

REPORT OF ENDORSEMENTS AND STATEMENTS BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY BASED ON ABCUSA POLICY STATEMENTS AND RESOLUTIONS

2014

Violence in Syria

In January 2014 General Secretary Roy Medley, along with other Christian communions and organizations throughout the US, signed on to a letter to President Obama regarding the ongoing violence in Syria and the great suffering of the Syrian people. This letter appealed in particular to the US and other involved countries, in the wake of the negotiations known as Geneva II, to prioritize peace over their own geopolitical agendas, to stop supplying weapons to any armed factor, to press for a cease-fire, to support civil society organizations committed to peace and to work vigorously towards a political solution.

Criminal Justice System

In January 2014 the General Secretary, along with other faith-based denominations and organizations, signed on to a letter to President Obama thanking him for his action in December 2013 to commute the sentences of eight people whose sentences would have ended long ago if the Fair Sentencing Act had been retroactively applied. The letter stated, “As people of faith, we seek a justice system characterized more by reform and restoration than retribution. We are concerned about the lack of equality and fairness in our current system...” The letter also called on Congress to pass the Smarter Sentencing Act which will lower certain drug mandatory minimums and allow certain inmates who did not appropriately receive the benefits of the Fair Sentencing Act to petition for sentence reductions consistent with the Fair Sentencing Act. Lastly, it urged the President to make criminal justice reform a significant part of his agenda during his remaining time in office.

Legislation Proposing New Sanctions Against Iran

In January 2014 the General Secretary also signed on to a letter to the U.S. Senate strongly urging the Senate to withhold co-sponsoring S.1881 (the “Nuclear Weapon-Free Iran Act of 2013) and strongly discouraging Senate consideration of new Iran sanctions while negotiations proceed. The fear is that new sanctions would critically endanger the possibility of a diplomatic resolution to the nuclear standoff with Iran, increasing the likelihood of a nuclear-armed Iran and an unnecessary and costly war.

Senate Intelligence Report on CIA Torture

In February 2014 General Secretary Roy Medley, along the NRCAT and other community of faith leaders, signed on to a letter to the Senate Intelligence Committee (Dianne Feinstein, Chair, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence; Saxby Chambliss, Ranking Member, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence) urging a release of its report on CIA torture, and all associated documents, to the public. The letter stated that only by “confronting the truth about the past can we move forward into a more righteous future.”

Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

In March 2014, the General Secretary, with other Christian leaders, signed on to a letter (sponsored by Churches for Middle East Peace) to Secretary of State John Kerry commending him for his active efforts to reach a comprehensive agreement to end the long-standing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians with the mutual recognition, dignity, justice, and security that each side deserves. The letter also noted that a framework for conclusive negotiations seems an essential step if there is to be progress towards a final status agreement. “The preservation and welfare of the Christian communities affected by this conflict are important to us. A comprehensive agreement should greatly strengthen opportunities for them to flourish. Moreover the support and inclusion of all three Abrahamic faiths is critical as they have an important role to play in promoting the peace process.”

Syrian Crisis

In March 2014, the General Secretary signed on to a Faith Leaders letter to President Obama calling for increased U.S. leadership to end the Syrian crisis. The letter spelled out both immediate and long-term steps that must be taken in order for a political process to succeed, and shared the commitment of faith leaders to action “in our own communities of faith so that neither the Syrian crisis nor the international responsibility to respond to it is forgotten.”

The Democracy Restoration Act

In April 2014 the General Secretary signed a Faith Letter to members of congress urging their support for the Democracy Restoration Act of 2014, a bill which seeks to restore federal voting rights to millions of Americans living and working in our communities who have been disenfranchised because of a criminal conviction in their past.

Columbia Peace Process

In April 2014, along with other faith leaders, the General Secretary signed on to a letter to President Obama and Secretary Kerry calling for: the right of internally displaced persons and refugees to safely return to their land; for protection programs for returning communities and human rights defenders, union members, Afro-Colombia and indigenous communities; and for participation by victims' associations, Catholic and Protestant churches and other faith-based and civil society in implementing and monitoring the peace accords, promoting reconciliation, accompanying victims as they rebuild their lives, and reweaving the social fabric torn apart by many years of civil war.

Cuba

In April 2014, the General Secretary signed onto a letter, with other religious leaders in the United States, to President Obama to express hope that he will take bold executive action to improve the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. The letter urged the president to:

- Open up a high level dialogue between the United States and Cuba to address a wide range of issues, including the issue of Alan Gross and the Cuban Five.
- Issue a general license to permit people-to-people travel in all categories.
- Remove Cuba from the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, an unnecessary irritant in an already tense relationship which undermines the credibility of the list itself and harms our relations with the rest of the Western Hemisphere.
- Open the opportunity for U.S. citizens to support the emerging small business and cooperative sector in Cuba by permitting U.S. citizens to buy from, sell to, or provide investment or technical assistance to Cuban small businesses and cooperatives.

Smarter Sentencing Act

In May 2014, the General Secretary signed on to an interfaith letter to U.S. Senators and Representatives. The letter stated: As clergy and faith leaders from a diversity of beliefs, we all believe in the inherent dignity of all people. We believe the criminal justice system should treat people, regardless of their offense, justly and humanely. We call on you to uphold these principles by supporting the Smarter Sentencing Act, S. 1410/H.R. 3382.

Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014

In May 2014, the General Secretary also signed on to a faith community letter to members of Congress in support of the Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014. The bill does what the Supreme Court called upon Congress to do—set up a new formula to trigger preclearance (Department of Justice oversight) of state and

local voting changes. The new formula looks at states/counties recent history and focuses on particular changes that are often discriminatory in intent or effect.

Assessing Progress in Haiti Act

In June 2014, the General Secretary signed on to a letter to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in support of the Assessing Progress in Haiti Act of 2013 (H.R. 3509). This bill, which passed the House of Representatives last December with bipartisan support, provides much needed transparency, accountability and overall policy oversight for U.S. efforts in Haiti. The Act would reinstitute and strengthen requirements for the State Department to provide comprehensive reports to Congress on post-earthquake reconstruction and development projects in Haiti and would provide a meaningful way to ensure the responsible allocation of U.S. taxpayer funds and ensure that our efforts in Haiti are fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of Haitian people.

Reduced Drug Sentencing

In July 2014, in response to the U.S. Sentencing Commission soliciting public comment regarding its upcoming vote to consider whether or not to make retroactive its amendment to reduce the federal drug sentencing guidelines, the General Secretary signed on to a faith leader's letter in support of full retroactivity. If applied fully retroactive, approximately 51,000 federal prisoners would be eligible for judicial review of their sentence based on the new guideline system. The Commission estimates that the average sentence reduction would be 23 months.

BWA Resolution on Unaccompanied Minors

In July 2014, General Secretary Medley signed on to a letter, initiated by the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, to President Obama and Members of Congress. The letter stated that this is a regional humanitarian crisis, not a U.S. immigration enforcement problem, and respectfully asked that specific steps be taken to address the needs of Central Americans fleeing harm in a just, effective, compassionate, and comprehensive manner, strengthening the humanitarian response in the U.S., and also addressing root causes. The letter ended with this statement: "As faith based organizations, we are called to love the stranger and welcome the stranger. We urgently appeal to all people of faith, to our leaders in Congress, and to you, President Obama, to respond to this humanitarian crisis with mercy, compassion, love and hospitality."

Killing of Michael Brown

In August 2014, General Secretary Medley signed on to a Joint Release from the Joint Statement of Heads of Historic African American Clergy Network, Faith Partnership, Inc., and Diverse Faith Leaders, denouncing the brutal killing of Michael Brown and establishing a fund for the Brown family.

Immigration: Central American Children

In August 2014, the General Secretary also signed on to a one-sentence letter to President Obama on protecting Central American children in any executive actions on immigration. This letter was initiated by Church World Service.

Hunger Report on Women

In October 2014, the General Secretary signed on to the faith leaders statement for Hunger Report. The report calls for government, community and faith institutions in the US and around the world to invest in women's empowerment by changing policies, norms, and behaviors that are harmful to women and girls. The report argues that women suffer disproportionately from hunger and poverty and that it is impossible to accomplish the goal of ending hunger by 2030 unless with a strong focus on women's empowerment.

Intelligence Report on CIA Torture

In November 2014, the General Secretary signed on with other faith leaders to a National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) letter to Senator Feinstein, thanking her for fighting to make public the truth about the CIA's use of torture and to urge her to "continue her work in the face of determined opposition from those who would prefer to sweep this troubling aspect of our history under the rug." The letter ended with: "We encourage you to stand fast against those who seek to censor the truth and we hope with all our hearts that you continue to exhibit your resolve to lift up the moral implications of torture."

Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition (IDAC)

In December 2014, the General Secretary signed on to a letter with the Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition (IDAC) and other national religious and religiously-affiliated organizations to urge Congress to support passage of the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2014 (S. 313/H.R. 647). IDAC is a program of the American Association of People with Disabilities, is a nonpartisan coalition of 33 national religious organizations from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh traditions with a mission to mobilize the religious community to speak out and take action on disability policy issues with Congress, the President and Administration, and society at large. The core spiritual values of IDAC members affirm the rights and dignity of people with disabilities.

Under the ABLE Act, people with disabilities would be able to save up to \$14,000 annually in special accounts that could be established at any financial institution. Individuals could accrue up to \$100,000 in savings without risking eligibility for government benefits like Social Security. Medicaid coverage could be retained no matter how much money is deposited. Money set aside in the proposed ABLE accounts could be used to pay for education, health care, transportation, housing and other expenses. Interest earned on savings within the accounts, which are modeled on 529 college savings plans, would be tax-free.

Confirmation of Rabbi David Saperstein as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom

In December 2014 the General Secretary also signed on to a multi-faith NGO letter to Harry Reid and to Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader and Senate Minority Leader, respectively, in support of a swift confirmation of Rabbi David Saperstein as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. It was the hope of signers that quick action by the Senate would signal to the world that the US takes this issue seriously and sees it as integral to the solutions that our global challenges demand.