

DAN BURTON  
5TH DISTRICT, INDIANA

COMMITTEES:

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

RANKING MEMBER

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

FORMER CHAIRMAN

OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT

REFORM

FORMER CHAIRMAN

SUBCOMMITTEES:

NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

DOMESTIC POLICY



# Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-1405

WASHINGTON OFFICE:  
2308 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-1405  
TELEPHONE: (202) 225-2276

DISTRICT OFFICES:  
8900 KEYSTONE AT THE CROSSING  
INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46240  
TELEPHONE: (317) 848-0201  
TOLL-FREE: (800) 382-6020

209 SOUTH WASHINGTON STREET  
MARION, IN 46952  
TELEPHONE: (765) 662-6770  
TOLL-FREE: (877) 846-2936

[www.house.gov/burton](http://www.house.gov/burton)

September 24, 2010

Prime Minister Hashim Thaci  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Government Building  
Str. "Nena Tereze"  
10000 Pristina  
Kosovo

**VIA: Ambassador Avni Spahiu**  
**Fax: (202) 380-3628**

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

I am writing in regards to the inauguration ceremony of His Holiness Irinej, the new Serbian Patriarch, which will be held on Sunday, October 3, 2010, in the Patriarchate of Pec in Kosovo, the historical seat of the Serbian patriarchs. This is not a political event; its sole purpose is to follow a long-standing tradition of the Serbian Orthodox Church that goes back centuries. This religious event concerns the fundamental human and religious rights of people to congregate freely and has no political background or agenda.

I believe that it is of utmost importance that this event be allowed to proceed without incident and that all the participants are protected. Mr. Prime Minister, I am respectfully asking that you use the full authority of your office to discourage, denounce, and protect against any incitement or potential provocations targeted against the Serbian Orthodox Church members or those who will be traveling to the patriarch's enthronement. I am echoing the sentiments of Kosovo's Minister for Local Autonomy, Sadri Ferati, who according to news reports, stressed that provocation should be avoided during the patriarch's enthronement in Pec.

In early September, I visited Serbia as part of a Congressional Delegation fact-finding trip to several countries in the region. While in Serbia, I had the opportunity to meet with business, government, and non-governmental officials. While I was encouraged by the progress I witnessed and heard about, I remain concerned about the vulnerability of Serbian holy sites in Kosovo. In addition to the Patriarchate of Pec, Kosovo is home to a number of significant Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries, including the Decani and Gracanica monasteries.

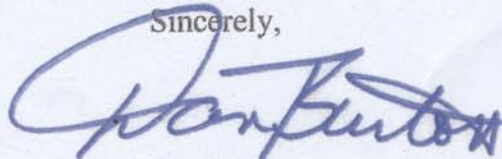
Prime Minister Hashim Thaci  
Page 2

I am aware that Kosovo has agreed to provide enhanced protection of the most vulnerable Serbian Orthodox sites, as identified by Serbian Orthodox officials. However, the Kosovo government – as evidenced by the 2009 Report on International Religious Freedom – needs to take do more to protect the religious freedom and personal safety of the Serbian Orthodox community living in and traveling through Kosovo. According to the U.S. State Department 2009 Report on International Religious Freedom, there were reports of assaults directed against the Serbian Orthodox community and property, including threats, thefts, and vandalism. There were reported incidents of rock throwing and other assaults against Serbian Orthodox clergy traveling outside their monasteries. Serbian pilgrims traveling by bus from Serbia to attend services at Decani Monastery often had rocks thrown at their vehicles. In the western municipalities of Pec, Decani, Djakovica, Istok, Klina, and Skenderaj, and also in south Mitrovica (areas that include the monasteries of the Peja/Pec Patriarchate, Decani, Gorioc, Budisavci, and Devic), clergy requested and received escorts from the NATO-led international peacekeeping force. Clergy stated that they could not visit church members in the west (where the most important Serbian Orthodox holy sites are located) without an escort, and members cited threats to their security as impediments to their ability to visit holy sites. Monks and nuns at some monasteries reportedly did not use parts of monastery property, often the land outside the monastery walls, due to safety concerns.

Mr. Prime Minister, I believe that a strong statement from you condemning all violence against ethnic Serbs and pledging protection and support for the Serbian Orthodox Church enthronement of its new patriarch, the Patriarchate of Pec, are two appropriate and much needed first steps at this time. A clear message that religious intolerance or violence against ethnic minorities will not be tolerated will only help to build confidence in the international community that Kosovo is capable of and committed to establishing an open, multiethnic and multi-religious society within its borders.

Thank you for your personal consideration to my request.

Sincerely,



Dan Burton  
Member of Congress