

# **West ignoring genocide of Middle East religious minorities, activists say**

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Nearly six months after Secretary of State John Kerry declared the murder of Christians in the Middle East “genocide,” Westerners are doing little to stop the killings, activists for the victims’ plight said.

Religious freedom proponent Katrina Lantos Swett called the crisis “perhaps the great moral challenge of our time right now,” at a news conference opening the national convention for In Defense of Christians, an advocacy group.

“I am baffled and heartbroken, as the daughter of Holocaust survivors, at how it is possible for the West to seem so, so blind, willfully blind, or even worse, aware but relatively disinterested in what is unfolding in our time, on our watch, in our purview of being able to act,” said Swett, president of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice.

Activists are urging Congress to take decisive steps to protect the lives and culture of groups such as Assyrian and Coptic Christians, and non-Christians such as the Yazidis.

Rep. Dave Trott, R-Mich., announced plans to introduce legislation to support restoration of Coptic Christian churches destroyed by Egyptian looters in religious violence in 2013.

Andrew Doran, co-founder of In Defense of Christians, said his group and other advocates will seek congressional action to end the conflict in Syria,

which he said is breeding terrorism in that region and beyond.

“It’s not coming; it’s here. It’s in our churches, it’s in our nightclubs, and it’s in our public spaces. And it will get much worse before it gets better,” he said. “If we move swiftly to end the conflict in Syria, we can save lives there now and save American lives and other lives elsewhere in the decades to come.”