



**TESTIMONY OF TAD STAHNKE
VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH & ANALYSIS
HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
GOVERNMENT REFORM SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL
SECURITY**

**“MEETING CURRENT INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM AND NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES”
September 18, 2014**

Introduction

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing to examine the implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act, with an emphasis on some of the major national security challenges facing the United States that also constitute grave abuses of religious freedom and other human rights. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to share Human Rights First’s findings and recommendations and to discuss how to advance U.S. policy on international religious freedom in ways that are mutually beneficial to both the protection of security and rights.

Religious freedom is a cornerstone of secure and thriving societies. It reinforces the freedoms of expression, assembly and association. Religious freedom is a universally recognized and fundamental human right; but it is also a human security issue, and as such protecting it should be a key element of U.S. national security and counterterrorism, conflict prevention and mitigation and democracy promotion strategies.

One need look no further than the past year’s headlines to see the religious freedom/security connection. Recent events in Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Pakistan and Egypt underscore the urgency of formulating U.S. foreign and national security policies that promote and protect religious freedom and related human rights as part of the strategy to secure U.S. national interests. Many of these situations have deteriorated because of a failure of governments to adequately protect human rights and the rule of law and confront discrimination, hatred and extremism.

Religious freedom problems are not limited to the Middle East or to Muslim majority countries. Almost all major U.S. foreign policy challenges involve countries where religious freedom is denied, where religious conflict threatens to destabilize societies, or where the state-sponsored religion or ideology is used to suppress debate or

dissent, including China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan, Burma, Sudan and the Central African Republic.

We know from empirical data that religious freedom is an indicator of free societies with accountable governments and thriving civil societies. We also know the converse: denying religious freedom is associated with increased conflict and hostility, restrictions on civil and political rights, political instability and violent extremism. In fact, more than three quarters of the world's population are restricted from freely practicing their faith, and there is a rising tide of religious intolerance and government restrictions. This is an ongoing threat to U.S. national security.

President Obama's 2009 Cairo speech and Secretary Clinton's 2012 speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace persuasively argued for policies that promote international religious freedom (IRF), including links to national security, economic development, and democracy promotion, and as an antidote to religious extremism and terrorism. Unfortunately, current IRF policy--in place since 1998 and largely built around the threat of economic sanctions against governments which no administration has been willing to use--has been underperforming in relation to the challenges and opportunities that President Obama and Secretary Clinton identified. To address that, the White House needs to build a stronger infrastructure and provide the necessary resources for a reinvigorated policy of new tools and strategies. The need is pressing. Nominating Rabbi David Saperstein to be the next Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom is a good start, as Rabbi Saperstein is well respected and brings with him a lifetime of experience championing religious freedom at home and abroad. I urge you to press your colleagues in the Senate to confirm Rabbi Saperstein without delay, before the mid-term election recess.

An Alarming Rise in Deadly Violence Targeting Religious Communities

In the last year, there has been an alarming rise in deadly violence targeting communities and individuals on the basis of their religion or belief, by terrorist organizations as well as religious and political extremists, in communal and sectarian violence, and in day to day violent hate crimes. The success of ISIS and to some extent Boko Haram in controlling territory and purporting to justify mass murder, expulsions, forced conversion, sexual slavery, severe discrimination and destruction of places of worship on their conception of Islam is particularly alarming, as is their effectiveness in using mass and social media to get out their message and recruit followers.

Although non-state groups and individuals perpetrate much of this violence, failures of governance play an enormous role. Governments create the conditions for these problems to flourish. They exclude members of some religious communities from sharing political power and from leadership positions in government, state security and law enforcement bodies. They promote sectarian or ethnic polarization in society, by proposing or enforcing oppressive and discriminatory laws, failing to confront and condemn hatred, and failing to take meaningful steps to provide security, prevent violence or to hold perpetrators accountable. State action to counter terrorist groups is often counter-productive, because the brutal rights-violating tactics that some

governments use alienate the very populations that the government needs in order to eliminate terrorist threats.

The result is fear, displacement and massive human rights abuses carried out with impunity, in some cases endangering the very existence of religious communities in their historic homelands.

The following are several specific examples from the last 12 months, comprising some of the most important threats to international religious freedom:

ISIS atrocities in Syria and Iraq
Boko Haram brutality in Nigeria
Anti-Muslim violence in Burma
Sectarian violence and religious persecution in Pakistan
Anti-Christian violence in Egypt

Each situation is unique, yet in each religion and religious freedom play central roles. All of these situations stem from broader failures of governance and protection of human rights and accountability for the violation of rights.

Not on the same scale of violence as the above but noteworthy, is growing antisemitic and other hate violence in Europe, occurring as far-right antisemitic, racist, homophobic parties have gained electoral strength in several EU countries.

ISIS in Syria and Iraq

ISIS has committed systematic, severe abuses of religious freedom and other human rights as part of a brutal campaign in their self-described quest to create a “caliphate” on the territory of Syria and Iraq. They have perpetrated mass killings, rape, human trafficking and sexual slavery, using these and other abuses to “cleanse” the areas under its control of religious minorities: Christians, Yazidis and Turkmen and Shaback Shia Muslims. The group has forced conversions of Christians, ordering them in Raqqa, Syria in February and then in Mosul, Iraq in **June** to convert to Islam, pay a special tax, leave town or be killed. Hundreds of thousands of Christians, Shia Muslims and Yazidis have fled their homes to escape persecution by ISIS in the areas it controls in Iraq. Countless more have fled in Syria. ISIS has destroyed hundreds of churches, mosques and shrines in the areas it has taken. The group has also killed Sunni religious leaders who oppose them. The State Department reports that ISIS has abducted at least 1,500 women and girls, mostly members of religious minorities, subjecting them to murder, rape, torture, sexual slavery, forced marriage and forced conversion as well as giving them to fighters as “brides” and trafficking them for profit. U.S. and Kurdish military intervention helped to rescue tens of thousands of Yazidis trapped by ISIS on **Mount Sinjar** who would have undoubtedly suffered a similar fate.

There is a direct line between ISIS success and Iraqi government failure on human rights and good governance. The Iraqi government’s security strategy has contributed to the polarization of the country. It has consistently resisted real power sharing and

other key reforms to address the grievances of the Sunni community. Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his Shiite-dominated government seemed more interested in recrimination than reconciliation. Sunni politicians were ignored, humiliated, and often prosecuted. The most senior among them, Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, fled the country after being charged with terrorism and sentenced to death in absentia. Maliki dismissed American trained Sunni generals from the Iraqi Army and replaced them with Shiite political cronies. He filled the ranks of the police forces with Shiite militia partisans, many of whom had previously killed Sunnis.

The United States and others in the international community did not exert enough pressure to bring about a change of course. The chronic failure of the Iraqi government to protect religious and ethnic minorities, who had for years been caught in the middle between Sunni and Shia sectarian violence, left them even more vulnerable to abuse by ISIS. All of this – the failure to forge inclusive governance and reign in corruption, to stand up institutions capable of protecting human rights, holding violators accountable and addressing grievances, and to tamp down rather than enflame sectarianism – invited further sectarian divisions and contributed to ISIS' success in Iraq. The International Crisis Group has likened ISIS taking territory in northern Iraq to “push[ing] against a house of cards.” Interviews with residents of Mosul assert that the corrupt and abusive conduct of government security forces controlling the city left residents, if not ready to embrace ISIS, at least not willing to fight to defend the existing order. In the absence of support, government forces fled ISIS' swift advance.

President Obama has set out a 4-pronged strategy to degrade and defeat ISIS and has begun to forge a broad coalition of nations to advance that effort. That coalition includes Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar, who have funded extremist groups and authoritarian governments who have promoted sectarianism throughout the region.

We welcome the Administration's effort to advance a more inclusive and responsive Iraqi government as part of its comprehensive strategy; a government that protects universal rights will strengthen the determination of Iraqis to work together to defeat ISIS and secure a more stable and democratic future. We urge that the Administration to secure specific undertakings from the Iraqi government to protect religious minority communities and the rights of their members and include community representatives as meaningful partners in the future of Iraq. U.S. security assistance to Iraq should include efforts to prevent abuses by the Iraqi security forces in any areas retaken from ISIS. We also urge the Administration to work to reduce the support of Gulf State allies for extremism and sectarianism.

Nigeria

This year has been the most violent of the conflict with Boko Haram thus far, with reports that some 3,300 people have been killed since January. Boko Haram militants have been responsible for mass killing, looting, abduction and rape as well as the destruction of entire villages often with little or no resistance. The group has sought to erase Western influence and establish an Islamic state in Nigeria, and has waged a brutal campaign of attacks in the northern and central parts of the country, bombing

churches, police stations, army barracks. It has killed those who criticize it, including Muslim clerics and Christian preachers. In August 2014, the UN reported that 650,000 persons had been displaced from northeast Nigeria, an increase of 200,000 since May.

The kidnapping of some 200 girls from a Christian boarding school in Borno state in April 2014 brought international attention to apparent weaknesses in the Nigerian military's efforts to protect Nigerians from atrocities and also recapture and hold territory controlled by Boko Haram. Less well known but no less apparent is that the Nigerian military and its civilian surrogates have engaged in rape, torture and murder in the fight against the extremist group. Security analysts have concluded that abuses by the Nigerian security forces has greatly undermined the government's efforts to degrade Boko Haram, and has in some cases increased local support for the group. These abuses have alienated the very citizenry the government needs to weaken Boko Haram.

The United States has ramped up its counterterrorism assistance to Nigeria following the crisis with the abducted girls, and, according to Congressional testimony by the Defense Department's African Affairs Director Alice Friend in May, the U.S. government is urging Nigeria "to take to take a more holistic approach and a frankly, much less brutal approach ... against Boko Haram." It is not clear how effective those entreaties have been.

Human Rights First has urged senior U.S. officials to be frank with their counterparts in Nigeria about how their security forces have contributed to this crisis. The Department of Defense should partner with State and USAID to support anti-corruption, rule of law, and police reforms. It should also, through the Leahy Law and other avenues, ensure that the United States is not supporting individuals within the Nigerian security services who are complicit in the victimization of civilians. The United States should support and demand that mechanisms to prevent abuses be put in place in the Nigerian security apparatus as part of the assistance it is providing.

Burma

Communal violence has killed hundreds of people and displaced close to 150,000 since unrest broke out in the western state of Rakhine in June 2012, with the ethnic Rohingya Muslim minority bearing the brunt of the violence. Outbreaks of anti-Muslim violence have also occurred elsewhere in the country, most recently in July of this year, when two were killed and 14 injured when rioting erupted in Mandalay. The rioting began when a mob attacked a tea shop owned by a Muslim man accused of raping a Buddhist woman.

Recent positive political changes in Burma have yet to resolve longstanding discrimination and other grievances against ethnic Muslims and Christians. The government has clashed sporadically with ethnic separatist groups, amid attempts to negotiate over grievances that stretch back decades. Extremist Buddhist nationalist elements, such as the so-called "969 Movement," have been accused of inciting sectarian hatred and pushing for discriminatory laws, including a proposed ban on

interfaith marriage. The government itself has asked the legislature to consider a ban on conversions, targeting non-Buddhist minorities in the country.

Burma is undergoing a transition to democracy that is heavily supported by the United States, which is reported to be considering some forms of security assistance to the country. As the United States advocates government and institutional reforms, it should concertedly press for more action by the authorities to abandon discriminatory legislation, condemn hate speech, counteract violence and combat discrimination on the basis of religion. Continued religious violence and official discrimination will undermine the ability of the Burmese government and people to achieve a transition to a more democratic, rights-respecting system.

Pakistan

There has been a spike in religious violence in the last year in Pakistan. Dozens have been killed by Sunni militant groups targeting primarily Shia Muslims (including several deadly attacks on pilgrimages) as well as Christians, Ahmadis, and Hindus. In February, gunmen launched a deadly attack on a Sufi religious ceremony in Karachi, killing 8. Abuses of blasphemy laws continue, leading to mob attacks on Christian, Hindu and Ahmadi communities. In March, Madrasa students in Sindh's Larkana district attacked and burned a Hindu temple after an alleged act of blasphemy by a Hindu community member. Christian teenager Asia Bibi and at least 16 others remain on death row for blasphemy law convictions, 19 others are serving life sentences, according to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Extremists have waged a brutal but largely successful campaign to kill and intimidate judges, lawyers and critics of the blasphemy laws. Pakistani authorities have consistently not brought perpetrators of religiously-motivated violence to justice. Pakistan is in the midst of a political crisis, and the current government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif faces an uncertain future, as a government campaign against the Pakistani Taliban and other militant groups in the tribal areas continues.

Egypt

Following the dismissal of President Morsi in July 2013, there was a spike of well over 100 attacks against Coptic Christians and their property that continued through the end of the year. At the time, it was clear that Copts were pawns in a highly destructive zero-sum political game between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military-backed national security state. Supporters of ousted President Morsi openly blamed the Copts for the removal of their president, claiming that Christian hostility to Islam and to the idea of a Muslim Egypt they claim to represent led them to conspire with the military and hostile foreign powers, like Israel and the United States, to overthrow a legitimately elected president. The disproportionate blame attached to the Christian community by Morsi supporters after his dismissal made the community more vulnerable to the violence that followed. At the same time, the military-backed government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and its supporters appeared to be more interested in pointing to the anti-Christian violence as evidence of the extremism of the Muslim Brotherhood than in taking effective measures to protect Christians and

their places of worship, homes and businesses from attack.

Sporadic attacks on Christians and other religious minorities have continued in 2014. Although the wave of attacks on Copts has largely abated, the underlying dynamic remains, rendering the community perhaps safer for the moment but vulnerable over the longer term in a political and security environment that remains unstable.

It continues to be the case, as it was under Mubarak and the Morsi government, that the Egyptian authorities need to enhance protection for the Coptic community, to be more responsive to complaints of assaults or harassment from extremists, and to hold accountable those who incite and take part in sectarian violence. The current government also should remove some of the long-standing restrictions on freedom of religion and building blocks of legal and societal discrimination targeting religious minorities, which would include repealing abusive laws prohibiting blasphemy and defamation of religions, repealing the decree banning Baha'is, and enacting a unified law for the construction and repair of all places of worship.

Even more than Mubarak, President Sisi is grounding his legitimacy in his own brand of Islamism. He is sometimes referred to as “the believer President” and he has maintained an alliance with the Salafi al-Nour Party, which has taken positions more extreme and more sectarian than the jailed Muslim Brotherhood leadership. His rhetoric and persona is more Islamized than Mubarak's. Sisi's financial and political backing is coming directly from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the same powers that have backed Sunni extremist groups, many of which have engaged or instigated violence against religious minorities throughout the Muslim world for decades.

Saudi influence can perhaps be seen in the “Think Again” campaign launched by the Sisi government to push back against atheism and “takfiri” thinking. This echoes moves in Saudi Arabia to discourage its nationals from taking up arms with takfiri groups like ISIS, or al-Qa'eda offshoots, but equates “atheism,” which threatens no one, with violent extremist groups responsible for killing thousands and displacing millions. Under the Egyptian campaign, the State Security directorate is clamping down on those who openly identify as atheists on Facebook. This has led to arrests and prosecutions. Working with Al Azhar and the ministry of Awqaf, the Sisi government is exerting greater control over Islamic preachers and policing religious discourse more tightly. This is partly to counteract extremism, but it also raises concerns for the situation of minority Muslim sects, like Shi'ites and Ahmadis, as well as the Baha'is.

Sisi seems to be using religion deliberately, possibly creating a religio-military-nationalist hybrid that follows the Pakistani model. Again, this carries risks for religious pluralism and the rights and safety of religious minorities. The United States should be careful not to repeat the mistakes made by successive administrations in Pakistan in the 1980's, turning a blind eye to the hardening of an Islamist military dictatorship because they are helping us fight another enemy.

Another caution for the United States is that ongoing human rights abuses in Egypt are likely to advance the cause of extremism down the road. The United States has been

painfully quiet as President Sisi has cracked down on human rights groups and civil society groups and independent media – the very voices in Egypt that have spoken out against abuses targeting religious minorities and women. Despite the ongoing crackdown, this past weekend in Cairo, Secretary Kerry implied that the Sisi government was working “to follow through on its pledge to protect human rights,” while he also referred to our “shared fight against terrorism and extremism” and reiterated the intent to deliver 10 Apache helicopters to the Egyptian military. Although the sectarian violence may have receded for now, the Egyptian government has done little or nothing to make it more difficult to return in the future. It has not addressed any of the long-standing grievances of the Coptic community. It may have suppressed the Muslim Brotherhood for the moment, but it has created an environment – including through a very violent crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters – where it is unlikely that a more moderate strain of political Islam will develop, one that is more open to religious pluralism than was the case under Morsi’s presidency. And if the future of Egypt continues to be shaped as a struggle to eliminate the Islamist opposition, the Christian community will likely remain trapped in the middle, to be used again as a pawn down the road, as the increasingly authoritarian regime has every incentive to paint all Islamists as terrorists and dangerous extremists. The United States does not appear to have a strategy to change that dynamic in a country that is an ally, is one of the largest recipients of U.S. assistance and has the largest non-Muslim minority community in the Middle East.

U.S. policy should be rooted in seeking to promote stability, and a more inclusive civilian government in Egypt through respect for human rights and the rule of law. If it does not take this opportunity, the United States will inevitably continue to lose credibility and influence in a country it desperately needs to be stable and free.

Antisemitism and the Rise of Hate Parties in Europe

Europe has witnessed a sharp increase in anti-Semitism. This includes violent attacks, such as the killing of 4 people outside the Jewish Museum in Brussels in May 2014, and a series of violent attacks on Jewish community property in France, Germany and elsewhere in connection with protests over the recent war between Israel and Gaza. Also very alarming is the rise over the last three years of virulently antisemitic, racist, neo-fascist parties, which have won seats in their national parliaments as well as the European Parliament. Human Rights First has recently issued a report entitled “We’re Not Nazis, but... The Rise of Hate Parties in Hungary and Greece and Why America Should Care,” that details how antisemitic, racist rhetoric has become part of the mainstream political discourse in both Hungary and Greece. There is a growing climate of fear for religious and ethnic minorities in those countries as hateful rhetoric flourishes and violent hate crimes go largely unpunished. Senior leaders of the Jobbik party in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece have openly denied the Holocaust, called for a list of Jews in the government to be drawn up, and read from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion; many of these statements took place on the floor of their respective national parliaments.

Jobbik and Golden Dawn have made large gains in local, national, and European Parliament elections. Both parties have benefited from the tolerance, if not the tacit

support, of the governing parties, which have competed with the extremists for votes. In Hungary, Jobbik has helped Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to become more authoritarian, pursue historical revisionism with regard to the Hungarian government's involvement in the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Second World War, violate European norms of constitutional democracy and human rights, and most recently, declare that Hungary rejects liberal democracy and will become an "illiberal state." In Greece, Golden Dawn infiltrated the police and weakened the Greek government, which waited far too long to begin prosecuting its leaders for running a criminal organization and to purge police officials who enabled their crimes. Neither government has done enough to combat hate violence and protect vulnerable populations. And in the case of both Greece and Hungary, for very different reasons, the assumption that E.U. democracies are self-correcting over time with respect to extremism in the political system has been thrown into doubt.

Jobbik and Golden Dawn are not poised to take power soon, but their malevolence and the corrosive effect they have on their societies and the political conversation in Europe should not be underestimated. They are more than Eurosceptic: they want their countries out of the European Union and oppose the commitments to respect existing borders to which their countries agreed in order to join the E.U.

Almost all of the 14 far-right parties that won seats in the May 2014 European Parliament elections have been courted by Russia. Pro-Russian far-right parties have opposed E.U. sanctions against Russia for its behavior in Ukraine and have attempted to give international legitimacy to its annexation of Crimea. Some analysts assert that Kremlin cultivation of far-right parties is part of President Vladimir Putin's strategy to weaken the E.U. from the inside and to prevent further expansion of NATO. There are allegations that Jobbik has received financial support from Russia and Iran. These concerns deserve full investigation.

The U.S. government needs a strategy to help Greece, and counter democratic backsliding in Hungary. The United States must engage directly to address the human rights and rule of law challenges in Greece and Hungary as part of its overall strategy to strengthen the Transatlantic Alliance. It will need different strategies to deal with its two old friends: Hungary, a democratic backslider, and Greece, with a government that has been weakened by severe recession and soaring unemployment but has belatedly begun to prosecute Golden Dawn leaders and their accomplices in the police for violent crimes. The United States needs to recognize that these successful neo-fascist movements in Europe are no longer just an E.U. problem. To the extent that they undermine the E.U., NATO, or our allies, they are an American problem, too.

Other International Religious Freedom Challenges

In addition to the situations described above, there remains severe government persecution, oppression and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief in North Korea, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Russia and elsewhere. Members of all faiths suffer persecution and continue to flee those repressive regimes where they can, many trying to reach freedom in the United States.

Freedom of expression continues to be under assault in the name of prohibiting blasphemy and the so-called defamation of religions, and these attacks have escalated dramatically as repressive governments and extremists alike are getting more adept at exploiting the internet and social media for their purposes. Although the United States led an international coalition that eventually reversed in 2011 the effort by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to establish a global blasphemy code at the UN, national laws prohibiting blasphemy or defamation of religion are regularly abused, creating instability and empowering violent religious extremists. The concept of blasphemy has long been a destabilizing force, and accusations of blasphemy easily stir popular sensitivities, which extremists with political agendas exploit to rally violent mobs. Human Rights First's most recent review found dozens of cases in over 20 countries.

A New International Religious Freedom Strategy ...

President Obama's nominee for Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Rabbi David Saperstein, said at his Senate confirmation hearing last week that he would seek to engage "every segment of the State Department and the rest of the U.S. Government, to integrate religious freedom into our nation's statecraft: counter-terrorism, conflict stability efforts, economic development, human rights...." This is a smart approach, and one that should be supported by the White House and the Congress. This kind of integration can produce smarter, more effective strategies to advance U.S. interests and to reduce violations on the ground in particular situations.

The United States needs country-specific strategies to better integrate promotion of religious freedom and related human rights into its efforts to confront the national security challenges described above. In particular, these strategies should be deployed in order to prevent security situations from deteriorating to the point where it becomes necessary to consider military action by the United States as a viable option.

The elements of this type of strategy should be specific to individual situations, but should include as applicable:

- **Promote a more rights-respecting approach by foreign governments to counterterrorism.**

Support for ISIS and Boko Haram has been fueled by human rights violations by the Iraqi and Nigerian security forces and their paramilitary supporters, including indiscriminate bombing, torture, rape and retaliatory killings. In its security and counterterrorism assistance for these and other countries, the United States should counteract this dynamic by securing and holding governments to commitments to reform its practices in exchange for U.S. assistance, by explicitly building human rights outcomes into the objectives of U.S. security assistance (by, e.g. funding accountability mechanisms for abuses, training in protection strategies for religious minorities and women and training in non-coercive interrogation techniques) and enforcing the Leahy

Law.

- **Stop U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia and Qatar from funding religious extremism.**

Employ diplomatic pressure and other tools to dry up the financial and other support coming from sources in countries that are allied to the United States (e.g. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar) for violent extremist groups as well as other activities like preaching and literature that exploit sectarianism and incite violence or hatred among Muslims and against Christians, Jews, Ahmadis, Baha'is, Yazidis and other non-Muslims. A necessary step in that effort is to ensure that U.S. Intelligence Community resources are deployed to track and analyze these activities. Lessons learned and information gathered from the current effort to disrupt financial support for ISIS should be applied to other situations, as applicable. Allegations of Russian support for neo-Nazi and other far right parties in Europe should be investigated. In the longer term, better strategies are necessary to upend the dynamic where wealthy Middle Eastern countries allied to the United States profit politically from promoting sectarianism, often in competition with Iran.

- **Provide assistance to integrate members of religious minorities into the security services and promote greater accountability for violence.**

Where the political will to do so exists or can be created, assist law enforcement, judicial and security services to recruit and integrate members of religious minority communities into their ranks, and to investigate, prosecute and punish violence targeting communities and individuals on account of their religion as well as complicity of government officials in such violence.

- **Counteract extremist propaganda and hatred.**

Develop and support messengers to counteract extremist propaganda about religious minorities. Support programs that create public space to discuss the benefits of religious freedom and that offer alternative narratives to religious extremism and ideologies of intolerance and violence, including that reflected in state-sponsored education. Provide opportunities for women's advocates to engage more effectively with religious leaders and religiously-based arguments to advance their issues.

- **Assist IDPs, refugees and asylum seekers fleeing religious persecution.**

Provide support for protection of those fleeing religiously based violence and persecution, including strategies in countries of first asylum where members of religious minorities, unaccompanied women and others are particularly vulnerable to threats from extremist elements in the local population. Obstacles to the fair adjudication of asylum claims in the United States – such as the backlog in immigration courts, overbroad interpretation of terrorism related

grounds for inadmissibility and unnecessary detention – should be removed.

Recommendations

In order to implement this strategy in situations where gross violations of religious freedom are occurring or threatened and foreign governments are unwilling or unable to act to prevent them, Human Rights First recommends the following:

1. *The President should include in the new **National Security Strategy** or another White House policy document a clear statement that it is U.S. policy to advance international religious freedom and related human rights as part of the strategy to promote stability in foreign countries and combat terrorism.* Such a statement should reflect the importance to U.S. interests of advancing the full scope of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (including religious pluralism and tolerance, the rights of religious minorities and the freedom of expression, dissent and debate).

2. *The President should **create a permanent Interagency Policy Committee (IPC) on religion, human rights and national security**, to be co-chaired by a Deputy National Security Advisor and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, with the resources and mandate to coordinate across the administration international religious freedom policy as it relates to national security issues.* This will help to integrate the IRF ambassador into the work on national security, conflict prevention and mitigation, counterterrorism, countering violent extremism and democracy promotion.

As part of its work, the IPC should:

- Analyze religious freedom conditions in particular countries or situations and provide guidance for the relevant federal agencies and offices in developing policy responses, programs, and activities as part of a government-wide strategy.
- Make recommendations to the Deputies Committee (NSC/DC) to define priority countries or situations for promoting religious freedom and channel resources to implement strategies on those countries.

The IPC should consider prioritizing the development of strategies on the following situations:

- ISIS
- Nigeria
- Burma
- Pakistan/Afghanistan
- Egypt
- Europe's Growing Far-Right

3. *Regardless of where the IRF Ambassador and the IRF Office sits in the State*

Department bureaucracy, **the Secretary of State should ensure that the Ambassador has regular and consistent access to him**, attends senior level State Department meetings, and is fully integrated into the broader policy discussions on issues of national security and bilateral relations with countries violate religious freedom.

4. The Secretary of State should instruct the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights to **create within the “J” family of bureaus an integrated unit that can be deployed to the field to assess the risk of systematic violence targeting religious communities** or other severe abuses of religious freedom and make recommendations on confronting the situation in a coordinated fashion using existing tools of diplomacy and assistance (in particular those under the control of the CSO, CT, INL, DRL and PRM Bureaus to promote civilian security, rights-respecting counterterrorism, law enforcement reform, protection of human rights and religious freedom, atrocity prevention, protection of vulnerable populations and the displaced, and women and girls).

5. The Secretary of State should **require training in international religious freedom, the religious dimensions of U.S. national security challenges and engagement with religious leaders** in the Foreign Service Institute’s A100 course and area-studies courses as well as mandatory training for ambassadors and deputy chiefs of mission.

6. The President should **send Vice President Biden to represent the United States at the 10th Anniversary of the OSCE’s Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism** in November 2014. Congress should also send a bipartisan, senior level delegation to this important meeting.