



February 15, 2021

The Honorable Joseph Biden
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We write as an informal group of organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious and secular leaders, human rights advocates and practitioners to urge you in the strongest possible terms to nominate a qualified Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. This international religious freedom post that is vital to our country's national security, human rights advocacy, and foreign relations should be filled as soon as possible.

Our Roundtable holds an extremely broad diversity of theological views and political positions. Despite our theological differences, we all agree on the importance of international religious freedom. It strengthens cultures, creates a safer environment for believers and non-believers alike, and provides the foundation for stable democracies and their components, including social harmony and equality.

Such conclusions are increasingly bolstered by empirical research. Dr. Brian Grim, a noted expert on society and religion, has found a strong correlation between government restrictions on religion and religiously-motivated violence.¹ Further, an exhaustive 2011 study by academics from Harvard, Notre Dame and Georgetown found "that religious communities are most likely to support democracy, peace and freedom for other faiths..."²

We cannot allow the post of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to go vacant at this critical time when assaults on religious freedom around the world are systemic and growing. In fact, the current state of international religious freedom is one of deepening crisis—government restrictions on religion rose to a record high in 2018, while religion-related social

¹ Brian Grim, "The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century." (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

² Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah, "God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics." (New York: Norton, 2011), p. 18.

hostilities fell slightly but remained near peak levels, according to Pew Research Center's [11th annual study of restrictions on religion](#).³

Over the last several administrations, the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious freedom played a key role in ensuring that America's foreign policy championed marginalized communities where the freedom of religion or belief was threatened, the successful forging of new multilateral partnerships for the freedom of religion or belief, the creation of religious freedom roundtables around the world, and many other initiatives to advance religious freedom and hold bad actors accountable.

In looking for the next ambassador, the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) states, "The Ambassador at Large shall be a principal adviser to the President and the Secretary of State regarding matters affecting religious freedom abroad..." As such, we urge you to appoint a high-profile Ambassador with a demonstrated expertise in foreign policy and religious freedom. This high-profile nominee for the Ambassador-at-Large position should possess the following experience in and working understanding of:

Experience and Background

1. The historical wins over the last 20 years of the acceptance of religious freedom globally; as well as a deep appreciation for the critical role of civil society and various activists in advancing this universal human right.
2. The unique role of religious freedom in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights, in particular the First Amendment's establishment clause and guarantee of the free exercise of religion;
3. International standards on freedom of religion, thought, conscience and belief as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR);
4. Global Affairs, to include the role of religion in foreign policy, and the nexus between religious freedom and national security;
5. The developmental history of human rights, including the history of the various international instruments, the principles that underpin them, and the international institutions that exist to carry out the requirements of these instruments;
6. The mission and function of the State Department's International Religious Freedom Office, and other relevant offices, including the office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, the Office of the Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the

³ [Government restrictions on religion around the world reached new record in 2018](#), Pew Research Center.

Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and the Office of the Special Envoy for Holocaust issues;

7. The mission and function of USCIRF;

8. The role of Members of Congress, present and past, who champion and actively promote international religious freedom, and the relevant Congressional bodies, including the International Religious Freedom Caucus, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, and the Religious Minorities in the Middle East Caucus, among others; and

We trust that a high-profile Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom will help the U.S. government continue to institutionalize religious freedom as an essential element of foreign policy and national security, integrating it into the promotion of democracy, governance, rule of law, and citizenship, as well as the fight against religious-based extremism and violence.

We therefore urge you to nominate such a candidate swiftly to ensure that this vital position is not left vacant and that the U.S. continues to champion the universal freedom of religion or belief.

Respectfully,

Organizations

21Wilberforce

Advocates International

Africa Faith and Justice Network

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA

Alevi Philosophy Center

Alliance to Save and Protect America from Infiltration by Religious Extremists

American Humanist Association

American Muslim Institution

Assisi Strategy - International Interfaith Peace Corps

Association for the Advancement of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Vietnam (AAFoRB-VN)

Assyrian Aid Society of America

Baha'is of the United States

Boat People SOS - Religious Freedom Project

Bureau of Minority Rights Bangladesh

Campaign for Uyghurs

CaoDai Today

Center for Civil Liberties

Center for Pluralism

Cheasta Organization for Zoroastrian Philosophy- Kurdistan

ChinaAid

Christian Medical & Dental Associations

Christian Solidarity Worldwide - USA

Churches for Middle East Peace

The Church of Almighty God

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Citizen Power Initiatives for China

Coalition for Jewish Values

Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience

CSW UK

Faith & Freedom Coalition

Faith & Liberty DC

Falun Dafa (Falun Gong) Association of Washington DC

FIACONA

Forcefield

Freedom2Care

Free Yezidi Foundation

Friends of Angola

Global Christian Ministers Federation

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Genocide Watch

Global Peace Foundation Kurdistan

Global Peace Foundation USA

Hindu American Foundation

Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom

IDRAC (International Dialogue Research & Awareness Centre) Islamabad Pakistan

International Christian Advocacy Network Corp.

International Human Rights Committee

International Religious Freedom Roundtable, Seoul, Korea

Indian American Muslim Council

Institut de recherche et d'études stratégiques de Khyber France

Institute for Global Engagement

International Center for Law and Religion Studies

International Christian Concern

International Organization for Peace building and Social Justice

International Organization to Preserve Human Rights

International Religious Liberty Association

International Society for Krishna Consciousness

Iraqi Christian Relief Council

Jubilee Campaign USA

Justice For All

Law and Liberty International

Legalise Apostasy

Leimena Institute

L. Ron Hubbard Foundation

Minaret Foundation

Muslims for Muslims International

National Association of Evangelicals

NRIM

Oasis Network for Community Transformation

Open Doors USA

Pakistan Christian Association

Popular Council of Cao Dai Religion

Red Eagle Enterprises

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Religious Freedom Coalition

Religious Freedom & Business Foundation

Religious Freedom Institute

Rumi Forum

Set My People Free

SIGS

Sikh Dharma

Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission

Sunshine Ministries

Tahrir Alnisa Foundation

Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam

United Macedonian Diaspora

Uyghur American Association

Uyghur Human Rights Project

Vision Catalyst Global

Vietnam Coalition Against Torture

Vietnamese Women for Human Rights

Voice For Christian Faith

West Papua Human Rights Center

White Mountain Research

Individuals

Listed with titles and organizations for identification purposes only.

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Amjad Mahmood Khan

National Director of Public Affairs

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA

Anna Lee Stangl

Joint Head of Advocacy

CSW UK

Anthony Vance

Director

U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs

Dr. Brian Grim,

President,

Religious Freedom & Business Foundation

David M Babu-Peddammudium

Sunshine Ministries

Debbie Farah

Vision Catalyst Global

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Bureau of Minority Rights Bangladesh

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Bangladeshi Hindu, Buddhist & Christian Unity Council, USA

Farooq Aftab
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International Human Rights Committee

Greg Mitchell
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International Religious Freedom Roundtable

Dr. Gregory H. Stanton
President
Genocide Watch

Hanh Thai-Tang
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Junior Sacerdotal Council of Caodai

Herman Wainggai
Executive Director
West Papua Human Rights Center

Ibrahim Anli
Rumi Forum

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Religious Freedom Institute

Dr. Jianli Yang
Citizen Power Initiatives for China

J. Mark Brinkmoeller
Assisi Strategy - International Interfaith Peace Corps

Joseph Tun Khaing
Peace and Human Rights Educator
K'cho Baptist Church

Rabbi Jonathan Guttentag
International Liaison
Coalition for Jewish Values

Mark Cunningham
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FIACONA

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Institute for Global Engagement

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Lauren B. Homer
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University of Shizuoka, Japan

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Leimena Institute

Michelle Nguyen
Advocacy Coordinator
Vietnam Coalition Against Torture

Dr. Mike Ghouse
Center for Pluralism

Nasim Malik
IHRC

Nehemiah Christie
Global Christian Ministers Federation

Patrice J. Pederson
President
First Freedom Foundation

Patrick Purtill
Director of Legislative Affairs
Faith & Freedom Coalition

Bishop Dr. Paul Murray
Global Peace Foundation

Dr. Shaik Ubaid
National Co-Chair
Alliance to Save and Protect America from Infiltration by Religious Extremists

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Pakistan Christian Association

Shaker A Rajasekar
CEO
NRIM / Voice For Christian Faith

Sharyn Runyon
L. Ron Hubbard Foundation

Simran Singh
Secretary of International Religious Freedom
Sikh Dharma

Stephan Sieber
SIGS

Rev. Susan Taylor
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Taniel Koushakjian
Hindu American Foundation

Thierry Valle

President

Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience

Tien Nguyen

Dr. Umar Mulinde

International Christian Advocacy Network Corp.

Chaplain Rev. Victoria Nguyen

CaoDai Today

William J Murray

Religious Freedom Coalition