



American ideals. Universal values.

How to Promote International Religious Freedom

BLUEPRINT FOR THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION

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BLUEPRINT
FOR THE NEXT U.S.
ADMINISTRATION

About Us

On human rights, the United States must be a beacon. Activists fighting for freedom around the globe continue to look to us for inspiration and count on us for support. Upholding human rights is not only a moral obligation; it's a vital national interest. America is strongest when our policies and actions match our values.

Human Rights First is an independent advocacy and action organization that challenges America to live up to its ideals. We believe American leadership is essential in the struggle for human rights so we press the U.S. government and private companies to respect human rights and the rule of law. When they don't, we step in to demand reform, accountability and justice. Around the world, we work where we can best harness American influence to secure core freedoms.

We know that it is not enough to expose and protest injustice, so we create the political environment and policy solutions necessary to ensure consistent respect for human rights. Whether we are protecting refugees, combating torture, or defending persecuted minorities, we focus not on making a point, but on making a difference. For over 30 years, we've built bipartisan coalitions and teamed up with frontline activists and lawyers to tackle issues that demand American leadership.

Human Rights First is a nonprofit, nonpartisan international human rights organization based in New York and Washington D.C. To maintain our independence, we accept no government funding.

Kody Kness, foreign policy consultant, led the team on this blueprint.

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“Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together. We must always examine the ways in which we protect it.”

“People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind, heart, and soul.”

President Barack Obama, June 4, 2009

“And because the impact of religious freedom extends beyond the realm of religion and has ramifications for a country’s security and its economic and political progress, more students and practitioners of foreign policy need to focus more time and attention on it.”

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton,
July 30, 2012

Introduction

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 which no administration has been willing to use—is not up to the challenges or the opportunities that President Obama and Secretary Clinton so eloquently identified. To correct that, the White House needs to embrace a leadership role, building an infrastructure and providing the necessary resources for a reinvigorated policy of new tools and strategies to thrive. The need is pressing.

Religious freedom is not only about freedom of religion; it is the cornerstone of freedom of expression and assembly, which are essential for secure and thriving societies. Religious freedom is a universally recognized and fundamental human right; but it is also a human security issue, and as such it should be a key element of U.S. national security and counterterrorism, conflict prevention and mitigation, democracy promotion, and public diplomacy strategies.

Recent events in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria underscore the urgency of formulating U.S. foreign policy that takes account of the motivations of religious actors, and promotes religious freedom. According to a recent Pew Research Center report, restrictions on religious freedom increased sharply in Arab Spring countries just before the uprisings began. Successful transitions in those countries will be measured by the embrace of religious pluralism and whether religion will be used as a weapon to suppress dissent and the rights of women and religious minorities.

Religious freedom problems are not limited to the Middle East or to Muslim majority countries. Virtually 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 repress debate or dissent, including China, Russia, Pakistan, North Korea, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

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 increases conflict and hostility, leads to restrictions on civil and political rights, hinders democracy and stability, and breeds 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 a threat to U.S. national security.

A current case in point is blasphemy. Laws prohibiting blasphemy or defamation of religion, which fill a vacuum of authority, 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 can exploit to rally violent mobs. The latest international incident of an alleged act of blasphemy being used to justify mob violence was in September 2012 in reaction to the anti-Muslim video *The Innocence of Muslims*.

The U.S. government should take the lead in promoting international religious freedom and work closely to build allies for this effort at home and abroad. This is a shared responsibility and an important element in any strategy designed to achieve regional and global security as well as create opportunities for economic and political stability.

How to Promote International Religious Freedom

DETAILS

Policy Vehicles

The Obama Administration should articulate the strategic imperative of promoting international religious freedom as a U.S. policy priority, including for national security and long-term foreign assistance goals, citing the statistical correlation between countries that restrict religious freedom and the absence of basic human rights, civil society, democracy, security, economic stability, and other factors of overall socioeconomic well-being. This will, among other things, help counteract the perception that U.S. policy to promote international religious freedom is intended to advance the interests of particular American religious groups. The administration should adopt a whole-of-government strategy to promote international religious freedom, coordinated by the National Security Council and implemented through a specific policy directive that guides actions of other federal agencies.

National Security Strategy

The president's national security strategy (NSS) should make the case for promoting international religious freedom as a foreign policy and national security priority.

The Obama Administration's 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) made reference to freedom of worship in the section on U.S. values. But it failed to reflect the importance of advancing the full scope of the right to freedom of religion to U.S. interests. The administration's next NSS should articulate the promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief as a strategy to protect human rights and advance democracy abroad, and make clear its importance to stability, security, and

development, as articulated by Secretary Clinton in her Carnegie Endowment speech. ¹

The NSS should guide a national strategy (discussed below) and the relevant agency strategies and activities, included as part of the Department of Defense National Defense Strategy (NDS) and Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), and the State Department Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR).

National Strategy to Promote International Religious Freedom

The president should issue a national strategy to advance international religious freedom and promote engagement with religious leaders and communities on related U.S. foreign policy priorities.

The National Strategy for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States, which identifies specific goals and priority actions, is a useful model.

A national strategy should include guidance on how the U.S. government should engage and build relationships with religious leaders and communities, both at home and abroad, to advance religious freedom and other related U.S. foreign policy and national security priorities. The president should appoint an IRF advisory committee to guide the development of this strategy.

The strategy should focus specific attention on how to prevent and mitigate damage from international incidents surrounding alleged acts of blasphemy or offense to religion. Increasingly, such incidents have had national security consequences for the United States, including on the safety of U.S. military and diplomatic personnel serving abroad, as well as on international support for freedom of expression.

¹ Both the 2002 and 2006 NSS specifically discussed religious freedom as a priority and central theme, including this excerpt from the 2002 NSS: “[The United States] will...take special efforts to promote freedom of religion and conscience and defend it from encroachment by repressive governments.”]

Issue a presidential policy directive (PPD) to implement the national strategy on international religious freedom. A PPD would focus and prioritize timely and effective implementation of the national strategy. The PPD should:

- Reflect the policy direction outlined in the national security strategy, and define international religious freedom as a foreign policy and national security priority.
- Designate the Interagency Policy Committee on International Religious Freedom as the lead entity to coordinate, provide oversight, and define priorities for the federal government's IRF policy, including priorities for annual agency budget requests to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
- Direct relevant federal agencies to integrate international religious freedom policies in annual program planning, including measurements for success.
- Require relevant federal agencies to report annually on their efforts to implement the national strategy.
- Designate the senior director at the National Security Council (NSC) as a special advisor to the president on international religious freedom, as described in the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA).

Leadership

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL AND INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

Because of its centrality to strategic interests such as preventing conflict, fostering democratic institutions, promoting human rights, countering terrorism and violent extremism, and combatting hatred without restricting speech, international religious freedom policy should be led by the National Security Council (NSC). These concerns cut across the missions of several federal agencies, and require the full menu of diplomatic, national security and programmatic resources to meet the challenges to U.S. interests when religious freedom is violated.

The NSC should be charged with coordinating a whole-of-government framework for implementing IRF policy. A dedicated senior level NSC official, with the support of the president and national security advisor, should lead this effort. The NSC should seek guidance on religious freedom policy priorities from a wide range of government and nongovernment actors with expertise in disciplines such as law, counterterrorism, defense, intelligence, and human rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To develop the IRF policy as a national security priority, the president should:

- **Appoint a senior director-level official at the NSC to elevate and integrate international religious freedom promotion into U.S. national security and foreign policies.** The NSC senior official should (1) guide and coordinate the implementation of the administration's strategy to promote international religious freedom and related foreign policy objectives; (2) co-chair a permanent interagency policy committee (IPC); (3) have regular contact with Congress, civil society, and religious and diaspora communities; and (4) working closely with the deputy national security advisor, be the point person on preventing and reacting to international incidents caused by religious freedom abuses and acts of alleged blasphemy. Congress recommended the creation of a similar position in Section 301 of IRFA, 50 U.S.C. 401(k).
- **Create a permanent interagency policy committee (IPC) to be co-chaired by the newly created NSC senior director for IRF and the ambassador at large for international religious freedom, with the resources and mandate to coordinate international religious freedom policy across the administration.**
 - The IPC should include representation from the Departments of State, Defense, Treasury, Justice, and Homeland Security, the Joint Staff, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Office of the

Vice President, the Office of Management and Budget, the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and Millennium Challenge Corporation, and be advised by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

IRF policy decisions should be put on the agenda of the NSC Principals Committee (NSC/PC) at least annually, and the NSC Deputies Committee (NSC/DC) should review the work of the IRF IPC on at least a biannual basis. The IRF IPC should have monthly working group meetings at the director level, and weekly sub-working group meetings with senior staff from the relevant federal agencies. The IRF IPC should:

- Analyze religious freedom conditions in particular countries 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 for promoting religious freedom and channel resources to implement strategies on those countries, including foreign travel priorities of the president and other senior officials.

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND THE AMBASSADOR AT LARGE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The State Department is the lead implementing agency on international religious freedom policy, and the lead official at the department is the ambassador at large for international religious freedom, supported by an office (DRL/IRF) currently located in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

The ambassador and the office have had limited success in including international religious freedom promotion into strategic and operational decisions among the various regional bureaus, as well as positioning international religious freedom policy as a foreign policy and national security priority within the State Department. In addition, the IRF ambassador does not have direct access to the president and the secretary

of state, and does not attend regular senior level State Department meetings. Moreover, there has been a proliferation in recent years of positions in the department with mandates that are associated with religious freedom, related human rights, and engagement with religious communities at home and abroad. These positions are currently dispersed throughout the department, making it difficult to coordinate religious freedom policy and other related initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To equip the IRF ambassador to lead and coordinate IRF and religious engagement policy at the State Department, the president should:

- Direct that the IRF ambassador serve as a special assistant to the president on religion and national security issues, and co-chair the IRF IPC. In order to integrate the IRF ambassador into the work on national security, conflict prevention and mitigation, counterterrorism, and democracy promotion.
- Direct the IRF ambassador to chair regular coordination meetings on international religious freedom policy and religious engagement initiatives with the assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, the special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism, the special envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the special representative to Muslim communities, and the special envoy for Holocaust issues. The State Department should consider consolidating these positions in one bureaucratic framework to improve policy implementation and coordination of efforts.
- Assign the IRF Office as the central bureaucratic location for coordinating IRF policy within the State Department, including vetting all IRF-related public statements and speeches, advising on religious engagement, and developing IRF policy for annual program planning for the relevant bureaus. Regardless of where the IRF ambassador and the IRF Office sits in the State Department bureaucracy, the ambassador should have regular and consistent access to the secretary of state and attend senior level State Department meetings.

- Integrate the State Department's IRF Office into all strategic and operational decisions regarding democracy promotion and programming.
- Increase the size and experience level of the IRF Office, so as to meet the challenges before the U.S. government and to fulfill any expanded responsibilities. The IRF Office should be staffed with professionals with expertise in international religious freedom as well as related policy areas such as national security, conflict prevention and mitigation, counterterrorism, and democracy promotion.
- Better utilize the tools provided in the International Religious Freedom Act, including making annual designations of "countries of particular concern" immediately after the issuance of each Annual Report on International Religious Freedom.

IRF Strategy: Policy Priorities

BLASPHEMY LAWS

The U.S. government led the successful effort to defeat the "defamation of religions" resolution at the U.N. and worked closely with the OIC to draft Resolution 16/18, which was adopted by both the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. Resolution 16/18 addresses efforts to combat religious intolerance without instituting an international blasphemy code or otherwise restricting freedom of expression. These efforts led to U.S. participation in the "Istanbul Process" and the State Department hosting a meeting of foreign governments and international organizations to develop best practices to prevent religious violence and discrimination.

Despite this progress, national blasphemy laws continue to trample on human rights in at least 18 countries, and newly elected governments in the Middle East are considering expansions of these laws. The fate of these legislative proposals remains a key indicator of a country's transition to the rule of law, as well as the ability to protect religious freedom, and other related freedoms including, speech, expression, and assembly.

Finally, recent incidents such as "Burn a Koran Day" in the United States, and events surrounding a religiously intolerant film called *The Innocence of Muslims*,

emboldened religious extremists to fuel violence under the guise of blasphemy, and inflamed negative sectarian stereotypes. These incidents demonstrate the security threats that the United States faces from actions deemed to be offensive to religion or religious believers. These incidents undermine international support for freedom of expression. The United States needs a better strategy to prevent those incidents and to mitigate the damage from them.

To advance international religious freedom, religious leaders and foreign governments must be persuaded that blasphemy laws do not protect religion, but rather exacerbate tensions and threaten security and social harmony. In many cases, these laws are used by extremists to incite violence against political opponents, political and religious reformers, and members of religious minorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To discourage blasphemy laws that promote violence or restrict debate or dissent on political or religious issues, the president should:

- Publicly condemn human rights abuses associated with blasphemy laws, and urge foreign leaders not to tolerate violence or foment unrest associated with alleged blasphemy or other offensive accusations and resulting incidents.
- Work closely with foreign governments and civil society groups to develop the political and religious arguments and legal tools to reform or repeal blasphemy laws and decrees banning minority religious faiths.
- Fund (directly from U.S. government sources or indirectly through multilateral mechanisms) programs to promote legal representation, judicial independence, and education, as well as witness and judicial protection in order to support victims and opponents of blasphemy law abuses.
- Direct the appropriate federal agency to initiate discussions with U.S. Internet service providers on mitigating censorship by foreign governments on the grounds of blasphemy, and encourage the development of technology to protect the safety of

those who are at risk in their countries because they oppose blasphemy law abuses.

- Encourage foreign governments to protect the media's ability to freely report on blasphemy cases, without suffering pressure, censorship, or intimidation.
- Challenge attempts by parliaments and governments to introduce new or harsher blasphemy laws by raising concerns during bilateral engagements and in international forums.
- Direct U.S. embassies in Egypt, Tunisia, and other countries which are currently considering new or expanded blasphemy prohibitions to develop country-specific strategies to limit abuses of national blasphemy laws.
- Direct U.S. missions in Pakistan and other countries where these abuses are rampant to develop country-specific strategies to address these challenges.

CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE RULE OF LAW

In emerging democracies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and elsewhere, the United States is offering technical assistance to democratically-elected governments in drafting and implementing constitutions and strengthening judiciaries and other rule of law initiatives. This assistance should also focus on initiatives to protect religious freedom and related human rights, fend off the adoption of blasphemy, apostasy, anti-conversion and overly restrictive laws governing the recognition of religious communities and organizations, and promote pluralism and democracy. The rule of law is also a useful lens to advance respect for religious freedom in authoritarian countries such as China, Vietnam, and Russia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The president should:

- Assist governments in transition to democracy to draft and implement constitutions that protect religious freedom and related human rights in accordance with international standards.
- Financially support civil society participation in constitution-making and legal service providers to enforce constitutional and other legal guarantees for religious freedom and related human rights through the courts.
- In countries where the lack of rule of law has contributed to violations of religious freedom (such as Russia, India, Egypt, Indonesia, Vietnam, and China), support legal and policy advocacy to strengthen the rule of law generally, including training for lawyers and human rights activists in relevant international standards and, where appropriate, comparative approaches to issues of religion and law.
- Work with international organizations, like-minded countries, and experts to develop materials on constitutionalism, the rule of law, and religion which demonstrate that universal values of freedom of religion and related human rights are recognized across cultures and religious traditions.² Provide venues for the discussion of these issues as part of programming to promote the rule of law and legal reforms.

CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MITIGATION

The majority of conflicts that contribute to global instability and threaten U.S. national security have a religious dynamic. There is a need to increase resources for conflict prevention and mitigation that take into account the religious dimension to conflict and its resolution. This would include tools for engaging religious leaders and communities to develop country-specific strategies to prevent and mitigate conflicts that arise from religious intolerance and related violence.

² See, e.g. USCIRF, *The Religion-State Relationship & the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Comparative Textual Analysis of the Constitutions of Majority Muslim Countries and Other OIC Members*

RECOMMENDATIONS

To develop conflict prevention and mitigation policies with an understanding of religious dynamics and to engage religious actors, the president should:

- Encourage foreign governments to end impunity for communal, sectarian, religiously-motivated, and related violence by condemning such violence, investigating and prosecuting incidents, working with affected communities to provide protection and encourage cooperation with public security officials, and condemning hatred without restricting speech.
- Encourage the inclusion of religious leaders and faith-based civil society organizations in conflict prevention frameworks and strategies, and ensure that the religious factors of conflict are integrated into both prevention and response strategies.
- Direct resources for programs that develop inter-religious networks and coalitions in both country-specific and regional settings that are designed to promote peace and respond to both religious and nonreligious causes of conflict and destabilizing violence.
- Support opportunities for U.S. personnel serving abroad to engage religious communities to better understand the role of religion in conflict in order to develop strategies to prevent it.
- Provide personnel and other resources at the State Department's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations to assess the religious dynamics of conflict and engage relevant religious leaders and others in an effort to reduce religiously-motivated conflict and violence.
- Dedicate personnel and resources for USAID programs and activities that mitigate and manage the causes and consequences of violent conflict, instability, and extremism, including USAID's development response to violent extremism and insurgency policy.

COMBATting VIOLENT RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

Governments and private actors continue to cultivate or promote, and in some cases export, ideologies that incite conflict and violence. A Pew Research Center report found that religious extremism—defined as advocating violence or hatred based on religious ideology—from outside a country's borders incited internal religious hostility or government restrictions on religious freedom in 56 countries.

The U.S. government has put in place a strategy to support communities to combat violent extremism at home. To complement that strategy, and to promote stability and human rights abroad, it should enhance current foreign policy efforts to combat violent religious extremism abroad, which is a driver of economic and political instability that actively contributes to human rights violations, including hate crimes and other religiously motivated violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To advance a robust U.S. policy to prevent and respond to violent religious extremism, the president should:

- Punish and deter foreign government officials responsible for violence targeting individuals or communities on the basis of religion by imposing travel bans and asset freezes. Authority to do this already exists in Section 604 of the International Religious Freedom Act, 8 U.S.C. 1182 (a)(2)(G), and other statutes, but has rarely been invoked.
- Encourage foreign governments to prevent and punish violence and discrimination on the basis of religion (including by implementing the actions contained in Human Rights First's *Ten-Point Plan* for combating violent hate crime).
- Encourage foreign governments to denounce and take other steps to prevent incitement to religious hatred, discrimination, and violence by government officials. This should include disciplining or dismissing government officials, including government-sponsored clerics, who incite violence,

or seek to limit the rights and freedoms of individuals on the basis of their religion or belief.

- Encourage senior foreign government officials to publicly denounce such incitement by private individuals or organizations within their jurisdictions.
- Support programs to assist foreign governments to develop, and civil society groups to advocate, national textbook and curricula standards that prevent the teaching of hatred and violence against anyone on the basis of religion and that promote religious pluralism and the equal rights of all individuals, including those of different religious and ethnic backgrounds.
- Support programs that create public space, including on the Internet, for religious and civic leaders and organizations to discuss and advocate religious freedom and other democratic principles, and offer an alternative narrative to religious extremism and ideologies of intolerance and violence, including that reflected in state-sponsored education.
- Consult with other concerned governments and implement strategies to combat official support for the dissemination or exportation of hate literature and extremist ideology.
- Encourage and support funding for development, civic, or humanitarian projects that different religious communities and their members can undertake together in order to break down barriers between communities.

EMPOWERING AND PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

The protection of civil and political rights for women and increased engagement of female religious and civic leaders must be central components of international religious freedom and related policies to strengthen civil society and promote democracy, the rights of women, and gender equality.

The U.S. government can do a better job of engaging women religious and civic leaders in formulating international religious freedom policy or support opportunities for women's rights advocates to engage

effectively with religious and cultural leaders and traditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The president should:

- Increase U.S. government engagement and explore other opportunities to partner with female religious and civil society leaders on international religious freedom.
- Direct the State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues to dedicate resources and personnel to (1) better engage and empower female religious and civil society leaders and support their efforts to promote democracy and human rights in their communities, and (2) provide opportunities for women's advocates to engage more effectively with religious leaders and religiously-based arguments to advance their issues.
- Dedicate resources for foreign assistance programs that support female religious and civil society leaders who promote religious freedom.

IRF Strategy: Building Allies

The administration should enhance public diplomacy and other strategies to build allies, both at home and abroad, for its policy to promote international religious freedom. The lack of allies has undermined the effectiveness of the policy. At home, co-religionists and diaspora communities can assist policy makers to articulate how the people of the United States and foreign countries share economic and political interests in promoting religious freedom. The U.S. government should also look for opportunities to share its own unique experiences combatting invidious religious discrimination and developing mechanisms that protect religious freedom. This should include public reporting on violations.

The U.S. government should increase engagement, promote discussion, and develop joint strategies to promote international religious freedom in regional dialogues, multilateral institutions, and domestic and international forums, and through public statements with foreign government leaders that condemn religiously-

based violence and discrimination, and promote religious freedom, and democratic institutions.

The U.S. government should also prioritize policies that support freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and access to information, including efforts to combat restrictions on Internet freedom, as a strategy to support the ability of social reformers and political dissidents to engage in the “marketplace of ideas.”

CIVIL SOCIETY, DIASPORA, AND U.S. REPORTING

- Direct the White House Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships office and the NSC to jointly develop a permanent advisory committee on international religious freedom with representatives from civil society, including academia and religious organizations, as well as diaspora leaders of various sectors, including business, civil society, and religious communities. The IRF advisory committee should advise the White House and assist in the development of the IRF national strategy.
- Direct resources to programs and exchanges to connect foreign religious leaders vulnerable to violent extremist ideologies with religious counterparts in the United States to learn about the protection of religious freedom and other human rights.
- Encourage increased dialogue with diaspora leaders on issues of religion and religious freedom in forums such as the International diaspora Engagement Alliance (IdEA).
- Direct the Department of Justice to publish information on incidents of invidious religious discrimination in the United States, and recommendations on policies to prevent and respond to such incidents.
- Continue to document incidents of religious discrimination in the United States and report more regularly in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY AND SUPPORTING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ADVOCATES ABROAD

- Direct all U.S. delegations in regional dialogues to espouse a coordinated message concerning U.S. interests in promoting international religious freedom as a global economic and security policy. Such dialogues include: the Shangri-La Dialogue (security forum with defense ministers); ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF); Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF); Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS); and the Manama Dialogue (security forum in the Middle East).
- Raise the profile of religious freedom at the United Nations through resolutions and statements, and advocate for adequate resources for U.N. human rights monitoring and field operations in areas of conflict or countries engaged in systematic human rights abuses, in particular those related to the protection of religious freedom.
- Maintain and strengthen coalitions to counter the reemergence of proposals to prohibit defamation of religions at the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly, and in other U.N. forums, and continue to build support for the principles in Resolution 16/18, as well as their active implementation through the “Istanbul Process.”
- Seek opportunities to make joint statements with leaders from like-minded countries on the importance of promoting international religious freedom, and encourage public commitments by foreign governments to support policies and programs on religious freedom in their countries.
- Encourage other countries and international organizations to fund initiatives and programs that promote international religious freedom.
- Dedicate resources for U.S. government programs and NGOs that promote interfaith understanding and integrate religious freedom into democracy programs, such as those administered by United States Institute of Peace (USIP), USAID, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

- Dedicate U.S. foreign aid and democracy funding to support civil society actors whose mission is to advance religious freedom as part of democratic development.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND LOCAL MEDIA

- Direct resources to media trainings in countries where there are societal tensions between religious groups to promote objective, fact-based reporting on religion, religious minorities, and issues of law and public policy that touch on religious freedom and related human rights, as well as increased reporting on cooperation between and among religious and other communities to promote human dignity, civil and political rights, and equal justice.
- Support programming that uses multimedia and social network platforms to educate and connect individuals and organizations sympathetic to protecting religious freedom, including activists, educators, students, and religious leaders.
- Direct resources towards programs aimed at supporting and providing protection for regional and local media outlets, especially bloggers, social media journalists, and other individuals and organizations that offer a positive alternative to violent religious extremism and hatred.
- Support U.S. programs that promote freedom of the press, access to information, and Internet freedom, in countries where religious freedom violations occur but information about them is suppressed or controlled, including circumvention and safe technology for Internet users.

IRF Strategy: Research & Training

RESEARCH

There is a critical need for increased research on the analytical framework for religious freedom and religion as it relates to foreign policy and national security. Also, in light of recent uprisings in the MENA region and the coming to power of Islamist political parties, there is a need for research on the identity of these and other political parties and their perceptions of democracy, human rights, and religious freedom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen research and intelligence for religious freedom policy, the president should:

- Request a national intelligence estimate (NIE) on international religious freedom by the National Intelligence Council (NIC), which should:
 - Analyze conditions and trends of international religious freedom and identify potential national security risks related to the absence of religious freedom, including threats to stability from authoritarian governments, terrorism, violent religious extremism, and laws that restrict religious freedom.
 - Discuss the potential response or effect of U.S. policies and initiatives to promote international religious freedom on U.S. national security.
- Direct the State Department's International Religious Freedom (IRF) office and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) to co-chair a study on the effectiveness of diplomatic and other efforts to promote international religious freedom since the passage of IRFA. The study should make recommendations to guide strategies and annual program planning in the State Department.

TRAINING

Concerns about the separation of church and state should not be a barrier for U.S. officials to develop creative strategies to advance religious freedom and other human rights in countries where the religious dynamic is at the core of conflict and human rights abuses.

The Obama Administration has stepped up training of foreign service officers on international religious freedom. Given the important religious dimensions to political and economic development, U.S. national security challenges and human rights, the administration should build on this effort to develop a broader set of skills and expertise in U.S. officials.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To prepare U.S. officials to implement international religious freedom policies, to understand the religious dimensions to U.S. national security and other foreign policy challenges, and to engage religious actors to achieve U.S. foreign policy objectives, the president should:

- Ensure that diplomatic officials are well-versed in religious-based arguments from various traditions in countries where they will serve that support justice, the rule of law, responsible government, human rights, and gender equality.
- Mandate that the U.S. military and the U.S. intelligence community (IC) provide relevant personnel basic education about religious and related cultural issues, and particularized instruction on the religious traditions in the countries in which they serve or for which they are responsible.

- Require that religious freedom and religious literacy curricula be incorporated into Foreign Service Institute (FSI) A100 courses, area-study courses, and mandatory training for all ambassadors and deputy chiefs of mission.
- Ensure that online training courses on promoting religious freedom and religious engagement are made available to every post overseas, based on specific circumstances of that country.
- Institute a religious engagement/religious freedom subspecialty under the political, economic, and public diplomacy career tracks for Foreign Service officers.
- Establish a “religion attaché” position within the political section of the embassy in U.S. missions where religion has particular salience, similar to the way that political/military officers are assigned to selected embassies.

Conclusion

Failing to invest in the promotion of the universal value of freedom of religion or belief creates risks for U.S. security. A recent Pew Research Center report found that religious-related events in any particular country significantly contribute to religious hostilities and restrictions in other countries, thus underscoring the cross-national influence and impact of religion.

The Obama Administration should develop a preventative strategy for combating religious extremism and promoting religious freedom that is commensurate with the challenges in today's global landscape.



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