

September 23, 2013

Dear Member of Congress,

We, the undersigned faith leaders, urge you to extend the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) programs for Iraqi and Afghan allies of the U.S. missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Without congressional reauthorization both programs will sunset, in September 2013 and September 2014 respectively. Furthermore, the looming deadline of September 30 of this year for the Iraqi SIV program will endanger thousands of Iraqis who put their lives and their families' lives at risk to work alongside U.S. Government and Armed Forces. To honor our commitment to these brave individuals who served alongside our troops **we urge Congress to include the extension of the Iraqi SIV program on the FY 14 continuing resolution bill.**

Congress created the Iraqi and Afghan Allies SIV programs in 2008 and 2009 respectively in recognition of our responsibility to protect Iraqi and Afghan nationals who face persecution as a result of their employment by and partnership with the U.S. missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. These courageous men and women willingly put their lives and the lives of their families in danger to protect the lives and mission of our troops. Federal agencies have only issued only a fraction of the visas available for this program, with Afghans accessing only 15% of the visas available and Iraqi accessing only 22%, leaving thousands of visas unused and lost to bureaucratic delay. The State Department estimates that 5,500 out of a possible 25,000 visas available have been issued for Iraqis and 1,041 of a possible 7,500 visas have been issued for Afghans. Meanwhile, thousands of Iraqi and Afghan SIV applications remain backlogged.

Both Iraq and Afghanistan remain extremely dangerous places, in regions of escalating conflict. We believe that we can and must do better to protect the thousands of people who put their lives at risk to help Americans on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq. Extending both the Iraq and Afghan Allies would allow implementing agencies to ensure the program fulfills its congressional mandate and allow the United States to fulfill its moral obligation to our allies.

Our troops are returning home to live in peace and safety with their families and our Afghan and Iraqi allies deserve the chance to do the same. Please extend the SIV programs for both Afghans and Iraqis so that timely life-saving protection can be offered to those who have helped save many American lives.

In faith,

Regional Faith Leaders

Bishop James B. Magness, Bishop Suffragan, Armed Services and Federal Ministries, The Episcopal Church

Bishop Michael Rinehart, Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Dr. Larry Stoterau, President, Pacific Southwest District, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
(Southern California, Arizona and Nevada)

Bishop Pierre Whalon, Bishop in Europe, The Episcopal Church

California

Mark Schroeder, O.F.M., San Francisco, California

Connecticut

Bishop Jim Curry, Bishop Suffragan, Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut

Florida

Bishop J. Michael Garrison, Assisting Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of South West Florida

Archbishop Thomas Wenski, Archdiocese of Miami

Illinois

Bishop Wayne Miller, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Mike Langer, Pastor, Glen Ellyn Evangelical Covenant Church, Glen Ellyn, IL

Kirsten Strand, Community Christian Church, Aurora, IL

Louisiana

Bishop Kevin Kanouse, Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Maine

Bishop Stephen T. Lane, Episcopal Diocese of Maine

Maryland

Stephan Bauman, President and CEO, World Relief, Baltimore, MD

Bishop James Shand, Episcopal of Easton Maryland

Minnesota

Bishop Brian N. Prior, Episcopal Church in Minnesota

Montana

Bishop C. Franklin Brookhart Jr., Episcopal Diocese of Montana

New Jersey

Sister Maryann Mueller, Justice and Peace Coordinator, Felician Sisters of North America, Lodi

Bishop Canon William H. Stokes, Bishop-elect, Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey

New York

Rabbi Michael Feinberg, Executive Director, Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition, New York

North Carolina

Bishop Porter Taylor, Episcopal Diocese of Western North Carolina

Ohio

Bishop William Persell, Assisting Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio

Oklahoma

Bishop Edward Konieczny, Episcopal Diocese of Oklahoma

Oregon

Bishop Bavi E. Rivera, Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon

Pennsylvania

Frances Murray, OSF, Chair of the Advocacy for Justice and Peace Committee of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

Sister Sandra Lyons, Bernardine Franciscan Sisters, Office of Justice, Peace and Earthcare, Reading

South Carolina

Bishop Andrew Waldo, Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina

Bishop Herman Yoos, South Carolina Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Utah

Bishop John C. Wester, Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City

Vermont

Bishop Thomas C. Ely, Episcopal Diocese of Vermont

Virginia

Ann J. Buwalda, Esq., Executive Director, Jubilee Campaign USA, Fairfax

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Bishop Greg Rickel, Episcopal Diocese of Olympia

Washington, DC

Bishop Richard H. Graham, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley, Director, Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Armando Borja, National Director, Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

Wisconsin

Brother James Zelinski, Justice & Peace Office of Midwest Capuchin Franciscans Milwaukee