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Commission urges religious freedom in Iraq

WASHINGTON (RNS)-The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has urged President Bush to maintain his commitment to religious freedom for all Iraqis.

“Now that Saddam Hussein has been ousted, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom believes strongly it is essential to ensure that the Iraqi people can exercise their religious freedom in full accordance with international human rights standards,” commission members wrote Bush in a letter dated April 28. “The United States can help this become a reality.”

The commission expressed its concern that U.S. leadership is needed to prevent ethnic and sectarian violence and other human rights violations against Iraq's diverse religious communities.

“The recent murders of Shiite clerics could be the harbinger of further violence within and between religious groups,” they wrote. “Now is the time to prevent such an outcome.”

In a speech Monday in Dearborn, Mich., the president included the issue of religious freedom in his comments about the future of Iraq.

“Whether you're Sunni or Shia or Kurd or Chaldean or Assyrian or Turkoman or Christian or Jew or Muslim-no matter what your faith-freedom is God's gift to every person in every nation,” he said.

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