

BILL TO COMBAT RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION NEEDED

On May 20, a bill will be introduced by Senator Arlen Specter and Congressman Frank Wolf that is aimed at combating religious persecution abroad. Entitled the "Freedom From Religious Persecution Act of 1997," the bill is principally targeted at seeking relief for Christians who are being persecuted in China, Vietnam, Sudan, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, North Korea, Indonesia, Egypt and Laos.

The bill, which is receiving broad bipartisan support, would create an Office of Religious Persecution Monitoring, one that would submit an annual report to the president on the status of religious persecution abroad. Among the sanctions that could be invoked against offending nations are limits on exports, foreign assistance and multilateral loans. It would be the job of the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor to improve reporting on religious persecution that arises from governmental and nongovernmental sources.

League president William Donohue urged passage of this bill today:

"The Catholic League welcomes any congressional initiative that could help end Christian persecution abroad. In particular, the league is concerned about the long-standing persecution of Catholic bishops, priests, nuns, religious and laypersons in China.

"Unfortunately, there seems to be more interest in this issue in newsrooms than in the halls of Congress, but that may now change. Senator Specter and Congressman Wolf have each put forward splendid bills on this subject and their latest joint effort is the best yet. It is our hope that this bill will

pass without delay.”