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United States Senate

<http://santorum.senate.gov>
January 18, 2005

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing with great concern regarding the upcoming elections in Iraq and the increasing likelihood that thousands of Iraqis living in this country will be needlessly disenfranchised.

I appreciate the leadership you and your Administration have taken in the effort to bring democracy to Iraq. The upcoming election for members of the Iraqi National Assembly, who will draft the permanent constitution and shape Iraqi government for years to come, is a vital step in this process. However, I am concerned that, if there is not immediate action, many of Iraq's minority ChaldoAssyrian population living in this country will be unable to vote in the upcoming election. As the U.S. is funding the out-of-country voting, it is of the utmost importance that we ensure that this voting is fair and equitable.

I have recently been made aware that thousands of the ChaldoAssyrians living in this country may be needlessly denied the right to vote. It is my understanding that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has limited the number of polling sites in the U.S. to five—only one west of the Mississippi River. I question this distribution of polling places. The situation in California is particularly troubling. San Diego is home to an estimated 25,000 ChaldoAssyrians and has the third largest Iraqi expatriate community in the country, yet has no polling site. The San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Valley around Modesto are home to an additional 40,000 ChaldoAssyrians, yet there is no polling site in that area either. In order to both register and vote in the election at the current polling sites, these Iraqis would need to drive a total of 1,800 miles over the next two weeks.

It is my understanding that the IOM is refusing to establish more polling sites, despite this inequity. I am aware that Congressman Frank Wolf has contacted Secretary Powell with this concern. In addition, members of the California congressional delegation have voiced their grave concern to the IOM about the lack of polling sites. Lawyers for the national ChaldoAssyrian Advocacy Council and the Chaldean bishop in California have also appealed this decision to the IOM. Unfortunately, these appeals have met with little success.

As you are aware, over the last several months, thousands of Iraq's native Christian population have fled the country after being the subject of intense persecution and targeted violence, in part because they are seen as being allies of the U.S. At the same time that ChaldoAssyrians have been the subject of these bombings and attacks, these

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groups have received little U.S. aid. This seeming indifference to the fate of the Christian population and the possible disenfranchisement of many Christian Iraqis in this country are being perceived by many as ethnic discrimination or favoritism of the Kurdish minority.

The ChaldoAssyrians make up 85-90 percent of all Iraqis living in the U.S. and are great supporters of democracy. They support religious freedom, women's rights, and minority rights. It is crucial that they receive fair access to polling places, especially since this polling is being carried out with U.S. funding. It is my understanding that Iran, a fraction of the size of the U.S., has more U.S.-funded polling sites than does the U.S. Unless the ChaldoAssyrian population is given fair access to polling sites, they will continue to have no government representation and no voice in the new Iraqi government.

I urge you to take whatever action necessary to ensure that this population, who has shown itself to be a friend of our country, is given the opportunity to vote.

I appreciate your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rick Santorum". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "R".

Rick Santorum
United States Senate