

20TH

ANNIVERSARY
of the International Religious Freedom Act

One Hundred Fifth Congress
of the
United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

*Begun and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday,
the twenty-seventh day of January, one thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight*

An Act

To express United States foreign policy with respect to, and to strengthen United States advocacy on behalf of, individuals persecuted in foreign countries on account of religion; to authorize United States actions in response to violations of religious freedom in foreign countries; to establish an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom within the Department of State, a Commission on International Religious Freedom, and a Special Adviser on International Religious Freedom within the National Security Council; and for other purposes.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of
the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the “International Religious Freedom Act of 1998”.

1948

1998

2018

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF 21WILBERFORCE

The International Religious Freedom (IRF) movement can be counted among the great human rights efforts of the last two decades, if not our generation. With this in mind, it is a privilege to introduce this 20-year anniversary reflection, offering some 50 viewpoints on its origins and influence.


It celebrates religious freedom activism and the reformers who helped transform that landscape. This is a social movement primer on the formation and progress, winnings and failings, of a movement, which prompted a cognitive shift in foreign affairs. Most importantly, it pays tribute to all the unnamed believers and activists, past and present, who peacefully stand on the frontlines of faith and, despite overwhelming pressures, continue to do so. This is dedicated to you.

From genocide to discrimination, the IRF Movement continues to challenge the established injustice of religious persecution. It established the defense of embattled minority believers as a fundamental right. It recognized people of faith as being individually valued across the world and worthy of protection. It catalyzed a monumental shift from dismissal to embrace at the highest levels of government. It features a big-spirited insistence on protecting all minority faiths who suffer hostility anywhere in the world. It has grown to defend those who choose no faith at all as a matter of personal conscience. It has planted a flag in the human rights soil for every faith, from ancient to newly emerging, including: Christians, Yazidis, Shia, Sufi, Uyghurs, Jews, Baha'is, Buddhists, Rohingya, Falun Dafa, Ismaeli, and Ahmadiyya, to name only a few.

A little told story, the IRF Movement has contributed to an impressive number of global initiatives these last 20 years. Early on, it sparked the campaign to end the North-South Sudanese War, which in turn sparked the Darfur Anti-Genocide Movement. Related anti-slavery advocacy sparked the anti-trafficking movement, which generated a global commitment to ending all forms of slavery, with momentum continuing to this day. On a separate track, other faith-based influencers (with thanks to Bono and the ONE Campaign) combined with secular activists to combat the HIV/AIDs crisis, creating the game-changing PEPFAR initiative, which turned the tide of destruction. This, in turn, spawned the global "under 5" child mortality campaign, which again, saved countless lives.

Simply put, the IRF movement influenced a long line of faith-based, international activism, affecting millions globally.

In America, international human rights is among the few remaining bastions of bipartisan activism. The IRF Movement continues in that proud tradition. Major reform shifts were possible, in part, because its advocates were committedly bipartisan. Agreeing to disagree, while joining together on key principles, remains an abiding strategy. That original dedication is a reminder that no worthy cause is ever won in a corner. This invites future advocates to practice the art of political transcendence where great things are accomplished.



A central genius of the IRF Movement was the activation of faith-based networks to influence foreign policy. Serving as an early prototype, this approach continued to be a key strategy for subsequent campaigns. In the early 20th century, faith-based movements helped catalyze the great social reforms from ending child labor, to reforming schools, hospitals, housing, and more. Yet in recent decades, faith-based social activism had become nearly dormant. The IRF Movement helped re-ignite that tradition which flourishes again.

One irony emerges among these accomplishments. The IRF Movement, despite all its influence, skipped a key path undertaken by other successful international campaigns: for the most part it did not scale up into broad program adoption and, eventually, nation-changing reforms. Instead, it concentrated on top-down, single-issue advocacy, with small NGOs targeting increasingly smaller sets of influencers and sources of funding.

Compare this to the anti-trafficking movement, which went from advocacy to programs and then to systems reforms worldwide. The result: anti-trafficking measures have been broadly adopted, with well-funded public and private efforts, producing global talent in both governmental and the private sector. This had extraordinary influence, ranging from transformed public awareness to broad government reforms, at local, national and even international levels.

That is the nation-changing key unlocked by successful movements such as anti-trafficking and PEPFAR. Great human rights movements make that journey from campaigning to broader implementation and the IRF Movement can, too. Most importantly the IRF Movement *is poised* to take this next step, inspired by the energy created by the Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom who is championing fresh approaches, and re-invigorating coalitions (including the IRF Roundtable), in Europe and beyond.

Consider the potential impact on billions of lives worldwide – the suffering it could address and the freedoms it could win. This is an invitation for exponential growth. We anticipate great things across the disciplines of collaborative technology, philanthropy, social entrepreneurship, advocacy and civil society, government, business, and more.

It's an exciting time to witness this renaissance of the IRF Movement and as we offer this retrospective, we look forward to what the next 20 years will bring.

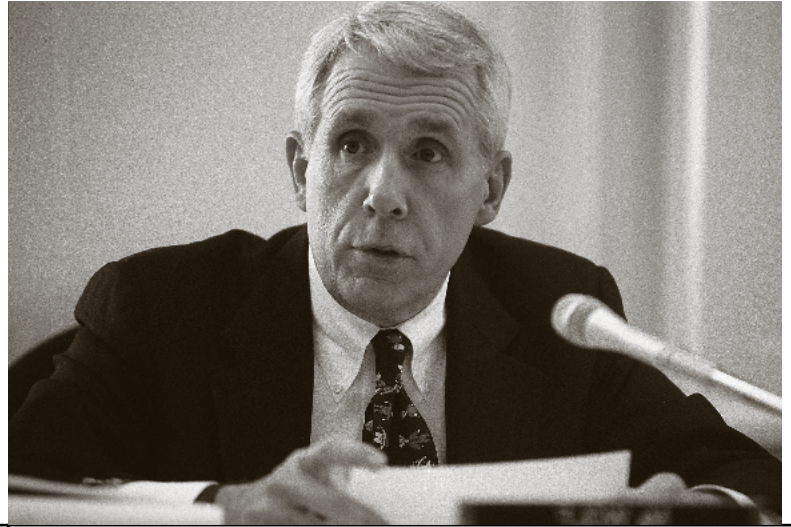
With expectation,



Sharon Payt, J.D.
Executive Director
21Wilberforce

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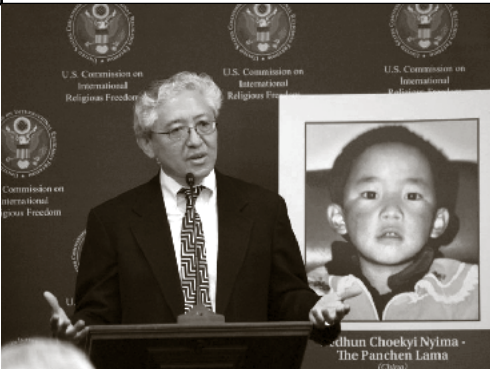


STATE.GOV

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USCIRF

USCIRF

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Above left: USCIRF Tenzen Dorjee
Above right: USCIRF meeting with
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INTRODUCTION

In the world of software engineering, development teams conduct meetings at the end of a project to determine what worked and what needs improvement. The meetings are called retrospectives and provide a forum for team members to reflect on important collaborative aspects of the project — process, effectiveness, mistakes, satisfaction, and quality. The end-goal of a well-conducted retrospective is clearer vision for the future and, hopefully, a plan for building better software.

This publication is a retrospective of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), landmark legislation signed into law in the fall of 1998 that has been a driver of considerable human rights initiatives during the past 20 years. In it IRF participants reflect on two decades of collaborative efforts to integrate international religious freedom with U.S. foreign policy. It is a historical memory of the process of creating a law whose aim was to promote and protect religious freedom for all people, in all nations, of all faiths or no faith at all.

This brief retrospective includes candid conversations and observations about the effectiveness of the IRF Act — what has worked and what has fallen short, the mistakes and the milestones. It includes the voices of IRF participants who helped craft, implement, measure and refine IRFA. The intended end-goal, of course, is a clearer vision for the future and how to advance and strengthen the principles of the IRF Act in a world of growing persecution based on religion and beliefs.

Often, software development teams discover an unintended consequence from conducting retrospectives. The act of intentional reflection and thoughtful critique frequently leads to a renewed sense of team spirit, a refreshed camaraderie. It is the hope, then, that this IRFA retrospective also will inspire and reinforce a spirit of solidarity and motivation among those who seek to foster a full embrace of the respect for human dignity and freedom of conscience.

The *20th Anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act: A Retrospective* was launched in the spring of 2018. The research team began by reading legislation, policy, books, white papers, research reports and articles about international religious freedom. Material sourced is noted in the Resources section.

The team followed its initial examination by conducting qualitative research through in-depth interviews with individuals across a broad spectrum. Asking open-ended questions evoked responses that were meaningful to those we interviewed and allowed us the flexibility to probe initial responses. Collecting information on stakeholder personal experiences and perspectives provided information about the “human” side of the issue, which at times revealed contradictory beliefs and opinions.

Our recruitment strategy and sample size were informed by materials read and referrals from stakeholders. We completed 56 out of 64 attempted interviews. Using informed consent for data collection, all interviews were conducted “on the record.” The interview list appears in the Resources section.

The authors have worked diligently to ensure that all information in this report is accurate as of the time of publication. We thank all the individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this project, as well as Judith Golub for research and editing assistance, and Faith McDonnell and Javier Peña for sourcing photos.

The *20th Anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act: A Retrospective* is a legacy project of:

[21Wilberforce](#)

405 North Washington Street, 3rd floor

Falls Church, VA 22046

info@21wilberforce.org

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PRELUDE

Twenty years ago, members of Congress made a deliberate and unanimous choice to stand as beacons for the most fundamental of all human rights. Passage of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in 1998 sought to underscore America’s centuries-old commitment to the freedom of religion or belief and codify its importance within U.S. foreign policy.

As most scholars and casual observers would agree, religious freedom is foundational to the American character, as articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Yet, despite the intrinsic value ascribed domestically to this first freedom, it is important to recognize that the design and approval of IRFA, which focuses on international religious freedom abroad, was neither instant nor certain. Rather, IRFA has been (and remains) a journey.

Broader studies have been made as to the importance of religious freedom in shaping American sensibilities about culture and international relations. This account will focus instead on the unique historical context of IRFA — the domestic and international forces at play, the crafting and compromises of legislation, implementation of and changes to the act, and milestones achieved in the two decades since its enactment. To begin, then, requires a brief look at what came before, a short examination of a few watershed moments of the 20th century.

The modern-day international religious freedom movement can be traced back to December 1948 with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Serving at the newly-formed United Nations, former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt spearheaded the campaign to craft an international document aimed at preventing future human rights atrocities, such as the grand-scale abuses of the First and Second World Wars. Echoes of her husband’s earlier Four Freedoms speech (freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from fear, and freedom from want) are evident in the final language of the UDHR. Article 18 focuses narrowly on the guarantee of religious freedom.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

– U.S. Constitution, First Amendment

1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights
Adopted December 10



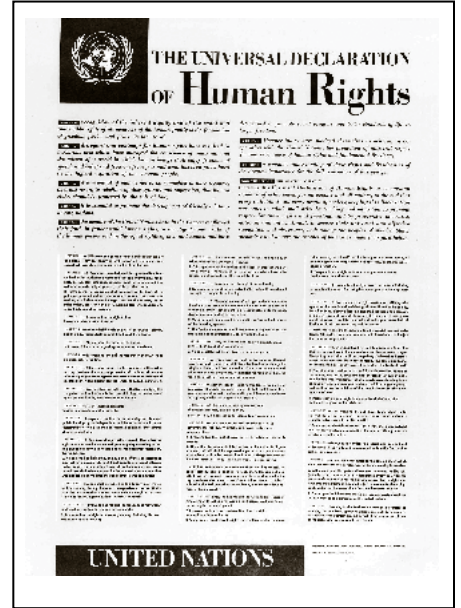
PRELUDE

While not legally binding, 48-member nations at the UN General Assembly approved this international declaration, which has animated the international religious freedom conversation for 70 years. UDHR language has been embedded in numerous international treaties, national constitutions and laws and serves as a standard by which to measure the preservation or deprivation of basic human rights.

The significance of the UDHR as a unifying and transformative statement for the international community, particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War, cannot be overstated. Yet from the start, its curative properties have remained limited.

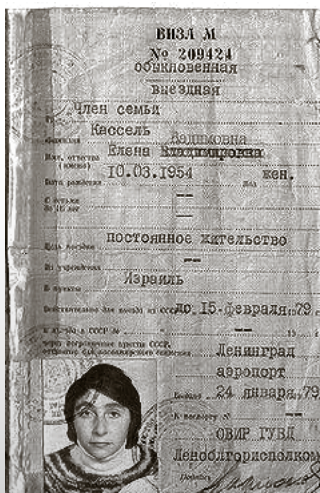
As the Cold War settled in during the second half of the 20th century, human rights violations and religious persecution persisted, particularly in Eastern Europe where communism held a firm grip. New initiatives and mechanisms to mitigate the suffering intensifying in Soviet bloc countries were needed. One such instrument, adopted by the U.S. in 1975, was the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, a powerful tool that established a linkage between U.S. foreign policy and human rights.

At the time, the Soviet Union was restricting the emigration of many of its citizens — mostly Jews, but also evangelical Christians, Catholics, and other religious minorities. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment prohibited the U.S. President from extending most-favored-nation (MFN) trade status to any non-market economy that denied its citizens the right to emigrate or imposed more than a nominal tax on emigration or exit visas. Basically, the message from the U.S. was: if you want to enjoy the benefits of trade with us, start by treating your own people well.



“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

– UDHR, Article 18



1975 Jackson-Vanik Amendment
The Trade Act of 1974 includes this provision establishing a linkage between U.S. foreign policy and human rights, particularly as related to the Soviet Jewry Movement. (January 3)

PRELUDE

The Jackson-Vanik Amendment fortified human rights as a priority within U.S. foreign policy and would remain an active lever for the next seven administrations. Another significant development of 1975 came at the conclusion of the first Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), held in Helsinki, Finland. The CSCE addressed questions of European security and cooperation in three critical areas, or “baskets”: political and military issues; economics; and human rights, cultural cooperation, and freedom of the press.

The diplomatic agreement — known as the Helsinki Final Act — that resulted between Soviet bloc countries and western nations participating in the CSCE was not originally pursued as a human rights initiative. In fact, many critics argued that negotiations with the Soviets would contribute to even greater, systemic human rights abuses throughout Eastern Europe. Over time, however, the Helsinki Final Act would prove to be a potent remedy to some of the most widespread humanitarian abuses within the Soviet Union and would hasten the demise of the Soviet regime.

“The participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”

– Helsinki Final Act, Principle VII

Like Jackson-Vanik, the Helsinki Final Act linked trade and foreign policy with human rights. In exchange for agreements by the U.S. and other western nations on security and economic concerns, the Soviet leadership had to agree to honor the “third basket,” which focused specifically on human rights issues, including matters of religious freedom. In the years that followed, the U.S. firmly held the Soviets accountable to their basket-three promises.

Jackson-Vanik and the Helsinki Final Act helped fuel other human rights initiatives aimed at the dark corners of the Soviet bloc countries, such as Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Baltics. Most notably, the international Soviet Jewry Movement in support of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union gained traction after 1975 and reached its zenith during the Reagan administration. Many scholars point to the campaign as a model of how to build a successful grassroots movement. Indeed, many of its participants would become active in or provide inspiration for the IRFA movement in the decades to follow.

1975 Helsinki Final Act

Signed by 35 nations at the height of the Cold War, the Helsinki Final Act addressed a variety of vital political, military, economic, and human rights issues.



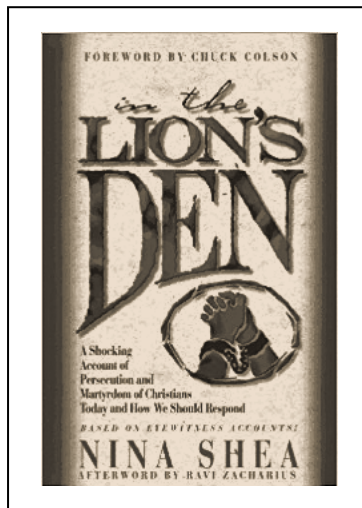
“Andrei Sakharov, Scoop Jackson, and Ronald Reagan...they created the policy of linkage: That international relations and human rights must be linked. That how a government treats its own people cannot be separated from how that government could be expected to treat other countries.”

—Natan Sharansky, human rights activist and former Soviet dissident

Yet, even as the Soviet Union collapsed and human rights and religious freedom were blossoming throughout Eastern Europe, they were withering in places like China, North Korea, Vietnam and South Sudan.

More troubling, by the early 1990s, much of the conversation had begun to drift away from religious freedom — the emphasis instead placed squarely on the more generic issue of human rights, which often was viewed through a secular lens. Indeed, there was widespread belief that modernity would bring about secularization and religion would matter less, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. So while economic and national security concerns remained at the forefront, the religious freedom dimension became increasingly marginalized.

Something needed to be done to ensure that the interests of persecuted people and America’s profound commitment to religious freedom were firmly integrated into foreign policy discussions. To do so would require a deliberate Congressional focus and legislative response — and a catalyst.



“While religious freedom issues tend to be overlooked by policy makers in the West, religion is playing an increasingly greater role in world events.”

– Author, analyst and advocate Nina Shea, from her book, *In the Lion's Den*.

1983 Congressional Human Rights Caucus

The precursor of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission is founded by Representatives Tom Lantos and John Edward Porter

LEAD-UP TO IRFA

In the final decade of the 20th century, international headlines were fraught with horrific stories of ethnic cleansing, religious persecution, and catastrophic humanitarian crises. In Africa, some 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates were butchered in Rwanda between April and July 1994. The following July, Bosnian Serb forces massacred 7,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. An additional 20,000 civilians were displaced.



FAITH MCDONNELL

Early IRF advocates (left to right): Rep. Ben Gilman (R-NY), Rep. Joe Pitts (R-PA), Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA), and Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-CO) join Sen. Sam Brownback (R-KS) at podium

Meanwhile, ongoing civil strife in Sudan bore all the hallmarks of genocide against the Christian and traditional faiths in the south: famine, enslavement of women and children, two million killed, and another five million displaced or driven into refugee status. In China, reports were beginning to emerge of Catholic bishops and Protestant pastors imprisoned for decades because of their faith, as well as the Chinese government's continued brutal suppression of Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhism.

Against this backdrop, and despite a creeping ambivalence about the significance of religion in world affairs, a stalwart few recognized religion could be a positive force for change. Even more, they understood religion was, in fact, an intricate and necessary force in the world that would need to play a central role in

U.S. foreign policy. They understood that the protection of religious freedom requires a degree of societal maturity, an embrace of pluralism and tolerance. For when societies in the public square are able to acknowledge diverse faith traditions with equality, they are on the path to building a functional, peaceful and prosperous society.

1994 End of apartheid in South Africa
(April 27)

1994 Rwanda Genocide
(April – July)

During the 1990s, Congressional champions emerged and tirelessly pressed their colleagues on matters of religious freedom. Among them, Tony Hall (D-OH), Tom Lantos (D-CA), Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Joe Pitts (R-PA), John Edward Porter (R-IL), Chris Smith (R-NJ), Tom Tancredo (R-CO) and Frank Wolf (R-VA) in the House, and Sam Brownback (R-KS), Dan Coats (R-IN), Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), Don Nickles (R-OK), and Arlen Specter (R-PA) in the Senate, each torchbearers for those who faced religious persecution.



Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA)

Likewise, congressional staffers like Alexandra Arriaga, Laura Bryant, Karin Finkler, John Hanford, Ann Huiskes, Karen Lord, Sharon Payt, and Dorothy Taft were devoted to the advancement of religious freedom, quietly navigating and creating legislative levers to bolster religious freedom initiatives. In the private sector, scholars, human rights activists, and faith-based leaders added their voices. Leading the charge were figures like international human rights lawyer Nina Shea, human rights advocate Michael Horowitz, author Paul Marshall, and a cadre of evangelical leaders, including Don Argue, Richard Cizik, Chuck Colson, and Richard Land.

Despite the determined work of these early advocates, by the mid-1990s a cohesive and consistent vision of how to integrate religious freedom into U.S. foreign policy still had not been fully developed, though a deeper understanding of the potency and potential of such a vision was emerging. Then in 1996, a spark flickered, igniting what some would describe as the early glow of an international religious freedom movement.

1995 Srebrenica Genocide
(July)

LEAD-UP TO IRFA

The catalyst was a January 1996 summit on global religious persecution, held at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. Organized by Michael Horowitz and Nina Shea, the gathering would inspire a chain of events that created a new sense of urgency around the topic of religious freedom. Following the summit, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a Statement of Conscience on behalf of its more than 42,000 member congregations, pledging to end its “silence in the face of the suffering of all those persecuted for their religious faith.”

“Religious liberty is not a privilege to be granted or denied by an all-powerful State, but a God-given human right. Indeed, religious liberty is the bedrock principle that animates our republic and defines us as a people...it is our responsibility, and that of the government that represents us, to do everything we can to secure the blessings of religious liberty to all those suffering from religious persecution.

– National Association of Evangelicals, Statement of Conscience

The following month, in February 1996, the International Operations and Human Rights Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee, under the leadership of Representative Chris Smith, conducted a landmark hearing on the persecution of Christians. Congress held other hearings on religious persecution as well. The subcommittee, again under Representative Smith’s leadership, held a hearing on the worldwide persecution of Jews. A year prior, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Commission), also under the chairmanship of Representative Smith, held a hearing on genocide in Bosnia Herzegovina.

1996 Religious Persecution Summit
Washington Mayflower Hotel (January)



Rev. (Dr.) Rich Cizik, Dr. Don Argue, and President Bill Clinton meet in the White House prior to January 1996 summit held at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C.

REV. (DR.) RICH CIZIK

LEAD-UP TO IRFA

Following these hearings on Christians and Jews, Congress adopted resolutions on the persecution of Baha'is in Iran ([H. Con. Res. 102](#)). By September 1996, the House and Senate also would pass measures ([H. Res. 515](#), introduced by Representative Frank Wolf and [S. Con Res. 71](#), introduced by Senator Don Nickles) in support of Christians worldwide. These called upon then-President Clinton to strengthen U.S. policies to combat religious persecution, including creation of a special advisory committee for religious liberty abroad or appointing a White House special advisor on religious persecution.



The testimonies presented during the hearings of 1996 revealed a pattern of oppression against the world's religious groups. In addition to the congressional resolutions, these same hearings inspired a requirement (included in a [Managers Statement to the 1997 Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act](#)) requiring the State Department to report on U.S. policies "designed to reduce and eliminate today's mounting persecution of Christians throughout the world." Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would release that report in July 1997, complete with a catalog of U.S. policies in support of international religious freedom.

Finally, in November 1996, the World Evangelical Alliance would launch the first-ever International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.

Moving forward, the focus would not be limited to Christian persecution. By the end of 1996, the small faith-based coalition that had gathered at the Mayflower Hotel in the beginning of the year had broadened. Different religious groups — evangelicals, Catholics, Jews, Baha'is, Tibetan Buddhists, Sikhs — began to coalesce around the singular belief that religious freedom was a universal human right and any faith persecuted was a threat to all faiths.

"The House of Representatives encourages the President to take organizational steps to strengthen United States policies to combat religious persecution, including the creation of a special advisory committee for religious liberty abroad which has an appropriate mandate and adequate staff or to consider the appointment of a White House special advisor on religious persecution."

– H. Res. 515

1996 H. Res. 515 and S. Con. Res. 71

Resolutions pass in the House and the Senate regarding religious persecution and persecution of Christians worldwide (September)

1996 First-ever International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church

(November)

LEAD-UP TO IRFA



ALEXANDRA ARRIAGA

As the conversation grew louder and more crowded, recognition also grew that more substantive legislation would be required — a stated policy of why freedom of religion was such an important and fundamental human right.

Consensus also began to build in support of a more robust role on the part of the executive branch, namely the State Department. For months, former Congressional staffer Alexandra Arriaga, who was by then serving as a senior advisor at the State Department but also monitoring the hearings on the Hill, had been quietly lobbying her superiors to elevate and integrate international religious freedom as a stand-alone human rights issue.

Executive Director Alexandra Arriaga, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor John Shattuck, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright

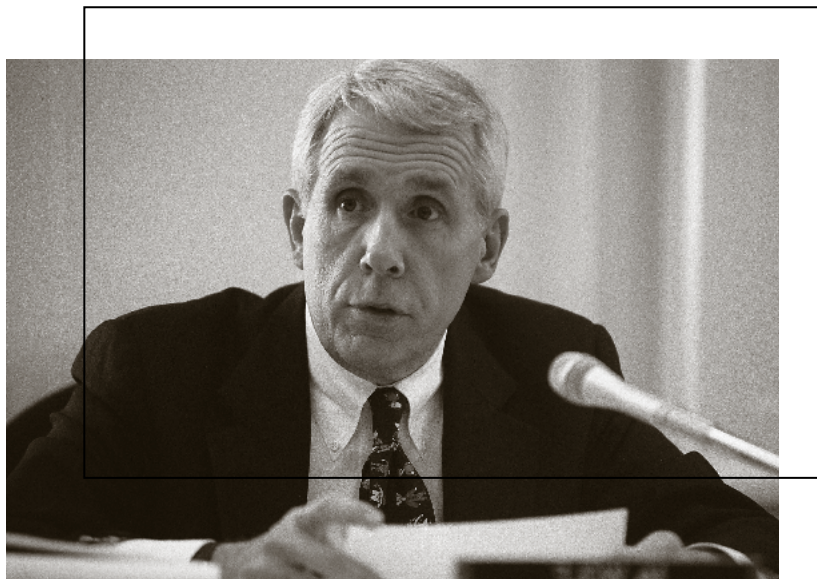
The Clinton administration responded in November 1996 with the creation of the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad. Warren Christopher formed the Advisory Committee in his final days as Secretary of State. Members of the Advisory Committee would roll up their sleeves in the new year with Arriaga serving as Executive Director, advising the new Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and her Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor John Shattuck with respect to issues of religious freedom, intolerance, and reconciliation abroad.

As 1996 drew to a close, the nascent international religious freedom movement had developed important momentum, though it remained a disjointed effort at best. Grassroots activism had ignited a fire, but gaining meaningful legislative traction would require leadership (and cooperation) at many levels — on Capitol Hill, at the State Department, and in the Oval Office. To advance the next step would take a trailblazer.

1996 Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad
Established

It would be overly simplistic to credit a lone individual as the force behind the IRFA movement. As already mentioned, there were many visionary leaders along the way who shared a deep longing and heartfelt commitment to securing religious freedom and protecting the persecuted. In the months between January 1997 and October 1998 when the International Religious Freedom Act was signed into law, the list of advocates contributing to the effort remained relatively small, but they were determined: some elected officials, congressional aides, human rights advocates, faith-based groups of all stripes, State Department officials, and a handful of non-governmental organizations.

If there were a trailblazer, however, many would point to then-Representative Frank Wolf. He is widely recognized as the “godfather” of IRFA and continues to carry the message to the present day. His was the first bill introduced in Congress that sought to integrate religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy. It would not be the last. Nor, in key ways, would the final version resemble the initial legislation he put forth. Still, Wolf’s bill was the first and set the stage, and there begins the conversation.



SCOTT J. FERRELL/CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY / ALAMY

Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA)

The Freedom from Religious Persecution Act

When he took office in 1981, Representative Frank Wolf had little intention of becoming the voice of religious freedom in the U.S. Congress; he was more interested in local transportation issues than international human rights. Then, in 1984, fellow Representative Tony Hall invited him on a humanitarian tour of Ethiopia, which at the time was experiencing a deadly famine. The trip changed Wolf’s life, and the following year he joined Representatives Hall and Chris Smith on

another humanitarian tour, this time to Communist Romania. At the time, the Romanian people were under the control of the brutal Ceausescu regime. Wolf and company met with families of jailed dissidents. Desperate wives and parents slipped them secret notes begging for relief from the repressive government. It was an emotional experience for Wolf, and upon his return to the U.S., he co-sponsored legislation with Hall and Smith to strip Romania of its Most Favored Nation status. Then there were many trips to the Soviet Gulag, Communist China, and the Sudan. Wolf's encounters with repressed

and persecuted individuals, many of them harassed, imprisoned, and even tortured because of their faith, imbued a fiery sense of purpose in the Virginia statesman.

In May 1997, Wolf introduced H.R. 1685, the Freedom from Religious Persecution Act, with its Senate counterpart (S. 772) introduced concurrently by Senator Arlen Specter. The Wolf-Specter bill would create an Office of Religious Persecution Monitoring, complete with a mechanism to impose sanctions on countries identified as engaging in a pattern of persecution. That spring and summer, after holding hearings on H.R. 1685, Representative Wolf revised the bill then reintroduced it with some modifications as H.R. 2431 in September 1997.

Pivotal to the crafting of the language of H.R. 2431 was Michael Horowitz, the human rights activist who might be described alternately as a firebrand or impassioned maverick. Drawing on the lessons of the Soviet Jewry movement during the Cold War, Horowitz, a Jew himself, took up the cause of persecuted Christians abroad before the issue appeared on the radars of most U.S. church leaders. *New York Times*

The New York Times

Persecuting The Christians

By A. M. ROSENTHAL FEB. 11, 1997

Some columns can be postponed for more important topics, some put off until they seem newsier and many dropped because they do not flesh out. But some have to be written as soon as information is collected, no matter how late.

This column is late, not because so much has been written about the subject and everybody knows, but for exactly the opposite reason.

A few journalists have written about the persecution of Christians in Communist or religious dictatorships. A few legislators have risen to protest. A few clergymen and their religious organizations try to arouse congregations.

1997 Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad

Opening session convenes February 13

1997 H.R. 1685 Introduced

Rep. Frank R. Wolf introduces first version of the "Freedom from Religious Persecution Act of 1997" on May 20

IRFA AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

editor [A.M. Rosenthal](#) would label Horowitz as the person “who screamed me awake, as he has so many Christians.”

Early on, Horowitz pressed for a Christians-only focus to the bill. Wolf took a wider approach in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — religious freedom is an inalienable right for all people, of all faiths or no faith at all. From the time it was first introduced, H.R. 2431 would be inclusive. The bill referenced many religious groups including Catholic and protestant Christians in Communist countries, such as Cuba, Laos, China, North Korea and Vietnam; non-Muslims and religious converts from Islam in Islamic countries; the Baha’is in Iran, Buddhist monks and other Tibetans in Tibet, and moderate Muslims in Sudan.

Still, the view that the Wolf-Specter bill did not sufficiently address non-Christian persecution, that it was a Christian issue only, remained a chief concern among critics. The Clinton administration, in particular, was sensitive to the optics that legislating religious freedom might elevate Christianity over Islam. The Christians-only impression (some characterized it as cultural imperialism) would factor heavily in committee debates and closed-door sessions. For some, this perception lingers even today.

The influence of Horowitz also can be detected in the focus of H.R. 2431. While religious freedom provided the framework for the bill, the emphasis was placed on persecution, specifically defined as abduction, killing, imprisonment, forced mass resettlement, rape, or crucifixion or other forms of torture. Penalties for countries identified as engaging in these behaviors would be immediate sanctions and other punitive measures, as defined in Section 7 of the bill. With few waivers, countries determined to be engaged in religious persecution would be subject to prohibition of exports. No U.S. assistance would be provided and the U.S. would seek to deny multilateral assistance from the International Monetary Fund or other development funds. And persecution-facilitating products would be prohibited from being exported to countries found to have committed religious persecution.



FAITH MCDONNELL

Michael Horowitz at rally

I wrote to Mission Boards encouraging them to speak out, and I started to get responses. I believed it was a leadership issue and people could begin to care. If all you do is ask people to pray, there becomes a compassion fatigue. I told them they had to obtain meaningful achievable goals.”

– Michael Horowitz, advocate

1997 H.R. 2431 Introduced

Rep. Frank R. Wolf introduces revised version of “Freedom from Religious Persecution Act of 1997” on September 8

“It would be helpful if we can continue to work together to make sure that messages do not sound partisan and are based on principle. The worst thing that can happen to religious liberty is for people to think that it is not for everyone.”

– Melissa Rogers, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

The Wolf-Specter bill also would expand U.S. immigration policy, proposing that, “any alien who can credibly claim membership in a persecuted community found to be subject to...religious persecution... shall be considered to have a credible fear of persecution.” Critics argued that such broad language could lead to a spike in the number of refugees who would qualify for being admitted to the U.S., as individuals who were merely a member of a persecuted group (though not persecuted themselves) would be eligible for entry into the U.S.

As originally written, the Office of Religious Persecution Monitoring outlined in the Wolf-Specter bill would be created within the Executive Office of the President, who would appoint a Director who would need Senate confirmation. As described, the Director was to have broad responsibilities and authority, including determining the countries that had engaged in religious persecution, the responsible entities within those countries, and designating sanctions. The bill included provisions for robust annual reporting on countries or regions engaged in religious persecution, and also called for training of immigration officers on religious persecution, as well as chiefs of mission on religious freedom. Finally, an entire section of the bill was dedicated to sanctions specifically aimed at Sudan — a section that ultimately would be removed.

Secretary of State’s Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad

As the Wolf-Specter bill was taking shape in the House, the Department of State was carving out its own position in the religious freedom conversation. After months of intense planning and in close coordination with the White House and the National Security Council, the Secretary of State’s Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad convened its first meeting on February 13, 1997.

Assistant Secretary of State John Shattuck chaired the Advisory

IRFA AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Committee, which included 20 leaders and scholars of the world's major religious traditions and was charged with collecting and assessing information on global persecution and the promotion of religious freedom. The Advisory Committee was assigned two principal tasks:

1. Call attention to problems of religious persecution and other violations of religious freedom and religious intolerance abroad and advise on how to end them; and
2. Provide information on how to bring about reconciliation in areas of conflict (especially conflicts where religion is a factor) and promote respect for human rights so that religious freedom could be fully enjoyed.



ALEXANDRA ARRIAGA

Members of the Advisory Committee
on Religious Freedom Abroad

Diplomacy would be the Advisory Committee's watchword. Yet in his remarks at the committee's opening session, Shattuck offered a broad approach, saying, "We use both quiet diplomacy and public condemnation. We engage in frequent, bilateral dialogue with other countries on these issues. We conduct monitoring and intervention in the cases of individuals who are victims of specific forms of persecution."

It was an open secret that the State Department was not keen on having Congress impose religious freedom mandates and policies on its agenda. The proposed Wolf-Specter bill was met with particular aggravation, perceived by many within the Department and the Administration as Congress encroaching on its turf. For that reason, skeptics viewed the Advisory Committee, and the State Department's subsequent creation of the Office of International Religious Freedom, as a smoke-and-mirrors tactic meant to get in front of legislation that would, in their view, impose unwanted policies and demands on the Department.

IRFA AND THE LEGSLATIVE PROCESS

Undeterred, the Advisory Committee pressed forward with its task. It would produce two lengthy reports during its tenure, the first of which was an Interim Report issued in January 1998, months before the International Religious Freedom Act would be passed and signed into law. The Interim Report offered several recommendations to promote freedom of religion and belief as a priority objective of U.S. foreign policy, including the creation of the new IRF office.

Once the State Department had set up a dedicated religious freedom office, the focus became how best to structure it. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright assigned that task to the Advisory Committee's executive director, Alexandra Arriaga. Arriaga tapped the president of World Vision, U.S., Dr. Robert Seiple, to head the new office as Senior Advisor for International Religious Freedom. Seiple would have dotted-line accountability to the Secretary of State. Thomas Farr later would serve as the founding Director.

In addition to the IRF Office, the Advisory Committee made several other recommendations in its Interim Report of 1998, which were then incorporated into the broader IRFA deliberations on Capitol Hill. It was suggested, for example, that the State Department routinely raise cases of individuals imprisoned for their religious beliefs. Human rights training for Foreign Service Officers was encouraged, as was more robust reporting of religious freedom conditions by U.S. embassies and the State Department as part of its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.



SCOTT J. FERRELL/CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY

Sen. Don Nickles (R-OK)

The International Religious Freedom Act

Even as H.R. 2431 was winding its way through multiple committees in the House, and the Advisory Committee was collecting information for its assessment and recommendations, a handful of elected officials and staffers on the Senate side were considering different language and, indeed, a different strategy.

1998 S. 1868 Introduced

Sen. Don Nickles introduces International Religious Freedom Act on March 26

1998 H.R. 2431 Passes House

House passes H.R. 2431 with the Brady amendment on May 14

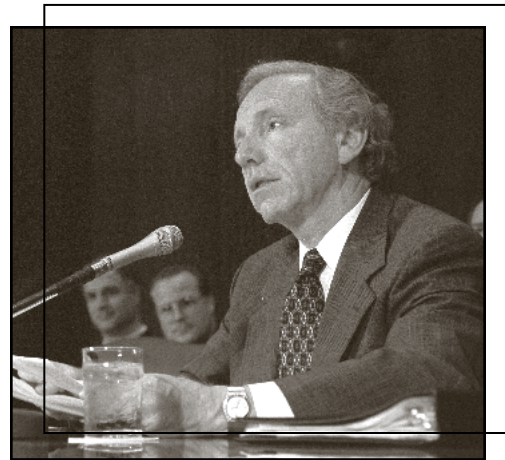
IRFA AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

John Hanford, who had specialized in religious freedom issues for decades as a staffer with Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), was the chief architect of S. 1868, which was introduced by Senator Don Nickles and Senator Joseph Lieberman on March 26, 1998. Unlike the Wolf-Specter bill, which placed heavy emphasis on defending against egregious persecution through punitive measures, the thrust of the Senate bill was the promotion and protection of religious freedom through calibrated diplomacy. To the casual observer, the difference was subtle, but for the stakeholders who would debate the two strategies, the distinction was great.

While the House and the Senate bills shared some similar provisions, namely institutionalized reporting, a mandated annual review, and training for foreign service and immigration officials, the Senate bill introduced some important distinctions. Titled the International Religious Freedom Act, S. 1868 listed three chief aims:

1. To express U.S. foreign policy with respect to, and to strengthen U.S. advocacy on behalf of, individuals persecuted for their faith worldwide;
2. To authorize U.S. actions in response to religious persecution worldwide; and
3. To establish an Ambassador-at-Large on International Religious Freedom within the Department of State, a Commission on International Religious Persecution, and a Special Advisor on International Religious Freedom within the National Security Council.

While arguably every member of Congress was prepared to back legislation in support of religious freedom, many on the Hill were not convinced about the more assertive approach outlined in the Wolf-Specter bill. Critics described the proposed sanctions scheme as a draconian, “one size fits all” solution that left little room for promoting positive and lasting change. Instead of automatic sanctions, S. 1868 would put at the President’s fingertips a graduating (and discretionary) range of actions and sanctions to use against countries identified as engaging in or tolerating religious persecution.



SCOTT J. FERRELL/CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY

Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-CT)

“In writing IRFA, we were interested in accomplishing three strategic goals. We wanted to anchor religious freedom promotion within international legal standards of religious freedom, as well as the broader framework of human liberty; embed it within the U.S. national security infrastructure; and then integrate it into America’s overall national security strategy and policy.”

– Dr. William Inboden, former congressional staffer involved in drafting IRFA language

Another concern some raised about the Wolf-Specter bill was its granting of power and decision-making authority to a mid-level White House official who could, in effect, supersede higher-level foreign policy decisions. Instead of a director-level position within the Executive Office, S. 1868 recommended the creation of an Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to advise

the President and the Secretary of State on matters of religious freedom abroad. The bill also called for the creation of a bipartisan, independent commission to “consider the facts and circumstances of religious persecution” and “make appropriate policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress.”

Finally, some definitions included in S. 1868 differed from those in the Wolf-Specter bill. Whereas Wolf-Specter defined religious persecution as “widespread and ongoing persecution of persons because of their membership in or affiliation with a religion or religious denomination,” S. 1868 harkened back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and defined religious persecution as “any violation of the internationally recognized right to freedom of religion” from its Article 18. Proponents believed that this more exacting definition offered a lower threshold for classifying offenders.

Some believed that if religious freedom were fortified abroad, fewer people would have cause to seek safe haven in the U.S. from religious persecution.

One Hundred Fifth Congress of the United States of America

AT THE SECOND SESSION

*Begun and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday,
the twenty-seventh day of January, one thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight*

An Act

To express United States foreign policy with respect to, and to strengthen United States advocacy on behalf of, individuals persecuted in foreign countries on account of religion; to authorize United States actions in response to violations of religious freedom in foreign countries; to establish an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom within the Department of State, a Commission on International Religious Freedom, and a Special Adviser on International Religious Freedom within the National Security Council; and for other purposes.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of
the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the “International Religious Freedom Act of 1998”.

H.R. 2431 VERSUS S. 1868

WOLF-SPECTER (H.R. 2431)	NICKLES-LIEBERMAN (S. 1868)
<p>Freedom from Religious Persecution Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on stopping persecution 	<p>International Religious Freedom Act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasis on promoting religious freedom
<p>Office of Persecution Monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housed within the <i>Executive Office</i> Headed by a <i>Director</i>, appointed by the President with consent of the Senate 	<p>Office of International Religious Freedom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housed within the <i>Department of State</i> Headed by the <i>Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom</i>, appointed by the President with consent of the Senate
<p>Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Annual Report to Congress</i> – generated by the Director 	<p>Reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Annual Report on Religious Persecution</i> submitted to Congress – generated by the Ambassador-at-Large
<p>Sanctions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Automatic sanctions imposed against countries found to be involved in religious persecution Director determines when and against whom sanctions apply President may waive sanctions with explanation 	<p>Sanctions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Range of actions available to the President in response to countries found to be involved in religious persecution Decisions informed by Annual Report on Religious Persecution and in consultation with the Ambassador-at-Large
<p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training on religious persecution for immigration officers and foreign service Chiefs of Mission 	<p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training on religious freedom for foreign service officers
<p>Religious Persecution Definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad definition Applies to membership in or affiliation with a religion or religious group 	<p>Religious Persecution Definition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrow definition Aligned with UDHR Article 18
<p>Immigration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modifies existing U.S. Immigration policy 	<p>Commission on International Religious Persecution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-partisan, independent commission Tasked with policy review and recommendations in response to religious persecution
<p>Sanctions against Sudan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive definitions and actions in response to specific religious persecution activity in Sudan 	<p>National Security Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointment of a Special Advisor on Religious Persecution within the National Security Council

In the Trenches

As any serious student of civics can attest, the legislative process is rarely simple or straightforward. Often it is a messy conglomeration of debate, argument, negotiation, compromise, and the occasional slight of hand. Passage of the IRFA legislation was no exception.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

President Clinton signs the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) into law in 1993

From the start, the Wolf-Specter bill met with stiff resistance and criticism on several fronts: the Clinton administration and the State Department, business and trade groups, even the National Council of Churches bristled at the scope and nature of the bill. Among the primary complaints: the bill was creating a hierarchy of human rights; it created the appearance of favoring Christians over other religious groups; and the prescribed penalties would do more harm than good.

From an institutional standpoint, resistance from the White House was to be expected, as most administrations do not like to be told how to structure their federal agencies. More important, the culture at the State Department for decades had been rooted in secularization theory, which held that as the world became more modern it would also become more secular, and religion would play a lesser role. That theory started to give way during the Clinton administration, which was also the era of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) domestically, which President Clinton signed into law. By the late 1990s, world events at that time underscored the certainty that religion was a growing force in the world, and by extension, religion needed to play an important role in U.S. foreign policy.

Still, there was concern that codifying religious freedom abroad — whether as prescribed by Wolf-Specter or Nickles-Lieberman — would lead to an artificial hierarchy of human rights. In testimony before

the House International Relations Committee, Assistant Secretary of State John Shattuck argued that the creation of a hierarchy that set religious freedom above other rights would severely undermine the long-standing U.S. policy of ensuring that all human rights are equally protected.

In the end, the State Department concluded that legislation was inevitable, but its best version would focus on international religious freedom in the broader context of human rights and not take the form of a blunt instrument. On the issue of sanctions, the diplomatic ranks wanted more than a single tool in the toolbox.

Certain religious groups, including the National Council of Churches and groups who had done missionary work abroad, shared this view. They were concerned that immediate and wholesale sanctions could put persecuted people at even greater risk. They feared penalized states would blame persecuted communities, thus ratcheting up violence against the very groups the legislation was designed to aid. This contingent warned of the need to consult with people on the ground to discern what measures made sense for protecting the persecuted and for bringing about changes.

Concerns about sanctions also factored heavily in the opposition to Wolf-Specter from the business and pro-trade corner. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and trade groups like USA Engage were particularly resistant to the bill's provisions that prohibited the export of items perceived as facilitating persecution. The bill was seen as an attempt at "trade sanctions." As argued by Robert P. O'Quinn, policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation, the bill's sanctions "could undermine U.S. security, harm the U.S. economy, and needlessly constrain the economic freedom of Americans — and, in the process, be of little if any effect in advancing religious liberty abroad." This faction also firmly opposed the section of Wolf-Specter that was dedicated to sanctions against Sudan.

"Frank Wolf led the fight in a very principled way. And alongside him were really quite an array of liberals, conservatives, and moderates because religious freedom really touches a nerve that goes beyond political ideology."

– Former Senator Joseph Lieberman



SCOTT J. FERRELL/CONGRESSIONAL QUARTERLY

Rep. Kevin Brady (R-TX)

Proponents of Wolf-Specter pushed back at critics. They argued that strong and immediate sanctions and withdrawal of non-humanitarian assistance were the teeth of the bill — the assurance for holding accountable those nations guilty of egregious religious persecution. If left to State Department reporting and the President’s discretion, many in the Wolf-Specter camp believed the sanctions trigger would rarely, if ever, be pulled and persecution would continue.

The concern was not without merit. In what was thought to be an off-the-record comment at a private meeting with evangelical leaders, President Clinton suggested that the Wolf-Specter bill would cause State Department officials to “fudge the facts” when reporting about religious persecution to avoid conflicts with other diplomatic efforts. The remark contributed to suspicions about the administration’s commitment to religious freedom and the integrity of its reporting apparatus.

While the Advisory Committee continued its efforts and H.R. 2431 slowly moved its way through committee hearings and markups, the authors of the competing S. 1868 conducted their own quiet lobbying.

By May 1998, several revisions had been made to Wolf-Specter, and on May 14, the bill went before the full House for consideration. During the course of debate, three amendments were proposed and approved. H. Amdt.630, offered by Representative Kevin Brady (R-TX), would establish, among other provisions, a five-member U.S. Commission on International Religious Persecution. Creation of the Commission was meant to address concerns about accountability within the administration as to the implementation of sanctions and monitoring of sanctions effectiveness. The Brady amendment also would establish a published list of religious prisoners and provide for the creation of a religious freedom Internet site and expanded international broadcasting.

A second amendment, H. Amdt.631, offered by Representative Alcee Hastings (D-FL), would expand the responsibilities of the Director of the Office of Religious Persecution Monitoring. Specifically, the amendment

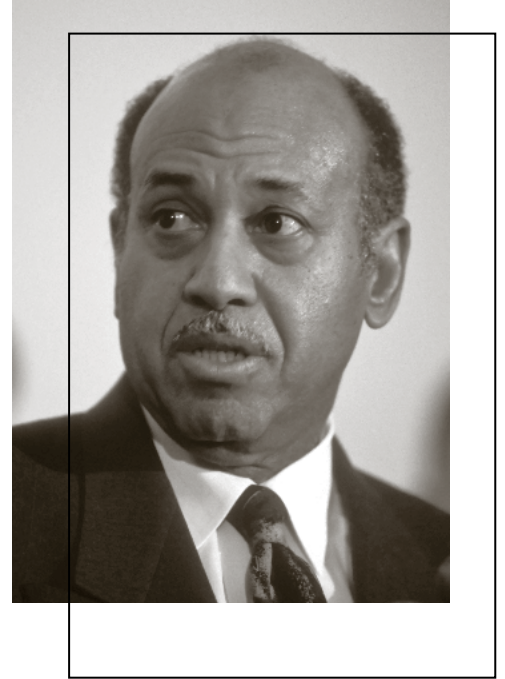
IRFA AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

would permit the Director, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to make policy recommendations to the President for prioritizing the promotion and development of legal and cultural protections of religious freedom in U.S. development programs, cultural and educational exchanges, and international broadcasting programs. The Hastings amendment also called for the creation of an awards program for meritorious service by foreign service officers in the promotion of human rights, including the right to religious freedom.

Finally, H. Amdt.632, offered by Representative Tom Campbell (R-CA), would revise a key aspect of the bill's section on Sudan. In a nod to business and trade concerns, the Campbell amendment would permit the president to waive any of the sanctions against the government of Sudan included in the bill if it was determined that the national security interest of the U.S. justified such a waiver.

After months of hearings, debates, revisions and amendments, the House passed H.R. 2431 by a vote of 375 to 41. The final bill would establish a Director of the Office of Religious Persecution Monitoring within the State Department. Among other things, the Director would be responsible for monitoring religious persecution and issuing an annual report assessing religious persecution abroad. The legislation would prohibit aid to states that carry out persecution and would prohibit export of goods likely to be used to continue persecution.

H.R. 2431 was sent over to the Senate where it would receive a fourth and final amendment five months later.



RICHARD ELLIS / ALAMY

Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL)



Getting to the Vote

It has been said that legislation will never be perfect, and it will almost always involve compromise. The IRFA legislation underscores this maxim.

The companion bill to H.R. 2431 (S. 772 introduced by Senator Arlen Specter) never moved in the Senate. It was read twice and referred to committee where it was left to die. The Nickles-Lieberman bill, on the other hand, quickly gained traction. There was a distinct rivalry between the Wolf-Specter and Nickles-Lieberman camps: while they shared a common goal, they each had different strategies and exhibited little cooperation during the hashing out of details. Instead of cooperation and concession, there was rancor and resentment.



JASON REED, REUTERS

Sen. Dan Coats (R-IN)

In October 1998, with just days remaining in the 105th Congress, the Senate finally took up H.R. 2431. There would be no time for normal procedures of debate between the Senate and the House before the close of session. In a stunning move, Senator Nickles introduced an amendment to H.R. 2431 in the nature of a substitute — [SP. 3789](#) would, in essence, replace H.R. 2431 in its entirety with S. 1868, the Nickles-Lieberman bill. On October 9, the Senate approved the substitute 98-0.

Many believed that, despite the unanimous vote to approve, with no last-minute opportunity to

1998 S. Amdt.3789 Passes Senate

On October 8, Sen. Nickles amends H.R. 2431, substituting the language of S. 1868 for H.R. 2431. Senate passed the amended bill 98-0

IRFA AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

conference between the House and Senate, the religious freedom legislation was dead. But after the Senate bill's passage, Senator Dan Coats picked up the phone and called Representative Wolf. There were just two options left: Wolf could accept the Senate substitute for his own, hard-fought version, or he could let the legislation die all together.

"I had this decision," says Wolf, looking back. "Do I take 40 percent of a loaf? I knew opposition to religious freedom legislation was building and if they killed it then, it would never pass. I took the 40 percent loaf."

And so, on October 10, 1998, the House suspended the rules, agreed to the Senate substitute, and passed it without objection. The bill then was sent to President Clinton for his signature. On October 27, without fanfare or an official signing ceremony, the President signed the bill, and the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 became Public Law 105-292.

Surely, many hands contributed to the passage of IRFA, though many would argue it was the trailblazer Frank Wolf who got the job done in the end. However flawed or incomplete the legislation may be, that IRFA passed unanimously in both the House and Senate is a powerful testament to the deep convictions many members of Congress hold about religious freedom, the first freedom.

"Promoting religious freedom is a tough thing to do...we don't know how bad things would be now if we didn't have [IRFA], but I think it's clearly an uphill battle. I think what we're seeing in the world is that democratization is not proceeding. Authoritarianism is on the rise. Human rights are not being respected, much less guaranteed in most of the world, and that includes religious freedom."

- Clifford May, former USCIRF Commissioner



CLIFFORD MAY

1998 Amended H.R. 2431 Passes House

House passes Senate version of H.R. 2431 under consent calendar on October 10

1998 IRFA Signed into Law

President Clinton signs IRFA into law on October 27

“I tremble to think where we would be without IRFA, without USCIRF, without an Ambassador-at-Large...it really would have just disappeared into the landscape.”

– Katrina Lantos Swett, former USCIRF Commissioner



USCIRF

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 established the framework to elevate religious freedom as a priority within U.S. foreign policy. Key features included:

Department of State Activities:

- Creation of the Office on International Religious Freedom
- Creation of the position of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom
- Annual reporting — to include “countries of particular concern” or CPC designations
- Establishment of a religious freedom Internet site
- Training for foreign service officers

Creation of the independent, bipartisan U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom (USCIRF)

National Security Council

- Creation of a Special Advisor on International Religious Freedom

Presidential Actions

- Targeted responses to violations of religious freedom abroad
- Strengthening of existing law

Promotion of Religious Freedom – through development assistance and international broadcasting, international exchanges and foreign-service awards

Reform of refugee, asylum, and consular matters

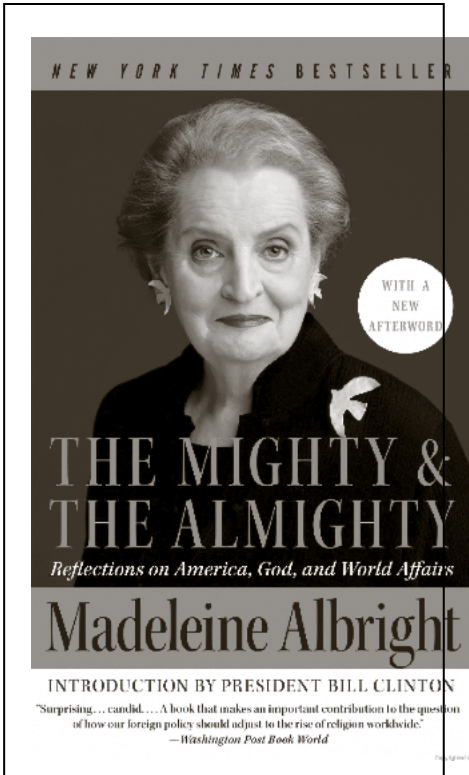
P.L. 105-292

In passing the International Religious Freedom Act, Congress provided the President with a range of discretionary actions, including sanctions, for dealing with countries identified as engaging in or tolerating religious persecution. The law also authorizes the President to take commensurate actions and make binding agreements, as well as grant waivers if they would further the purposes of the Act or are in the national interest of the United States.

An abridged list of available actions includes:

1. A private demarche
2. An official public demarche
3. A public condemnation
4. A public condemnation within one or more multilateral fora
5. The delay or cancellation of one or more scientific exchanges
6. The delay or cancellation of one or more cultural exchanges
7. The denial of one or more working, official, or state visits
8. The delay or cancellation of one or more working, official, or state visits
9. The withdrawal, limitation, or suspension of U.S. development assistance in accordance with the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961
10. Directing the Export-Import Bank of the United States and overseas development banks not to approve the issuance of guarantees, insurance, extensions of credit, or participations in the extension of credit with respect to the specific government, agency, instrumentality, or official found or determined by the President to be responsible for violations
11. The withdrawal, limitation, or suspension of U.S. security assistance in accordance with the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961
12. Directing the U.S. executive directors of international financial institutions to oppose and vote against loans primarily benefiting the specific foreign government, agency, instrumentality, or official found or determined by the President to be responsible for violations
13. Ordering the heads of the appropriate U.S. agencies not to issue specific licenses, and not to grant any other specific authority, to export any goods or technology to the specific foreign government, agency, instrumentality, or official found or determined by the President to be responsible for violations
14. Prohibiting any U.S. financial institution from making loans or providing credits totaling more than \$10 million in any 12-month period to the specific foreign government, agency, instrumentality, or official found or determined by the President to be responsible for violations
15. Prohibiting the U.S. government from procuring, or entering into any contract for the procurement of, any goods or services from the foreign government, entities, or officials found or determined by the President to be responsible for violations

IRFA IN THE FIRST DECADE



HARPERCOLLINS

Once IRFA passed and was signed into law, the task shifted to implementing its provisions by creating, within the existing foreign policy apparatus, a religious freedom infrastructure with designated functions and activities. From a practical standpoint, these actions would include sorting out personnel and operations details, recalibrating reporting structures, and establishing new processes and procedures. On a theoretical level, it would require an adjustment in thinking — a heavy lift by some accounts, including that of the Secretary of State’s.

In her 2006 book, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs*, Madeleine Albright reflected on the worldview shared by many within the diplomatic corps about religion and its place in foreign policy during the transitional, post-IRFA era at the State Department: “Religion...was above and beyond reason; it evoked the deepest passions; and historically, it was the cause of much bloodshed. Diplomats in my era were taught not to invite trouble, and no subject seemed more inherently treacherous than religion.”

Indeed, for decades the State Department had been steeped in a tradition undergirded by secularization theory and the belief that, in the march toward enlightenment and modernity, religion had lost much of its social and cultural significance. Thomas F. Farr, who would become the first-ever Director of the Office on International Religious Freedom, described the foreign policy establishment at the time as having a reticence “about addressing the religious factors in other cultures and indeed in seeing culture as an expression of religion at all.” IRFA represented a sea change, one that was both applauded and resisted.

As intended, IRFA demanded that religion be taken seriously, not merely on the margins of foreign policy, but in a fully integrated, whole-of-government approach. As applied, it would take many years and several administrations before the implementation of the law would begin to approach its original intent.

IRFA also established the Office of International Religious Freedom within the State Department, to be headed by the Ambassador-at-Large

1999

Clinton Administration

Robert A. Seiple

Sworn in as first-ever Ambassador-at-Large for International religious freedom, May 5

IRFA IN THE FIRST DECADE

for International Religious Freedom. By the time IRFA was enacted, a precursor to the IRF office already had been formed via the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee. As noted, Thomas Farr was tapped to be director of that office, and Dr. Robert Seiple, the former president of World Vision, became the first-ever IRF Ambassador.

The law clearly stipulated that the Ambassador was to have autonomy within the constructs of the State Department, direct access to the Secretary of State, and was to serve as a principal advisor to the President and Secretary on matters of religious freedom abroad. From the start, these authorities were clipped. The IRF office, with its small budget and negligible staff, was relegated to, what some have wryly referred to as, a broom closet within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. A clear line to the Secretary was never firmly established during either the Clinton or the George W. Bush administrations. Instead of reporting directly to the Secretary of State, Ambassador Seiple reported to the assistant secretary, as did Seiple's successor, John Hanford, for the better part of his tenure.



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM INSTITUTE

Dr. Thomas Farr was the founding Director of the Office on International Religious Freedom

Such attitudes within the State Department, upon the arrival of the IRF Ambassador and the IRFA mandate, reinforced criticisms about the Department that had prompted the enactment of IRFA in the first place. Early IRFA advocates believed the Department did not give proper attention to religious freedom and religious persecution issues. The new law was meant to remedy what was perceived as a lack of interest in or concern for these matters. Drafters of the legislation included what they believed would be an important safety net, a watchdog to ensure that IRFA would not be buried and silenced beneath the bureaucracy of the State Department. That assurance came in the form of an independent commission — the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).



1999
Clinton Administration

USCIRF convenes inaugural meeting,

June 23 USCIRF Commissioners 1999-2000
Rabbi David Saperstein (Chair); Michael K. Young (Vice Chair);
The Honorable Elliot Abrams; Leila Al-Marayati, M.D.; The Honorable
John R. Bolton; Firuz Kazemzadeh; Cardinal Theodore McCarrick; Nina
Shea; Charles Z. Smith; Ambassador Robert A. Seiple (*Ex-Officio*
Member)

VOICES

PRACTICAL MATTERS

Before the important work of the new commission could begin, a few practical matters required attention. Elliott Abrams, who was one of the original USCIRF Commissioners, reflected on setting up operations for the brand new entity:

“You’ve got a Congressional bill creating a commission, right? It’s law. Now what? You want space for an office. You want to hire a staff. The legislation permits this, but none of us knew how to do it. So there we were, and one of us said, ‘I’ve got an office. There’s a conference table. Why doesn’t everybody come over?’ So the first meetings of the Commission were held around that conference table with a speaker phone in the middle of the table.”



ROBERT CLAY / ALAMY

Former USCIRF Commissioner Elliott Abrams

1999
Clinton Administration

Rabbi David Saperstein
Elected first-ever Chair of USCIRF, June 23

1999
Clinton Administration

U.S. Dept. of State issues first Annual Report on International Religious Freedom
September

USCIRF would be comprised of nine members, three appointed by the President and six appointed by the House and Senate leadership. The IRF Ambassador, though originally intended as a full member, would serve *ex officio* as a nonvoting member of the Commission. The general role of what was meant to be a temporary commission was to review the State Department's human rights report — the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom and its Executive Summary — and make policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State and Congress on international religious freedom. Critics, however, saw USCIRF as an unnecessary and unwanted watchdog agency that would add another layer of complexity to an already difficult topic while depleting scarce resources.

Both USCIRF and the State Department office, for example, were required to prepare annual reports, with USCIRF, unlike the State Department, mandated to make recommendations for U.S. policy — in addition to the human rights report the State Department already issued each year. Though cumbersome, the annual reporting process with the State Department's designation of countries of particular concern (CPCs) would prove to be a powerful tool for holding bad actors accountable and elevating the plight of the persecuted. It would also fuel the ongoing internal debate as to the best strategy for promoting and securing religious freedom abroad: carrots (quiet diplomacy) versus sticks (naming and shaming).

As anticipated, USCIRF and the IRF office did not always arrive at the same conclusions. Nor were they uniformly confident about each other's motives. As each worked to carve out and identify its role within the IRFA mandate, a certain level of tension emerged between the Commission and the IRF office that, by some accounts, persists two decades later, albeit to a lesser degree. That tension contributed to an underlying disconnect between the IRF office and the very department (the State Department) largely responsible for crafting and deploying U.S. foreign policy.

“I think it takes watchdogs to just make sure we keep raising our voices. If we relax for a few minutes, it’s gone and we have to work again really hard to get it back.”

– Faith McDonnell, religious freedom advocate

“Most nations don’t want bad publicity. More often than not, a very public naming of governments and non-government entities is the right strategy, but in any particular case, you have to exercise judgment. And you are not always going to get that right. There are times when we hit too hard, but sometimes the opposite is true.”

– Dr. Robert P. George, former USCIRF Chairman

2000

Clinton Administration

USCIRF issues first annual report

May 1

VOICES

SEA CHANGE

The **Country of Particular Concern**, or CPC designation, was an IRFA linchpin. Henceforth, countries found to be engaged in religious persecution would be identified as CPCs and subject to an array of punitive actions by the United States. In the beginning, the State Department would have preferred to ignore the CPC label — it was confrontational, and it complicated diplomacy. Ambassador Robert A. Seiple tells the story of changing hearts and minds, beginning with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright:



PEWFORUM.ORG

Former Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom
Bob Seiple

“A real turning point for the legislation came at the end of the first year in 1999, when we wanted to designate China as a CPC. Nobody wanted to touch this, including Secretary Albright.”

Ambassador Seiple had visited many of the countries identified as candidates for CPC designation. On the ground in China, he observed the regime’s abuses first hand and quickly concluded that Chinese officials had little interest in changing their own policies. The problem was, the Clinton administration had invested considerable energy in cultivating a relationship with China. A CPC designation would be detrimental to that effort. All the same, Seiple pressed the matter with Albright.

“She felt she was being pressured by me.” So Seiple pulled back while Albright traveled to Asia, but a seed had been planted. “She went off to a conference with Asian counterparts, and the Chinese insulted her. She came back and decided to go through with the CPC designation. When that was announced, folks on the Hill were amazed and our office gained a great deal of credibility.”

Seiple would plant more seeds in his two-year tenure as Ambassador. Some would take root more quickly than others. He believes a willingness to listen and respect, not merely tolerate, remains a worthy aim: “Toleration is for someone we don’t care for. Respect is a much better platform to grab onto.”

VOICES

REPORT OR LIFELINE?

The State Department's annual Religious Freedom report (which is informed in part by USCIRF's annual report) has become a diplomacy mainstay.

Rabbi David Saperstein, who served as the first-ever USCIRF Chairman and later as IRF Ambassador, describes the report's influence:

"This report has had a powerful impact on countries across the globe. First, there is an impact on minority communities facing discrimination or harassment, who really didn't think anyone in the world knew or cared about them and feel supported and encouraged that their story is being told. Second, is the impact on the State Department because every embassy now has a political officer or researcher who tracks religious issues that might otherwise be ignored or missed, thus building relations between the embassy and oppressed communities. And third, other countries are using our report as a template for their own diplomacy."

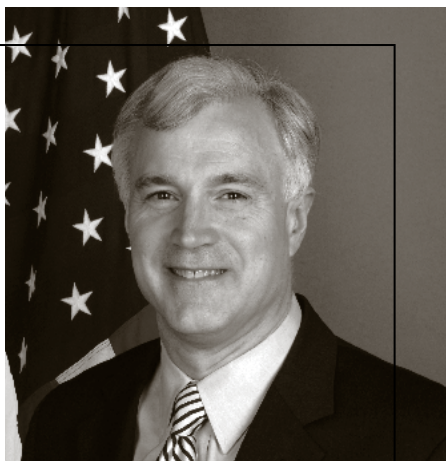
Traveling as a USCIRF commissioner, Saperstein met with many disenfranchised people who often expressed a sense of abandonment by the international community. But when the United States began collecting religious data, suddenly those people felt connected. For many, the report is their lifeline. Embassy staff are engaged with the minority religious communities, they ask what is going on, what the needs are and how the embassy might help. One respondent told Saperstein, "We never had anyone like that before, and now when we run into problems there's somebody in the embassy that we're able to talk to. That means an awful lot to us to have someone we know is going to be sensitive to our concerns and advocate for us."



USCIRF

Ambassador David Saperstein and Elliott Abrams when they were USCIRF Commissioners (Commissioner Nina Shea in background).

IRFA IN THE FIRST DECADE



USCIRF

“Some people take the approach that if we just yell and scream enough, religious persecution problems will be solved. I’ve rarely seen this approach work. Patterns of religious persecution are usually deeply entrenched in a nation’s culture, history, and politics...the goal must be to advance freedom, and that often happens only after extensive efforts to build relationships and persuade foreign officials to adopt a change in mindset and policy.”

– John Hanford, former Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom

Despite early wrangling over form and function, however, the Commission and the IRF office made important headway using their newfound tools to inject religious freedom into the foreign policy conversation at the State Department. Ambassadors Seiple and Hanford used the CPC designation and accountability measures provided by IRFA to begin chipping away at abuses in places like China, Vietnam, Laos, Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia, even as they set about changing hearts and minds at the State Department. Of course, the challenge then and now is the nature of diplomacy — often the successes and measures taken behind the scenes remain quietly tucked away, lest overt attention to the process undermine incremental movement forward.

The changes made in those early years were particularly noteworthy considering the electoral events at home that would usher in a new administration, and the devastating geopolitical events that would follow. Within IRFA’s first five years, as officials wrestled with the details of implementation, America was blindsided by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and involved in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. U.S. foreign policy was forever altered, and national security became a paramount concern. Like it or not, factoring religious freedom into the calculus would take on greater urgency for the nation’s top diplomats. Yet, there was still resistance.

When terrorists flew airplanes into the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and an open field in Pennsylvania in September 2001, it is notable that the U.S. had no sitting Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. Ambassador Seiple had stepped down a year prior, and though President Bush had been in office since January, he had not yet nominated a replacement. Indeed, it would be another eight months, May 2002, before John Hanford was sworn in as the second IRF Ambassador.

During the Bush administration, elevating the religious freedom mandate within the State Department remained a challenge, with some IRF officials reporting that they felt quarantined from the broader policy discussions. Even so, Ambassador Hanford succeeded in growing the IRF staff, increasing the IRF budget, and most significantly securing a much-needed direct line of report to the Secretary of State. President Bush himself demonstrated a fundamental interest in promoting international religious freedom. On more than one occasion he welcomed Chinese dissidents

2001

Bush Administration

9/11 Terrorist attacks

2002

Bush Administration

John V. Hanford III

Sworn in as second Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, May 2

IRFA IN THE FIRST DECADE

to the White House, for example, and in 2004 he approved a CPC designation for Saudi Arabia, a controversial decision that reinforced the credibility of IRFA. Likewise, his 2006 National Security Strategy included robust language in support of religious freedom.

Indeed, President Bush inspired a new wave of homegrown activism in the public square. After IRFA was signed into law, many of the original advocates moved on to other issues and causes like human trafficking. Interest in religious freedom as a movement began to wane just when consistent involvement was needed most. Following the 2000 election, a newfound enthusiasm arose as many faith-based communities and civil society organizations mobilized grassroots efforts to fight injustice in places like Sudan, China, North Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East. The epicenter for much of this activity was Bush's hometown of Midland, Texas.

As the first 10 years of IRFA came to a close, the Ambassador, the IRF office, and USCIRF had found their footing on a practical level. Personnel and fiscal details had been sorted out; processes and procedures were in place; even the early confusion attached to the reporting mandates had been largely resolved. Likewise, the Commission and IRF office had found a delicate rhythm, and the Ambassador had created some traction within the State Department. The annual religious freedom reporting provided by USCIRF and the IRF office was entrenched and viewed by many as the most important (albeit imperfect) legacy to date of the IRFA mandate.

The next decade would bring a new set of challenges and victories for IRFA — two new administrations, the spread of violent extremism and subsequent humanitarian crises, extended vacancies within the Ambassador's office, funding and reauthorization battles for USCIRF, new tools, and a new law that strengthened and updated IRFA. Still, the need remained for an attitude adjustment to realize a whole-of-government approach and meaningful integration of religious freedom into the U.S. foreign policy apparatus.

“Our ‘enemy’ at Foggy Bottom...was not so much hostility to our mission as indifference to, or confusion about, the policy value of religious freedom.”

– Thomas F. Farr writing in *World of Faith and Freedom*



USCIRF

USCIRF Commissioners Nina Shea, Elizabeth Prodromou, Dr. Preeta Bansal and Michael Cromartie with Rebiya Kadeer, political activist for the Uyghurs at a 2005 press conference

2002

Bush Administration

Sudan Peace Act Signed into Law

October

2008

Bush Administration

Tom Lantos Human Rights

Commission established, September 24

VOICES

MIGHTY MIDLAND

In the heart of the dry and dusty West Texas oil fields rests the city of Midland. For most outsiders, Midland is best known as the childhood home of former President George W. Bush and former First Lady Laura Bush. At the turn of the millennium, however, the quiet, industrious town halfway between Fort Worth and El Paso set off a firestorm of activism. Deborah Fikes was the unassuming teacher, wife and mother who lit the spark.

After Bush was elected president, he made frequent references to Midland. "If you really want to understand me," he would tell reporters. "Go back to my roots." And they did. Reporters flooded Midland, and Fikes recognized an opportunity: "Churches in Midland had one of the most unique opportunities to plug in at a high level, she says. "If they got involved, they would have the ear of the President and could make a difference."

For Fikes, the obvious issue was to elevate the plight of believers persecuted for their faith. For years she had been reading literature from the Voice of the Martyrs. She prayed and wrote letters to Congress on behalf of the persecuted but felt frustrated that she couldn't do more — until a Texas favorite son entered the White House. "I did not have a grand plan," says Fikes, who simply wanted to leverage the sudden media attention and newfound access to the President of the United States. "I wanted the pastors to raise the issue of the persecuted church and get their congregations involved."



FAITH MCDONNELL

At the signing into law of the Sudan Peace Act in 2002 are (left to right) Brad Phillips of Persecution Project Foundation, Faith McDonnell of IRD, James Tonkowich of BreakPoint, Deborah Fikes of Midland and President George W. Bush

She approached the Midland Ministerial Alliance (MMA), a loose network of area churches, to play host to the 2001 International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP). The flagship event drew more than 40 local

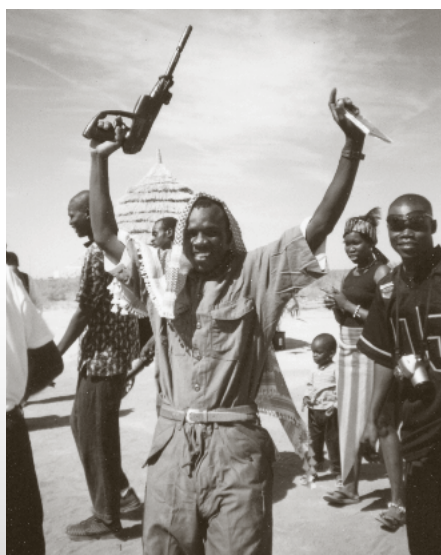
churches and hundreds of participants and got the attention of national leadership in Washington, D.C.

Midland became an epicenter for church mobilization — a practical response to religious persecution and civil rights abuses around the world. Its citizen ambassadors helped push the Sudan Peace Act through Congress in 2002, helped fund a center in Thailand for women and children at risk for sexual exploitation, and continue to support countless churches, schools and other projects in places like Sudan, North Korea, and China where persecution is extreme. Many ministries working on the frontlines of religious persecution have made Midland home base, including the China Aid Association and Watch and Pray International.

For 20 years, Midland's mighty faith community has rolled up its sleeves to combat religious persecution and influence U.S. foreign policy, not from the halls of Congress, but from the pews and the public square. As one observer noted about Midland, "God used a lot of normal people" to do extraordinary work. And as Deborah Fikes would earnestly note, this work has been important not just for Christians, but for all religious faiths and freedoms. As such, the arid oil-patch town of Midland has proven to be fertile ground for some of the most important and far-reaching applications of the policies and outreach inspired by the International Religious Freedom Act.



FAITH MCDONNELL



FAITH MCDONNELL

Above and right: (Midland 2001) Mock Sudan village hut and mock Sudan village simulation of armed attack



USCIRF

Reverend Suzan Johnson Cook,
Ambassador-at-Large for International
Religious Freedom

“When I took office, some Ambassadors told me that you get two or three deliverables. For me, it was bringing women, faith leaders and multinational NGOs to the table. Back then, international religious freedom was at the bottom of the list in terms of government priorities. Perhaps with the [2018] Ministerial, it can have new momentum.”

– Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook, former
Ambassador-at-Large for International
Religious Freedom

The second decade of IRFA began against a backdrop of profound international conflicts, many with religious underpinnings. In Nigeria, the terrorist group Boko Haram launched its bloody military campaign to create an Islamic state. Syria was on the verge of a civil war that would result in one of the worst humanitarian crises of the 21st century. Ancient Christian, Yazidi and Shia religious minorities would come to suffer genocidal targeting in Iraq. Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, conditions were ripening for a wave of demonstrations, riots, and civil wars that would come to be known as the Arab Spring. In the shadows, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist cells were conspiring. ISIS had not yet emerged.

In the United States, new administrations would impact the State Department and the IRF office, including extended vacancies in the office of the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom at a time when religious extremism and persecution around the world were both virulent and destabilizing. With President Barack Obama sworn into office in 2009, Ambassador John Hanford – who had served nearly seven years as the senior religious freedom diplomat for the U.S, departed. It would be a full 27 months before President Obama nominated, and Congress approved, a replacement, Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook. To critics, the lag in securing Ambassador Cook’s appointment was an indication that the administration did not prioritize IRF policy.

Despite energy and devotion for the job, Cook’s appointment was met with skepticism by some because her background included few foreign policy credentials and she was new to Washington. Prior to her nomination, she had been Associate Dean and Officer at Harvard University School of Divinity, founder and senior pastor of the Bronx Christian Fellowship Baptist Church in New York and founder of Wisdom Women Worldwide Center, a global organization for female faith leaders.

Although short on funds and staff, Cook worked to build on the contributions of her predecessors. Early on, she held listening meetings

2011
Obama Administration

Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook
Sworn in as Ambassador-at-Large
for International Religious Freedom, May 16

IRFA IN THE SECOND DECADE

and 12 to 14 roundtables monthly with various groups. From that effort, the Religious Leaders Roundtable was formed. Cook resigned her position after two years to return to the private sector.

It would be another nine months before the President nominated Rabbi David Saperstein, who had been named by *Newsweek* in 2009 as the most influential rabbi in America. Saperstein's impressive credentials and long-time involvement in religious freedom advocacy was widely respected. Besides serving as the first-ever Chair of USCIRF, he was director and counsel of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University Law Center. Congress confirmed his appointment in December 2014, and Saperstein was sworn in the following month as the fourth Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom.

Even as the administration made its adjustments, USCIRF was fielding its own personnel challenges as the new decade of IRFA began. By many accounts, the commissioners were not getting along. Some long-term members became entrenched in particular interests at the expense of other projects and priorities. In 2009, USCIRF was hit with a lawsuit from a former analyst alleging religious bias. And criticism was levied at the Commission for an overall lackluster performance. The rancor had many in Congress wondering if USCIRF had served its purpose and should be shut down.

In fact, as provided by IRFA, the Commission originally was authorized to exist for four years, with reauthorization at Congress' discretion. By 2011, some questioned the Commission's impact, and some Members of Congress sought to use reauthorization to try to achieve victories on unrelated issues. Reauthorization was in jeopardy. But many in the religious freedom community — legislators, advocates, and former commissioners — came to USCIRF's defense. After a fierce debate,



USCIRF

Former USCIRF Commissioners Clifford May, Dr. John Ruskay, Dr. Daniel Mark and Rev. Thomas Reese with Greg Mitchell, co-chair of the IRF Roundtable

2012

Obama Administration

Magnitsky Act

Signed into law, December 14

IRFA IN THE SECOND DECADE

“Our job is to defend religious freedom and any belief, right? I hope commissioners will stay focused on international religious freedom issues...and not mix our personal faith, belief systems with our work. That’s a tough one, but we need to remind ourselves about that.”

– USCIRF Chairman Dr. Tenzin Dorjee

Congress reauthorized USCIRF for an additional three years but trimmed the budget from \$4 million to \$3 million and imposed term limits on commissioners to bring in fresh ideas and perspectives.

Another challenging reauthorization debate ensued in 2015. While much of the confidence in USCIRF and its mission had been restored, the process was not smooth. At the end, Congress reauthorized the agency for four more years and even increased annual funding to \$3.5 million, but required the Commission to implement a new strategic planning process that would focus on areas including issue prioritization and changes in the Annual Report.

During the Obama administration, the Ambassador position again was quietly downgraded in terms of direct access to the Secretary of State, although Ambassador Saperstein cultivated a close relationship with then-Secretary of State John Kerry. The IRF office staff was reduced and underfunded in this era, though after 2014 it began receiving funding increases from Congress, along with other issues related to religious freedom abroad. In August 2013, Secretary of State Kerry added a new layer to the bureaucracy at the State Department with the creation of the Office of Religion and Global Affairs, headed by Shaun Casey. Its purpose was to analyze the role of religion in the world of diplomacy.

Also, important new tools and expansive research were changing the religious freedom landscape. Research provided a much broader, global understanding of IRF challenges, and new tools provided the means to respond with greater impact.

In 2012, for example, President Obama would sign into law the Magnitsky Act (P.L. 112-208) in response to the human rights abuses that led to the death of a Russian lawyer who had exposed a \$230 million tax fraud linked to the Kremlin. The Act originally sanctioned 18 Russian officials and businessmen. It also repealed and replaced the decades-old Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which had established human rights as a priority within U.S. foreign policy.

2013

Obama Administration

Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook

Resigns as Ambassador, October 16

President Obama also signed into law in 2016 The Global Magnitsky Act (P.L. 114-328), which extended the scope of the Magnitsky Act to apply to human rights abuses perpetrated worldwide. The new Global Magnitsky Act gave the U.S. government authority to sanction offenders anywhere in the world by freezing assets, banning use of the U.S. banking system, and imposing a visa ban to keep offenders from entering the country.



STATE.GOV

Additional tools were made available with the passage of the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016 (H.R. 1150), which President Obama signed into law in 2016 (P.L. 114-281). The Act strengthened and updated the original IRFA, creating a more muscular framework to “improve the ability of the U.S. to advance religious freedom globally through enhanced diplomacy, training, counterterrorism, and foreign assistance efforts, and through stronger and more flexible political responses to religious freedom violations and violent extremism worldwide.”

Among other provisions, the new Act mandates that the State Department designate non-state actors as entities of particular concern (EPCs). A companion to the countries of particular concern (CPC) designation, the law provides that the Secretary of State work with Congress and USCIRF to create new political, financial and diplomatic tools to address the severe violations of religious freedom committed by non-state actors, such as ISIS and Boko Haram.

The Act emphasizes the strategic value of IRF and its position within the broader foreign policy apparatus. It mandates that the IRF Ambassador report directly to the Secretary of State and establishes a minimum number of full-time staff members for the IRF office. The Act further mandates that the State Department establish and maintain a “designated persons list” of individuals who violate religious freedom.

Newly sworn in Ambassador-at-Large David Saperstein delivers remarks during a ceremony in his honor at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., on February 20, 2015

2015

Obama Administration

Rabbi David Saperstein

Sworn in as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, January 6

IRFA IN THE SECOND DECADE



PASS.VA

“We now have all this data and really objective, verifiable information... scholars can use that in very sophisticated, statistical ways to show the relationship between high levels of restrictions on religion and violence.”

– Allen Hertzke, Ph.D., Department of Political Science, University of Oklahoma

USCIRF, too, is mandated under the Act to make public a list of persons it determines are imprisoned or detained, have disappeared, been placed under house arrest, been tortured, or subjected to forced renunciations for their religious activity or religious freedom advocacy by CPC designated countries or non-state actors. Religious freedom training for all Foreign Service Officers is also required, as is the development of curriculum for this training.

Research, too, contributed to the international religious freedom conversation during the second decade of IRFA. IRFA’s enactment inspired a body of valuable research that provided the empirical data which analysts, government officials, and activists sought to support what they already knew and observed on the ground: that there is a strong correlation between the robust protection of religious freedom and a host of desirable social and other goods.

Many institutes, think tanks, and academics started collecting information and developing democracy and freedom scores, civil liberties scores, or terrorism databases. But it was Brian Grim of Pew Research Center and Roger Finke, a professor of sociology and religious studies at Penn State, who were in the vanguard of religious freedom research. They developed a methodology to examine government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion.

Grim and Finke’s research took a holistic, global approach. The results were sobering but informative. As they describe in their book, *The Price of Freedom Denied*: “Michael Horowitz led an unlikely alliance in revealing religious persecution around the globe. But as the awareness of persecution became greater, explanations for the occurrence of violent religious persecution and conflict remained scarce.” In other words, awareness is a necessary first step, but it is insufficient when trying to understand the factors associated with persecution and conflict, let alone for alleviating and preventing abuse. It is not enough to merely react and point to persecution; the underlying causes need to be identified and addressed as well.

2015

Obama Administration

Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (H.R. 1150)

Introduced in the House, February 27

To that end, Grim and Fink determined that “ensuring religious freedoms for all serves to defuse the potential volatility of religious plurality,” and “to the extent that governments deny religious freedoms, violent religious persecution and conflict will increase.”

Research thus affirms the success of efforts to expose persecution, but also reveals that more needs to be done. To that point, The Pew Research Center’s [analysis](#) of religious restrictions and hostilities for 2016 found that 83% of the global population lived in countries with high or very high religious restrictions, mostly targeting religious minorities. The numbers left many observers dismayed. How, after nearly 20 years of IRFA, could the numbers be so dismal? The focus, if Grim and Finke are correct, needs to shift from simply an awareness of persecution to the exploration and understanding of the underlying causes for persecution.

Even Thomas Farr, the former Director of the Office of International Religious Freedom, questioned the efficacy of post-IRFA policies toward religious persecution. In [testimony](#) before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform – Subcommittee on National Security in June 2013, he offered a sobering assessment of the degree to which religious persecution has been abated or religious freedom increased worldwide as a result of IRFA.

You measure impact “comparatively and on a country by country basis. In terms of failure in impacting a dramatic decline in persecution, I am not sure that was an accurate measure. It’s not helpful in thinking about IRF efficacy to expect a simplistic cause-effect analysis, which is what critics charge when they say that IRFA passed but persecution is on the rise. What’s important is to consider the symbolic significance, as well as to evaluate the measurable impacts and, of course, to make adjustments, so that the impact of IRFA is as full and positive as possible.”

– Dr. Elizabeth H. Prodromou, former USCIRF Vice-Chair

2015

Obama Administration

Knox Thames

appointed Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia, September 28

2016

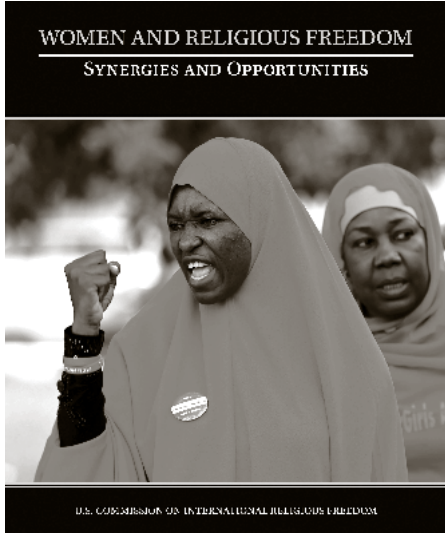
Obama Administration

U.S. declares ISIS committed genocide

against Yazidis, Christians, and Shi’a Muslims in Iraq, March 17

VOICES

MOVING THE NEEDLE



USCIRF



USCIRF

Former USCIRF Commissioners
Zuhdi Jasser, Robert George and
Katrina Lantos Swett

Research provides important empirical data that strengthens the work and outreach of religious freedom advocates like Katrina Lantos Swett. The President of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice and former USCIRF Chair, Lantos Swett knows that research lends credibility to the often emotional conversation of religious persecution and helps to promote religious freedom.

“Societies that do a good job protecting religious freedom tend to have lower levels of social tension, lower levels of extremism, and higher economic outcomes. Women tend to have a higher socioeconomic status in societies where conscience rights are robustly protected.

“In some ways, that’s almost counterintuitive. I think people might have thought historically, ‘Well, free religious practice is somehow associated with fewer rights for women,’ but evidence is just the contrary. In countries where you have strong religious freedom protections, women are more empowered. Freedom of religion and belief really can become a pretty significant tool in the empowerment of women.”

2016
Obama Administration

Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act signed into law by President Obama, December 16

2016
Obama Administration

Global Magnitsky Act signed into law, December 23

In its 2018 annual report, USCIRF acknowledged the downward trend, saying it “often intersected with authoritarian practices characterized by hostility toward dissent, pluralism, independent media, and active civil society, or took place under the guise of protecting national security or countering terrorism.” Still, in the view of many, the study points to reasons for optimism. In releasing the report, then-USCIRF Chairman Daniel Mark said, “The importance of this foundational right is appreciated more now than ever, and egregious violations are less likely to go unnoticed.”

When the first substantive research was introduced, many in the religious freedom advocacy community were paying attention and doubled down on their efforts. The IRF Roundtable in Washington, D.C., for example, was born of a desire to respond to research and stem the tide of persecution and abuse. Quickly, the IRF Roundtable became the premier space for practical policy discussions and coordination among civil society, government, and multilateral organizations. By 2018, it had attracted representatives from 250 organizations and launched nearly 100 multi-faith initiatives on behalf of persecuted communities. The NGO community as a whole had grown from a handful of groups in the late 1990s to hundreds of organizations.



Former USCIRF Co-chair Sandra Jolley introducing the 2017 USCIRF International Religious Freedom report

2017

Trump Administration

National Security Strategy identifies protection of religious freedom and religious minorities a priority, December

VOICES

ADVOCATES GET BUSY

Greg Mitchell is the co-founder of the IRF Roundtable, an informal network of religious freedom advocates that meets regularly to discuss IRF issues, share ideas and propose joint advocacy actions. When the statistics showed religious persecution on the rise, Mitchell got busy.



STATE.GOV/DRL/IRF

Greg Mitchell and the IRF Roundtable

“Pew started doing research and started finding a rising tide of restrictions on religion,” says Mitchell. It was ten years after IRFA had been enacted, and Mitchell recognized that IRFA and government are only part of the solution. “Even with IRFA, even with an ambassador and USCIRF, you can’t just rely on the U.S. government to solve all these problems. People have now realized that this is going to be a constant struggle. Vigilance, that’s what religious freedom requires. You’re going to have to work at it all the time.”

“When we first started the Roundtable, we only had one purpose, and that was to engage the U.S. government and get it to do more to advance international religious freedom, to do what the people expected they would be doing since IRFA passed.”

2018
Trump Administration

Sam Brownback sworn in as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, February 1

VOICES

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE PROJECT

In April 2017, USCIRF launched its Prisoners of Conscience Project to shine light on

individuals imprisoned around the world for exercising their freedom of religion or belief. Commissioners selected prisoners and advocated on their behalf. Former Commissioner Clifford May adopted Raif Badawi, a Saudi Arabian blogger, activist, and creator of the website Free Saudi Liberals, which encouraged debate on religious and political matters.

Charged with “setting up a website that undermines general security,” “ridiculing Islamic religious figures,” and “going beyond the realm of obedience,” Badawi was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes. Speaking about his support of Badawi, Commissioner May said, “In some cases [advocacy] may have helped win release earlier than otherwise would have been the case. In other instances, I think it’s important that those who are imprisoned know that somebody cares about them.”

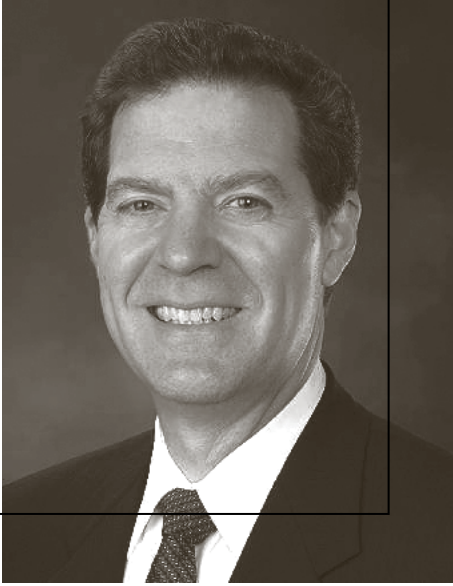
“I recently had the opportunity to support Raif Badawai with the Ambassador from Saudi Arabia. I don’t think that’s going to get his release anytime soon, but at least he knows that there are people who care about him in the U.S. The fact that he and others are imprisoned is an obstacle to the better relations that I think the Saudis seek with the U.S. at this point.”



USCIRF

Former USCIRF Commissioner Clifford May at press conference in April 2017 to launch the Prisoners of Conscience project

IRFA IN THE SECOND DECADE



STATE.GOV/DRL/IRF

“Religious freedom is a fundamental right of every human no matter where they live, who they are, or what they believe. It is the right to do with your own soul what you choose without interference of any government or group.”

– Ambassador Sam Brownback, Testimony at Senate confirmation hearing

By the end of IRFA’s second decade, a new energy was brewing within the IRF community. President Donald Trump selected Kansas Governor Sam Brownback as his nominee for Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, a choice that drew some partisan grumbling but was acknowledged by many as an astute and timely pick.

Brownback was lauded as a principled and authoritative voice for international religious freedom. While in the Senate, he spoke out against atrocities committed against many religious minorities abroad. He worked to end the North-South war in Sudan, then subsequently pushed for passage of the [Darfur Peace and Accountability Act of 2005](#); sponsored a resolution condemning persecution of the Baha’i minority in Iran; and was instrumental in the enactment of IRFA.

The Senate narrowly [confirmed](#) Brownback as the fifth IRF Ambassador in January 2018, with Vice President Pence casting the tiebreaking vote in his role as president of the Senate. Many believe that the combination of Brownback and Pence, with the addition of Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State and former USCIRF commissioner John Bolton as National Security Advisor in 2018, has the potential for unprecedented opportunities to further advance religious freedom abroad.

Both IRFA and the Frank R. Wolf Act called for the creation of an advisory position within the National Security Council, a mandate that has yet to be met. But the Trump administration did incorporate meaningful IRF language into its [2017 National Security Strategy \(NSS\)](#). For the first time since the passage of IRFA, religious freedom was clearly stated as a pillar of the NSS: “The United States also remains committed to supporting and advancing religious freedom — America’s first freedom. ...We will advocate on behalf of religious freedom and threatened minorities. ...We will place a priority on protecting these groups and will continue working with regional partners to protect minority communities from attacks and to preserve their cultural heritage.”

2018

Trump Administration

Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, hosted by the U.S. Department of State, July 24 to 26 – Potomac Declaration and Potomac Action Plan are introduced

In the 20th anniversary year of IRFA, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hosted the first-ever [Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom](#), a three-day summit attended by ministerial-level officials from more than 80 nations, as well as hundreds of religious leaders, NGO representatives, civil society organizations, and human rights advocates. The goal: reaffirm the international commitment to promote religious freedom and identify concrete initiatives to raise religious freedom as a global priority.

In convening the Ministerial, U.S. leadership sought to put its “first freedom” in first position. Time was spent listening to survivors of persecution and the family members of those who did not survive — a reminder that persecution has a face, and religious freedom is a beating heart.

With eyes to the future, the international participants discussed concrete steps to take for the collective protection and promotion of religious freedom. Secretary Pompeo issued the [Potomac Declaration](#) and the [Potomac Plan of Action](#) at the conclusion of the [Ministerial](#), promising that the U.S. would “work with others around the world to help those under attack for their beliefs, and that we expect leaders around the world to make it their priority as well.”

IRFA provided an imperfect but useful framework with which to integrate religious freedom into U.S. foreign policy. Opinions are mixed as to its effectiveness. Most would agree that IRFA has been at least partially successful, but much work remains. What comes next will be important and will need to include new actions and efforts from the U.S. government, international partners, and the advocacy community.

“There is still a disconnect between IRF and other foreign policy imperatives and resources. Significantly here, the IRF director-level position on the National Security Council has remained unfilled for the entire duration of the IRFA legislation. This underscores that all of the resources of the U.S. foreign policy establishment have not yet been fully leveraged for supporting IRF and it also underscores that there remains a disconnect in understanding the key linkages between religious freedom and all forms of human and state security.”

– Dr. Elizabeth H. Prodromou, former USCIRF Vice Chair

“The United States of America stands for religious freedom yesterday, today, and always. We do this because it is right. But we also do this because religious freedom is in the interest of the peace and security of the world.”

– Vice President Mike Pence

2018
Trump Administration

Trump Administration Deploys Global Magnitsky Act
in response to Turkey's refusal to release American Pastor Andrew Brunson (August)

Few would question the importance of the International Religious Freedom Act and its influence on U.S. foreign policy over the past 20 years. While the law up to now may have fallen short of achieving its intended goal, IRFA (and its progeny, the Frank R. Wolf Act) has energized the policy conversation and made progress toward elevating religious freedom as an essential and worthy component of international relations. IRFA and its proponents have reinforced the urgent need for attentive and meaningful solutions to religious persecution. Still, as one observer has noted, “we cannot take our foot off the gas.”



USCIRF

Abid Raja and Leonardo Quintão of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief and Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom David Saperstein

Looking forward, the viability of IRFA and religious freedom advocacy will depend on the willingness and ability of the religious freedom community — policymakers, advocates, NGOs, and faith-based groups — to engage other nations, mobilize civil society, and recalibrate the foreign policy mindset.

Engaging Nations

Foreign policymakers and monitoring bodies have looked to the United States as a model for how to promote and protect religious freedom. The landmark IRFA law, in particular, has given other nations

an important roadmap as they seek to develop solutions to religious persecution and other fundamental human rights abuses, and also as they begin to recognize religious freedom is key to achieving stability and security.

In Law and International Religious Freedom: The Rise and Decline of the American Model, religious freedom scholar Pasquale Annicchino writes: “The International Religious Freedom Act has been an example of legislation that has inspired many Western countries to make the protection and promotion of the right of religious freedom an objective of their foreign policy. Despite problems with the effective application of the norms of the International Religious Freedom Act, and criticisms coming from within the United States from both academia and policymakers, in recent years an increasing number of states, and the European Union itself, have been inspired by the U.S. legislation.”

As IRFA enters a new decade, it will be important for the U.S. to leverage its own history, including its successes, failures, challenges, and lessons learned, to encourage the many groups and initiatives seeking to advance religious freedom agendas around the world. “There

IRF – THE NEXT GENERATION

is a growing international network of state and non-state actors who are now also realizing they have to work on advancing religious freedom around the world,” says IRF Roundtable Co-chair Greg Mitchell. “More governments are now coming to the table to work shoulder to shoulder on religious freedom. What has to happen for success is coordination.”

The U.S. would do well to continue lending its support to groups such as the International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief ([ICG-FoRB](#)), an international consortium of like-minded executive branches, and the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief ([IPP-FoRB](#)), a global network of legislators. Both networks are working to enhance information sharing and cooperation between nations committed to protecting and promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief.

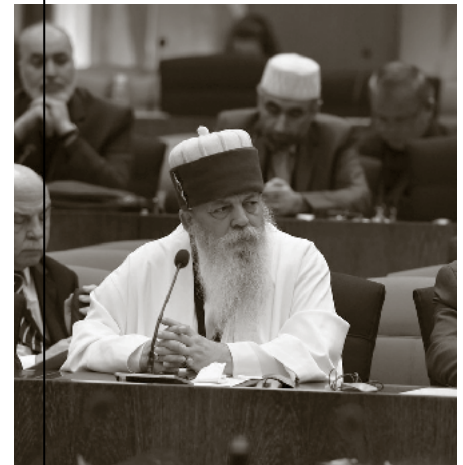
Across the globe, nations are starting to understand the importance of creating an office or a special envoy to work in concert with others to advance religious freedom concerns. The United Kingdom created an IRF office and the position of Prime Minister’s Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2018, with Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon appointed to the role. The European Commission also has a Special Envoy, and Norway, Germany, and Denmark have created IRF offices. The United Nations has a Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

In 2013, Canada’s Prime Minister Stephen Harper established the Office of Religious Freedom and appointed Andrew P. Bennett to be Ambassador for Religious Freedom. The Trudeau government has since replaced the office with one focused more broadly on human rights, an unfortunate development according to many in the IRF community.

The Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom convened by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in July 2018, was an important step toward engaging other nations and building up the larger IRF community. The three-day summit drew officials from more than 80 nations and more than 400 civil society participants from around the world. The Ministerial provided an important platform to discuss trends and solutions to the world’s most difficult religious freedom challenges. In addition to the Potomac Declaration and Plan of Action, three thematic statements on global trends undermining religious freedom were issued at the Ministerial. These included one on blasphemy and apostasy laws, another on counterterrorism as a false pretext for religious freedom repression, and a third on violations by non-state actors. Three country statements — on Burma, China, and Iran — were introduced as well.



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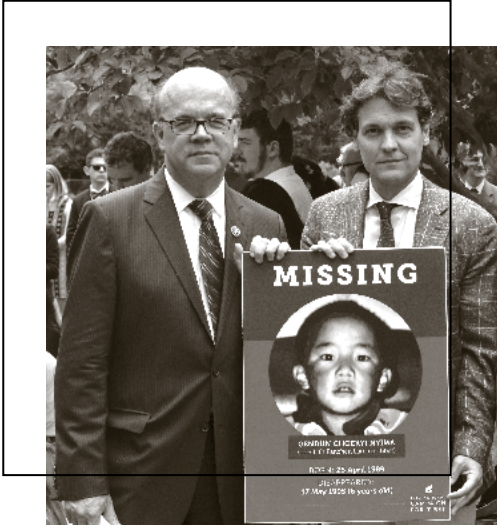


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Participants from more than 80 nations attended the first-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom



21WILBERFORCE

Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA) and Matteo Mecacci, President of International Campaign for Tibet

It is noteworthy that the comfort level for signing the Ministerial statements was low – just 12 of 88 signatories for the blasphemy statement. The counter-terrorism statement garnered just 15 signatures, and the statement on non-state actors only 20. Ten countries signed the Burma statement; four countries signed the China statement; and five countries signed the Iran statement. While the Ministerial may have reinvigorated the issue of international religious freedom, any forward movement likely will be incremental.

In the spirit of forward momentum, Ministerial participants were encouraged to work toward such goals as increasing financial support for religiously persecuted groups; strengthening the rule of law, including the guarantee to a fair trial and the institutional capacity to protect religious freedom and other human rights; providing additional diplomatic resources; training and equipping diplomats; and supporting civil society organizations and domestic forums.

Mobilizing Civil Society

Of course, meetings, official appointments, and declarations are critically important, but many would argue that they are insufficient in themselves; what is needed are forces on the ground – grassroots campaigns and personal storytelling. Some would use the term “movement.” The difficulty is that social movements are hard to create and even harder to sustain. To the extent that there was an IRF movement (and reasonable people have differing opinions), it would seem that it has lost momentum and needs a jumpstart.

“Social movements are hard to sustain. You get a kind of natural dissipation of movement energies; they get absorbed into other things.”

– Allen Hertzke, Ph.D., Department of Political Science, University of Oklahoma

Knox Thames has served as the State Department’s Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia since 2015. Though a strong supporter of IRFA, Thames concedes that the disparate and determined groups that came together to pass the legislation did not, in turn, create mechanisms inside their own organizations to build on their victory. “Overall, our field is still learning how to do the work that builds capacity,” he says.

Sharon Payt, Executive Director of 21Wilberforce and long-time human rights advocate would agree: “The IRF movement did not move beyond top-down advocacy, as has happened with other movements, to include program adoption and funding.”

If the momentum of IRFA has stalled, Thames suggests one reason may be the daunting landscape that would-be activists must navigate. Writing in *International Religious Freedom Advocacy: A Guide to Organizations, Law, and NGOs*, he says, “Without firsthand experience working with international institutions, many find it difficult, if not impossible, to engage effectively” in religious freedom advocacy. In

other words, the work of religious freedom advocacy is not intuitive. The passion and purpose that motivates someone to get involved may be instinctual, but the practical steps are not.

Perhaps even more problematic than navigating the IRF infrastructure, particularly for civil society groups that would take up the cause of international religious freedom, is how best to build strong coalitions that are inclusive, that lift up and protect those who are vulnerable without vilifying other communities along the way. For many IRF observers, that challenge boils down to bridging differences and diffusing conflicts.

Twenty years post-IRFA, the nature and extent of what may or may not be characterized as a movement is difficult to identify. The ability to discern that may come with the fullness of time. Movement forward, however, will depend on how well civil society can engage, motivate, and deploy advocates.

Recalibrating the Foreign Policy Mindset

Finally, for all of the forward movement the International Religious Freedom Act has accomplished, it is a common view that religious freedom has still not been fully integrated into broader U.S. foreign policy. Instead, it hovers somewhere along the periphery. The hoped-for sea change has not taken full effect.

Some believe that this perception may be due, in part, to the fact that the IRF Ambassador, for the better part of two decades, has not had sufficient access to the Secretary of State. Access matters in terms of visibility, attendance at secretary-level meetings, development of clear talking points, and agenda setting.

Others offer other explanations. Former USCIRF Commissioner Zhudi Jasser believes that the collective foreign-policy mindset of Washington needs to change. “We are addicted to what is perceived as global stability,” he says. As a Commissioner, Jasser spent much time and energy focused on the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia. He observes that State Department officials are “psychologically vested in stability in the region” instead of concerning themselves with what the country was doing to its own people. “At the end of the day, all of the domestic or internal religious freedom issues we called for within countries were given waivers. All those bad habits in foreign policy were never corrected.”

Jasser is not alone in his criticism. Elyse Bauer Anderson, Staff Director of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, observes that, “There’s been a lot of discussion about the extent to which religious

“We got stuck in single-issue advocacy, and we never expanded out into systems reform. You don’t get systems reform with governments in partnership unless you have a broad-based coalition.”

– Sharon Payt, Executive Director,
21Wilberforce

“Religious Freedom touches people deeply. It is something people care about because it means so much to them personally — across faiths. I would love if more church communities would adopt or engage with someone who is Hindu or Muslim or Baha’i to begin to lessen our differences and recognize the beliefs we share.”

– Alexandra Arriaga, former State
Department Senior Advisor

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freedom is simply a kind of feel good humanitarian issue...versus something that has strategic importance and is linked to our national security.” She believes IRF has been treated as an afterthought, something to pursue only “if it doesn’t ruffle other elements of the bilateral relationship.”

Like Jasser, Anderson is critical of the State Department’s track record in deploying the measures provided by IRFA, pointing to its reluctance “to use the various tools in its toolbox to advance religious freedom.”

She notes that when countries have been sanctioned because of a CPC designation, these sanctions have been double-hatted, that is, attributed to pre-existing sanctions, not to a religious freedom violation under IRFA.



Former USCIRF Chair Leonard Leo at an interfaith conference on religious freedom in Manila, 2010

USCIRF

The Frank R. Wolf Act of 2016 sought to address these and other shortcomings in the original IRFA. Still, while amending and updating IRFA may address some of the pressing challenges, it is the mindset within the government and foreign policy establishment that needs recalibrating, and that will take leadership and time. There is enthusiasm among many observers that, at the top, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and IRF Ambassador Sam Brownback are poised to provide the right leadership at the right time to advance the international religious freedom agenda in an integrated and meaningful way.

Education, too, will be a critical component of any success that is achieved, and must involve educating U.S. government officials. The Frank R. Wolf Act strengthened the scope of training that foreign service officers must receive, but the instruction must go deeper. There must be a shift in the way officials think about threats to religious freedom. Executive Vice President of the Federalist Society Leonard

Leo and a former USCIRF Chair, suggests that without broader education about the confluence of religion and culture, it is too easy for the U.S. foreign policy community to dismiss certain concepts as non-religious. For example, the North-South conflict in Sudan may be viewed as political, but the religious underpinnings are obvious. Or in Nigeria, Boko Haram is rightly characterized as a militant terrorist group, but their fury is fueled principally by religion.

“The regional bureaus and the country desks at the State Department don’t always have an interest in dealing with [religious freedom] issues,” says Leo. “Their interest is in maintaining an ongoing dialogue on a number of issues. There is always a risk that human rights and religious freedom issues are thrown under the bus for other issues such as trade.”



21WILBERFORCE

Former Rep. Frank Wolf speaking with college students

Education has yet another facet. The ability of the diplomatic corps to assist religious minorities endangered by persecution depends largely on how well those incidents are reported and the extent to which officials are aware of specific problems. Teaching groups how to accurately report in-country instances of persecution will go a long way toward improving the ways in which those injustices are addressed.

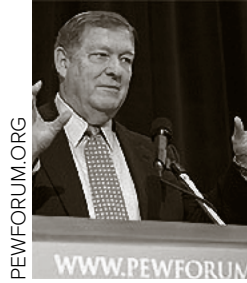
Of course, leadership must emerge and contribute from all arenas. But for the vision and leadership of the original IRFA stakeholders — people like Frank Wolf, Chris Smith, Joe Pitts, Michael Horowitz, Nina Shea, Robert Seiple, John Hanford, and so many others — there would have been no International Religious Freedom Act or IRF movement.

Moving forward, the IRF movement faces an enormously challenging landscape. Many are stepping forward to accept that challenge because they understand that freedom of religion or belief is a foundational human right that is key to global security and stability; that millions care about it; that governments fear and oppress it, while other governments support it, because they understand its power; and that many prisoners of conscience languish in detention because of their religious beliefs, actions, identity or advocacy.

The inclusion of international religious freedom into the broader foreign policy conversation over the past 20 years has been a hard-fought and noble pursuit. The work is not complete, at home or abroad, but it is a worthy endeavor for this generation and those that follow.

“Personnel is policy. You can have the worst law with the greatest personnel, and they’ll find a way. Put the right personnel in, you get the right policy.”

– Frank R. Wolf, former U.S. Congressman



Ambassador Seiple (1999 – 2000)

Robert A. Seiple was the Ambassador-at-Large from 1999 to 2000. In December 1986, he was named president of World Vision International, where he served from 1987 to 1998. He founded the Institute for Global Engagement in 2000 and previously served as the athletic director and Vice President for Development at Brown University from 1975 to 1979, and President of Eastern University and Palmer Theological Seminary from 1983 to 1987. Ambassador Seiple received an AB degree in American Literature from Brown University in 1965. During 1966 – 1969, he served in the U.S. Marine Corps, attaining the rank of Captain.



Ambassador Hanford (2002 – 2009)

John V. Hanford III was Ambassador-at-Large from 2002 to 2009. Previously, he served under Senator Richard Lugar for 14 years in the first full-time US government position dedicated to international religious freedom, mobilizing individual and Congress-wide interventions on persecution issues and oppressive policies around the world. As an architect of the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, he led the team that conceptualized and wrote the Act and co-led, with Senator Don Nickles' office, negotiations for its passage. Ambassador Hanford earned an M.Div from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a BA in Economics from UNC at Chapel Hill, on a Morehead Scholarship.



Ambassador Cook (2011 – 2013)

Suzan Johnson Cook served as the Ambassador-at-Large from April 2011 to October 2013. She currently is the Leader and Chief Inspiration Officer, Pro Voice/ Pro Voz Movement for Women and CEO & Owner/ Professional Speaker, Charisma Speakers. The Rev. Dr. Cook served in 1993 on the White House Domestic Policy Council, and with HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros as a consultant on Faith Initiatives from 1994 to 1997. In 1996, she became the founder and senior pastor of the Bronx Fellowship Christian Church, serving until 2010. In 1990, Mayor David Dinkins appointed her as the first woman chaplain to the New York City Police Department. In 1983, she was appointed pastor of the Mariner's Temple Baptist Church in Manhattan. She received her B.S. degree from Emerson College, her M.A. degree in education from Columbia University, her M.Div. degree from Union Theological Seminary and her D.Min. Degree from Ohio's United Theological Seminary.

AMBASSADORS-AT-LARGE



Ambassador Saperstein (2014 – 2017)

Rabbi David Saperstein served as the Ambassador-at-Large from December 2014 until January 2017. He serves on the board of numerous national organizations and is a Senior Fellow at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs and its School of Foreign Service's

Center for Jewish Civilization, and is Senior Advisor for Strategy and Policy for the Union for Reform Judaism. An attorney, Rabbi Saperstein teaches seminars in First Amendment Church-State Law and Jewish Law at Georgetown University Law School. He previously served for four-decades as Director and Counsel at the Religious Action Center (RAC). In 1999, Rabbi Saperstein was elected the first Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). In 2009, President Obama appointed him to the first White House Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. He received a BA from Cornell University, an MHL from Hebrew Union College, and a JD from American University College of Law.



Ambassador Brownback (2018 – Present)

Sam Brownback was sworn in as Ambassador-at-Large on February 1, 2018. Amb. Brownback served as Governor of Kansas from 2011 to 2018, a U.S. Senator (1996-2011), and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives (1995-1996) from Kansas. He also served as Kansas Secretary of

Agriculture (1986-1993) and was a White House Fellow in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (1990-1991). Prior to his public service, Ambassador Brownback was an attorney in Kansas and taught agricultural law at Kansas State University, co-authoring two books on the subject. He earned a B.S. from Kansas State University and a J.D. from the University of Kansas.

USCIRF COMMISSIONERS



Dr. Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, Omar and Azmeralda Alfi Distinguished Professor in Islamic Law at the UCLA School of Law. Commissioner 2003-2007.

Elliott Abrams, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Commissioner 1999-2001, 2012-2014, Chair 2000-2001.

Dr. Azizah Al-Hibri, Founder of KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights; Professor Emeritus at the T. C. Williams School of Law, University of Richmond. Commissioner 2011-2013.

Dr. Laila Al-Marayati, Clinical Assistant Professor of Obstetrics & Gynecology (Part-Time), University of Southern California, Keck School of Medicine and Medical Director of Women's Health at the Eisner Pediatric and Family Medical Center. Commissioner 1999-2001.

Dr. Don Argue, Ambassador-at-Large for Convoy of Hope. Commissioner 2007-2012, Vice Chair 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.

Kristina Arriaga de Bucholz, Commissioner 2016-to present. Vice Chair, 2017-2018, 2018.

Preeta Bansal, Research Affiliate, Laboratory for Social Machines, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Co-Founder and President, Social Emergence Corporation. Commissioner 2003-2009, Chair 2004-2005, Vice Chair 2007-2008.

Gary L. Bauer, President of American Values and Washington Director of Christians United for Israel Action Fund; former Reagan Administration official; former Sr. Vice President of Focus on the Family and former President of the Family Research Council. Appointed Commissioner 2018.

John R. Bolton, National Security Advisor of the United States. Commissioner 1999-2001.

Ambassador Sam Brownback, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Ex-Officio Commissioner 2018.

Patti Chang, CEO of the Feed the Hunger Foundation. Commissioner 2003-2004.

Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, Archbishop of Philadelphia. Commissioner 2003-2007.

Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook, Leader, Chief Inspiration Officer, Pro Voice/ Pro Voz Movement for Women; CEO & Owner/Professional Speaker, Charisma Speakers. Ex-Officio Commissioner and Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom 2011-2014.

Michael Cromartie, Deceased. Commissioner 2004-2010, Chair 2005-2006 and 2007-2008, Vice Chair 2006-2007 and 2008-2010.

Dr. Tenzin Dorjee, Associate Professor at the Department of Human Communication Studies, California State University, Fullerton (CSUF). Commissioner 2016-2018, Chair 2018.

Imam Talal Y. Eid, Imam and Director of Religious Affairs of the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo. Commissioner 2007-2011.

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Felice D. Gaer, Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, American Jewish Committee; Vice-Chairperson of the Committee against Torture. Commissioner 2001-2012, Chair 2002-2003, 2006-2007, 2008-2009, Vice Chair 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, Executive Committee 2001-2002.

Hon. Sam Gejdenson, Board Member – National Democratic Institute; head of Sam Gejdenson International; Member of Congress 1981 to 2000. Commissioner 2012-2014.

Dr. Robert P. George, McCormick Professor in Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, Princeton University. Commissioner 2012-2016, Chair 2012-2014, 2015-2016, Vice Chair 2014-2015.

Ambassador Mary Ann Glendon, Learned Hand Professor of Law, Harvard Law School. Commissioner 2012-2016, Vice Chair 2012-2013.

Ambassador John V. Hanford III, Ex-Officio Commissioner and Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom 2003-2009.

Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser, Founder and President of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy (AIFD). Commissioner 2012-2016, Vice Chair 2013-2014, 2015-2016.

Sandra Jolley, leader in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Commissioner 2016-2018, Vice Chair 2017-2018.

Firuz Kazemzadeh, Deceased. Commissioner 1999-2003, Vice Chair 2001-2002.

Dr. Andy Khawaja, Southern California-based entrepreneur and Founder/CEO of Allied Wallet. Honorary doctorate degree in Humanitarian Studies from Lebanese American University. Appointed Commissioner in 2018.

Dr. Richard D. Land, President of Southern Evangelical Seminary. Commissioner 2001-2004, 2005-2012, Vice Chair 2007-2008.

Leonard Leo, Executive Vice President of the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy Studies. Commissioner 2007-2012, Chair 2009-2012.

Nadine Maenza, speaker, writer, and policy advisor; founding Executive Director of Patriot Voices and former Chair of Hardwired Global; former congressional staffer. Appointed Commissioner in 2018.

Gayle Manchin, former First Lady of West Virginia; former President and member of West Virginia State Board of Education; Appointed Commissioner and Vice Chair in 2018.

Dr. Daniel Mark, Assistant professor of political science at Villanova University 2017–18; Visiting Tocqueville Fellow and a visiting research fellow at the Center for Ethics and Culture, Notre Dame. Commissioner, 2014-2018. Vice Chairman, 2016-2017, Chair 2017-2018.



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2018 USCIRF Commissioners with
Ambassador-at-Large for International
Religious Freedom Sam Brownback

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Clifford D. May, President of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies
Commissioner 2016-2018.

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, resigned as American prelate of the Catholic
Church. Commissioner 1999-2001.

Johnnie Moore, founder and CEO of the KAIROS Company; formerly Sr. Vice
President for Communications at Liberty University, as well as Chief of Staff and
Vice President of Faith Content for the United Artists Media Group. Appointed
Commissioner 2018.

Most Reverend William Francis Murphy, Retired December 2016 as the Fourth
Bishop of Rockville Centre, Long Island, New York. Commissioner 2001-2003.

Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou, Visiting Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution at
The Fletcher School at Tufts University. Commissioner 2004-2012, Vice Chair
2006-2007, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012.

Tony Perkins, President of the Family Research Council (beginning in 2003);
former representative in the Louisiana state legislature. Appointed Commissioner
in 2018.

Most Reverend Ricardo Ramirez, Retired after serving as the first Bishop of
the Diocese of Las Cruces from 1982-2013. Commissioner 2003-2007.

Reverend Thomas J. Reese, S.J., Senior Analyst at Religion News Service.
Commissioner 2014--2018, Chair 2016-2017.

Hannah Rosenthal, President and CEO of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation.
Commissioner 2014-2016.

Dr. John Ruskay, Executive Vice President Emeritus of UJA-Federation of New
York; senior partner of JRB Consulting Services. Commissioner 2016-2018.

Leila Nadya Sadat, James Carr Professor of International Criminal Law at
Washington University School of Law; Director of the Whitney R. Harris World Law
Institute; and Special Advisor on Crimes Against Humanity to the ICC Prosecutor.
Commissioner 2001-2003.

Commissioner Perkins: "Today's
decision by the Turkish govern-
ment is good news. We celebrate
along with the millions of Ameri-
cans who have been praying for
Pastor Brunson's release."



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USCIRF COMMISSIONERS

Rabbi David Saperstein, Senior Fellow at the Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs and its School of Foreign Service's Center for Jewish Civilization; Senior Advisor for Strategy and Policy for the Union for Reform Judaism; Adjunct Professor Georgetown University Law School. Commissioner 1999-2001, Chair 1999-2000. Ex Officio Commissioner and Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, 2015-2017.

Eric P. Schwartz, President of Refugees International. Commissioner 2013-2016, Vice-Chair 2015-2016.

Ambassador Robert Seiple, Founder of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE). Ex-Officio Commissioner and Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom 1999-2000.

Pastor Reverend Dr. William J. Shaw, Pastor of the White Rock Baptist Church. Commissioner 2010-2014, Vice Chair 2012-2013.

Nina Shea, Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute where she directs the Center for Religious Freedom. Commissioner 1999-2012, Vice Chair 2003-2007.

Justice Charles Z. Smith, Deceased. Commissioner 1999-2001.

Ambassador Charles R. Stith, Chairman of the Pula Group. Commissioner 2001-2003.

Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, President and CEO of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice. Commissioner 2012-2016, Chair 2012-2013, 2014-2015.

Dr. Shirin Raziuddin Tahir-Kheli, Adjunct Scholar of the Foreign Policy Research Institute and on its Board of Advisors; Senior Fellow of the Foreign Policy Institute at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. Commissioner 2001-2003.

Ted Van Der Meid, Deceased. Commissioner 2010-2012.

Ambassador Jackie Wolcott, nominated to be the U.S. Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and UN Vienna (UNVIE), Commissioner 2016-2018.

Michael K. Young, President of Texas A&M University. Commissioner 1999-2003, Chair 2001-2002, Vice Chair 1999-2000.

James Joseph Zogby, President of the Arab American Institute (AAI); Managing Director of Zogby Research Services, LLC. Commissioner 2013-2017. Vice Chair 2014-2015.



USCIRF

USCIRF meeting with representatives of the U.S. Baha'i Office of Public Affairs in 2013. L to R: Mr. Hessam Rahimian, Ms. Monir Khanjani, Ms. Jackie Wolcott, Mr. Iraj Kamalabadi, Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, Ms. Azadeh Perry, Ms. Niknaz Aftahi, Mr. Anthony Vance, Ms. Naseem Kourosh, and Mr. Dwight Bashir

RESOURCES

INTERVIEW LIST – **BOLD** SIGNIFIES COMPLETED INTERVIEW

Abrams	Elliott Abrams Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations (Assistant Secretary of State for Inter- American Affairs, Department of State 1985- 1989; USCIRF Commissioner 1999-2001, 2012-2014)	Brownback	University of Illinois at Chicago 1998- 2005; Deputy Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, May 2005-December 2010) Ambassador Sam Brownback Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom (United States Senator 1996-2011)
Albright	Secretary Madeleine Albright, Chair, Albright Stonebridge Group (United States Secretary of State 1997-2001)	Cassidy	Elizabeth Cassidy USCIRF Director of International Law & Policy 2007-Present
Anderson	Elyse Bauer Anderson Staff Director, Congressional Executive Commission on China (Foreign Policy Director for former Representative Frank Wolf 2002-2015)	Cizik	Rev. (Dr.) Rich Cizik President, New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good (Vice President for Governmental Affairs, National Association of Evangelicals 1980-2008)
Argue	Don Argue (Former President of the National Association of Evangelicals 1992- 1998; Former President of Northwest University 1998 -2007, Chancellor 2007- 2013; USCIRF Commissioner 2007- 2012)	Coats	Dan Coats, Director of National Intelligence (United States Senator 1989-1999, 2011-2017)
Arriaga	Alexandra Arriaga Managing Partner, Strategy for Humanity (Executive Director, First Advisory Committee for Religious Freedom Abroad)	Cook	Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook (Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom 2011-2013)
Arriaga	Kristina Arriaga Commissioner, USCIRF (Becket 1995-2017, Executive Director 2010-2017)	Dorjee	Dr. Tenzin Dorjee Associate Professor, Dept. of Human Communication Studies California State University, Fullerton (USCIRF Commissioner 2016-Present)
Bansal	Dr. Preeta Bansal HSBC General Counsel (USCIRF Commissioner 2003-2009)	Farr	Dr. Tom Farr President, Religious Freedom Institute (Director, Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. State Department 1999-2003)
Bashir	Dwight Bashir Director of Research, USCIRF (Advisor, Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, U.S. Department of State, 1997-1999).	Figel	Dr. Jan Figel EU Special Envoy for the promotion of FoRB 2016-to Present
Beuttler	Dr. Fred Beuttler Associate Dean, Graham School The University of Chicago (Associate University Historian,	Deborah Fikes	Director Intergovernmental Relations/ Public Engagement/ World Evangelical Alliance (Coordinator for International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church 2001/ Midland, Texas, Director for Human Rights Advocacy and Spokesperson for the Midland Ministerial Alliance 2002-2008)

RESOURCES

INTERVIEW LIST – **BOLD** SIGNIFIES COMPLETED INTERVIEW

Forte	David Forte Professor of Law, Cleveland State University (Visiting Scholar, Liberty Fund, Inc. 1998-1999; Senior Fellow, Center for the Study of Religion and the Constitution, The Witherspoon Institute 2008- 2009)	Hanford	Laura (Byrant) Hanford (Staff member, Office of Representative Bob Clement (D-TN))
Gaer	Felice Gaer, Director, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights (USCIRF Commissioner 2001-2012)	Hertzke	Dr. Allen Hertzke Professor of Political Science at the University of Oklahoma & Faculty Fellow in Religious Freedom for the Institute for the American Constitutional Heritage 1986-present
George	Dr. Robert George McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence, Princeton University (USCIRF Commissioner 2012-2016)	Homer	Lauren B. Homer, Attorney At Law, Homer International Law PLLC (President/Founder, Law and Liberty Trust International 1990-Present)
Golub	Judith Golub Board of Directors/Managers Religion News Foundation & Religion News Service (USCIRF Director of Congressional Affairs 2009-2017)	Horowitz	Michael Horowitz Director, Religious Liberty Project, Hudson Institute 1994-Present
Gombis	Al Gombis, Esq. Department of State foreign affairs officer (Team Lead for the Middle East and North Africa in the Office of International Religious Freedom 2006-2011; House Foreign Affairs staffer 2011-2013)	Huiskes	Ann Huiskes Chair at Columbia-Willamette Chapter of Women of Vision/World Vision (Senior Legislative Assistant, Representative Frank Wolf (R-VA) 1992-1999)
Grim	Dr. Brian Grim President, Religious Freedom and Business Foundation (Director of Cross National Data, Senior Researcher in Religion & World Affairs, Pew Research Center 2006-2014; Co-PI, International Religious Demography Project, Boston Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs 2008-Present)	Inboden	Dr. William Charles Inboden III Executive Director and William Powers, Jr. Chair, Clements Center for National Security; Associate Professor, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, The University of Texas at Austin. (Staff member, Office of Representative Tom DeLay (R-TX) and Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA))
Hanford	John V. Hanford III Former Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom 2002-2009 (Staff member, Office of Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN))	Jasser	M. Zuhdi Jasser President and Founder, American Islamic Forum for Democracy (USCIRF Commissioner 2012-2016)
		Jolley	Sandra Jolley, former USCIRF Commissioner (USCIRF Commissioner 2016-2018)

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INTERVIEW LIST – **BOLD** SIGNIFIES COMPLETED INTERVIEW

Land	Dr. Richard Land President of Southern Evangelical Seminary (USCIRF Commissioner 2001-2004, 2006-2012)	Mitchell	Greg Mitchell President, The Mitchell Company (Chief of Staff, Representative James Rogan 1997-2000)
Leo	Leonard Leo Executive Vice President, The Federalist Society (USCIRF Commissioner 2007-2012)	Nickles	Former Senator Don Nickles Chairman and CEO, The Nickles Group (United States Senator 1981-2005)
Lieberman	Former Senator Joe Lieberman U.S. politician and attorney (United States Senator 2007-2013)	Payt	Sharon Payt, J.D. Executive Director, 21Wilberforce (Senate staff with then-Senator Brownback, international human rights, 1997-2002)
Long	Larry Long, Sr, Pastor, Fellowship Community Church, Midland, TX and Vice President, Midland Ministerial Alliance (President, Midland Ministerial Alliance 2001-2017)	Prodromou	Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou Visiting Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution, The Fletcher School, Tufts University (USCIRF Commissioner 2004-2012)
Mark	Dr. Daniel Mark Asst. Professor of Political Science, Villanova University (USCIRF Commissioner 2014-2018)	Rees	Ambassador Joseph Rees Writer, Advocate, and Former United States Ambassador to East Timor (Staff Director and Chief Counsel, House Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights 1995- 2001; Chief Council, Committee on International Relations 2001-2002)
Marshall	Paul Marshall Senior Fellow, Center of Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute (Senior Fellow, Freedom House 1998- 2007)	Reese	Fr. Thomas J. Reese Columnist, Religion News Service (USCIRF Commissioner 2014-2018)
May	Clifford May Founder & President, Foundation for Defense of Democracies (USCIRF Commissioner 2016-2018)	Rogers	Melissa Rogers Non-residence senior fellow in Governance Studies, Brookings Institution (Executive Director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2000-2003; Visiting Professor/Director of the Center for Religion and Public Affairs at Wake Forest University Divinity School 2004- 2012; Special Assistant to the President and Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships 2013 -2017)
McDonnell	Faith McDonnell Director, International Religious Liberty Program and Church Alliance for A New Sudan, IRD (IRF advocate, member of original task forces for creation of IDOP, IRFA, Sudan Peace Act, North Korea Human Rights Act, etc. Participated in Midland's "Rock the Desert" in 2001, Organized week-long prayer vigil for Sudan which influenced signing of 2002 Sudan Peace Act by President Bush)		

RESOURCES

INTERVIEW LIST – **BOLD** SIGNIFIES COMPLETED INTERVIEW

Ruskay	Dr. John Ruskay Executive Vice President emeritus of UJA-Federation of New York and a senior partner of JRB Consulting Services (USCIRF Commissioner 2016-2018)	Stith	Ambassador Charles Stith (USCIRF Commissioner 2001-2002)
Sadat	Dr. Leila Nadya Sadat, Henry H. Oberschelp Professor of Law, Washington University School of Law (USCIRF Commissioner 2001-2003)	Swett	Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett President, Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice (USCIRF Commissioner 2012-2016)
Saperstein	Ambassador David Saperstein Director Emeritus, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and Senior Advisor to the URJ for Policy and Strategy (USCIRF Commissioner 1999-2001; Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom 2015-2017)	Taft	Dorothy Taft Executive Director, The Market Project (Chief of Staff/Deputy Chief of Staff, U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe 1995-2007)
Seiple	Ambassador Bob Seiple Former President, World Vision (Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom 1999-2000)	Thames	Knox Thames Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia (USCIRF Director of Policy and Research 2009-2015)
Seiple	Chris Seiple CEO, The Sagestone Group (President 2003-2015 & President Emeritus 2015-2016, Institute for Global Engagement)	Young	Michael Young President, Texas A&M (USCIRF Commissioner 1999-2005)
Shea	Nina Shea Director, Center for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute (USCIRF Commissioner 1999-2012; Director of the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House 1996-2006)	Wolcott	Ambassador Jackie Wolcott Board of Governors, International Atomic Energy and Representative Vienna office, Nominee to be U.S. Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and UN Mission in Vienna (USCIRF Commissioner 2016-2018; Executive Director 2010-2015)
Smith	Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ) (Member of Congress 1981-Present)	Wolf	Former Congressman Frank Wolf Distinguished Senior Fellow, 21Wilberforce (Member of Congress 1981-2015)
Stasney	Rev. Jon Stasney, Rector Emeritus, Ret Christ Church Anglican, Midland, TX (Former President of Midland Ministerial Alliance and former President of Midland Association of Churches)	Zogby	Dr. Jim Zogby Founder and President, Arab American Institute (USCIRF Commissioner 2013-2017)

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- [H.R. 2431](#) — “Freedom From Religious Persecution Act of 1997”
- [S. 1868](#) — “International Religious Freedom Act of 1998”
- [P.L. 105-292](#) — “International Religious Freedom Act of 1998”
- [H.R. 1150 / P.L. 114-281](#) — “Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act”
- [National Security Strategy of the United States of America](#), December 2017
- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), Article 18
- [Jackson-Vanik Amendment](#) to the Trade Act of 1974
- [Helsinki Final Act](#), Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1975
- Interim and Final Reports of the Secretary of State’s Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, [1998](#) and [1999](#)
- U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom Report, [2017](#)

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Ambassador-at-Large: This position was created in the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), P.L. 105-292. Appointed by the President and Senate-confirmed, the Ambassador is a principal advisor to the President and the Secretary of State on matters affecting religious freedom abroad and heads the Office of International Religious Freedom in the State Department. The Ambassador also serves ex officio on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: IRFA requires the preparation and transmittal to Congress of an Annual Report on International Religious Freedom detailing the status of religious freedom in each foreign country, violations of religious freedom by foreign governments, and United States actions and policies in support of religious freedom. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) also issues an Annual Report.

Blasphemy: Blasphemy is the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God. Seventy-one of the world's 195 countries have blasphemy laws. Some governments justify these laws, which criminalize acts and expression deemed contemptuous of sacred things, as necessary to promote religious harmony. In fact, they do the opposite: they restrict the freedoms of religion and expression, thereby violating two of the most hallowed human rights, and lead to abuses and the destabilization of societies.

Civil Society: Civil society refers to a wide array of organized and unorganized groups: community groups, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations. When mobilized, civil society - sometimes called the "third sector" (after government and commerce) - has the power to influence the actions of elected policy-makers and businesses.

In addition to advocacy, civil society provides humanitarian aid and development.

CPCs: The International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requires an annual review of the status of religious freedom worldwide and a country of particular concern (CPC) designation of those countries that have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom" during the reporting period. (See definition below of "particularly severe violations of religious freedom.") The President's authority to designate CPCs has been delegated to the Secretary of State.

Demarche: A demarche is a diplomatic or political course of action. In terms of IRFA, a private demarche or public demarche are among the many actions available to the President as a response to countries identified as engaging in or tolerating religious persecution.

Designated Persons List for Particularly Severe Violations of Religious Freedom: The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 114-281) directs the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Ambassador-at-Large and in consultation with relevant government and nongovernment experts, to establish and maintain a list of foreign individuals to whom the consular post has denied a visa or who are subject to financial sanctions, or other measures on grounds of particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The law also requires the Secretary to submit to Congress a report that contains the list and a description of the actions taken, and requires updates to the report every 180 days thereafter and as new information becomes available

Diplomacy: Diplomacy is the profession, activity, or skill of managing international relations, typically by a country's representatives abroad. It can also include the work of nongovernmental elements and international civil servants. Practices include dialogue, negotiation and other measures at

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summit meetings, international conferences, and parliamentary diplomacy.

DRL: The State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) is responsible for U.S. efforts to promote democracy, protect human rights and international religious freedom, and advance labor rights globally. The Office of International Religious Freedom is housed within the DRL.

Entities of Particular Concern: The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 114-281) requires the President to identify non-state actors engaged in severe religious freedom abuses and designate them as entities of particular concern, or EPCs.

Ethnic Cleansing: Ethnic cleansing is the deliberate and systematic removal of an ethnic or religious group from a specific geographical area. The UN Security Council in 1994 confirmed a 1992 United Nations Report (Final Report of Experts Established Pursuant to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 780) that ethnic cleansing is a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.

Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 114-281): Recognizing the need to update the tools in IRFA to address violations to freedom of religion or belief, Congress introduced and passed P.L. 114-281, the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act. President Obama signed the law in December 2016. Among its provisions, the law created a "Special Watch List" of countries that engage in or tolerate severe violations of religious freedom but do not meet the CPC threshold; required the identification of non-state actors as "Entities of Particular Concern;" mandated religious freedom training and recommendations to the Secretary of State about the curriculum to be used for religious freedom training for foreign service

officers; created a Designated Persons List for Particularly Severe Violations of Religious Freedom; and required USCIRF to compile a prisoners list.

Freedom of Conscience: The right to follow one's own beliefs in matters of religion and morality is considered freedom of conscience. Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaims that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." The UDHR underscores that religious freedom is a conscience right.

Genocide: The U.S. Department of Justice defines genocide as including violent attacks with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.

Global Magnitsky Act (P.L. 114-328): The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act authorizes the President to impose U.S. entry and property sanctions against any foreign person (or entity) who: is responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights committed against individuals in any foreign country seeking to expose illegal activity carried out by government officials, or to obtain, exercise, or promote human rights and freedoms; acted as an agent of or on behalf of a foreign person in such activities; is a government official or senior associate of such official responsible for, or complicit in, ordering or otherwise directing acts of significant corruption; or has materially assisted or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services in support of, such activities.

Human Rights: Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever their nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. These

rights, to which all are equally entitled without discrimination, are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible and often are expressed and guaranteed in treaties, customary international law, general principles and other sources of international law. International human rights law obligates governments to act in certain ways or refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups. The principle of universality of human rights, first emphasized in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, has been restated in many international human rights conventions, declarations, and resolutions.

Impunity: Impunity is the exemption from punishment or freedom from the injurious consequences of an action. The impunity of governments has facilitated the rise of non-state actors and encouraged vigilante violence.

The International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief (ICG-FoRB): The ICG-FoRB is an international consortium of like-minded executive branches that works to enhance information sharing and cooperation between states committed to protecting and promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief.

The International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPP-FoRB): The IPP-FoRB is an informal network of more than 130 parliamentarians and legislators from around the world committed to combatting religious persecution and advancing freedom of religion or belief, as defined by Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration for Human Rights. All participating parliamentarians agree to the Charter's principles to advance religious freedom for all, including the right to believe or not believe, change faith, and share faith with others.

IRFA: President Clinton in 1998 signed into law the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) (P.L. 105-292). IRFA sought to give the U.S. government the

tools to address violations abroad of the freedom of religion or belief. Among other provisions, IRFA stipulates that the President should designate as CPCs those countries that commit “systematic, ongoing, and egregious” violations of religious freedom, and provides a menu of actions that the U.S. government should take in consequence of this designation.

The Marrakesh Declaration: In January 2016, Muslim scholars, politicians, activists, and interfaith clergy from around the world gathered in Marrakesh, Morocco, to address the rights of minorities living in Muslim-majority areas of the world. The conference resulted in the Marrakesh Declaration, a call to action grounded in the historic Charter of Medina, which was forged by Prophet Muhammad as a form of contractual citizenship to ensure equal treatment of all in a multicultural society. Those signing the Marrakesh Declaration affirmed that minority rights have a precedent in, and are essential to, Islamic law and tradition in accordance with international legal standards. They further called on politicians, scholars, artists, and others in Muslim-majority societies to advance the protection of minority rights based on equal citizenship through legal, political, and social processes, to ensure that minority communities, indigenous for centuries in the present-day Muslim world, can continue to flourish there.

Mass Atrocities: While there is no formal legal definition of mass atrocities, the consensus is that mass atrocities are large scale and systematic violence, deliberately inflicted against civilians. The legal categories most often associated with mass atrocities are genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Ethnic cleansing also is considered a mass atrocity but does not have a legal codification. Also, the conceptual boundaries between these terms can be unclear. Key to responding to mass atrocities is taking actions in countries in which early warning signs exist and nations use a full range of diplomatic and program interventions to mitigate atrocities risk.

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Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom: The State Department hosted the first-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom July 24-26, 2018. The Ministerial sought to reaffirm international commitments to promote religious freedom, convening a broad range of stakeholders, including foreign ministers, international organization representatives, religious leaders, and civil society representatives, to discuss challenges, identify concrete ways to combat religious persecution and discrimination, and ensure greater respect for religious freedom for all.

NGO: Non-Governmental Organizations or NGOs are non-profit citizens' groups that function separately from government to provide advocacy and assistance at the local, national or international level. NGOs focus on a variety of social or political issues, such as human rights, religious freedom, and development.

Non-State Actors: The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 114-281) defines a non-state actor as "a non-sovereign entity that exercises significant political power and territorial control; is outside the control of a sovereign government; and often employs violence in pursuit of its objectives."

Particularly Severe Violations of Religious Freedom: As defined in IRFA, "particularly severe violations of religious freedom" means "systematic, ongoing, egregious" violations of religious freedom including: torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; prolonged detention without charges; causing the disappearance of persons by the abduction or clandestine detention of those persons; or other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of persons. The Secretary of State's determination that the government of a country has engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom is key to a country being designated a CPC, "Country of Particular Concern."

Persecution: Persecution is hostility and persistent

mistreatment of a person or group of people based on ethnicity, political or religious beliefs, or a combination of all. The impact of persecution can range from mild discrimination, marginalization and harassment to hostility, imprisonment, torture and even death.

Pew Report: Since 2009, The Pew Research Center annually has issued a study on global restrictions on religion, measuring both government restrictions and social hostilities. The June 2018 study, using data from 2016, found increases in the overall level of restrictions governments or private actors (groups and individuals) imposed in the 198 countries examined.

Pluralism: Pluralism is the existence of people of different races, religious beliefs, and cultures within the same society, or the belief that this is a good thing.

Prisoners of Conscience: Prisoners of Conscience (POCs) are individuals who have been unjustly prevented from enjoying the most fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international human rights instruments and standards.

Refugee: A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

Religious Freedom: Freedom of religion is the right of an individual to choose a religion (or no religion at all) in which to believe and practice without interference by the government. Freedom of religion is guaranteed and enshrined as the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Religious Minorities: Religious minorities are members of religious groups that comprise a

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minority of the population within a country, state or region. In nations worldwide, they are the targets of discrimination and persecution simply because of their religious beliefs, affiliations, actions, and/or advocacy.

Sanctions: Sanctions are a tool that nations and nongovernmental agencies use to influence or punish other nations or non-state actors. While most sanctions are economic, they also may carry the threat of diplomatic or military consequences. Sanctions can be imposed unilaterally by one nation, or bilaterally by a group of nations.

Specially Designated Nationals List: As part of its enforcement efforts, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) publishes a list of individuals and companies owned, controlled by, or acting on behalf of targeted countries. The list also includes individuals, groups, and entities that are not country-specific. Their assets are blocked and U.S. persons generally are prohibited from dealing with them.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): The United Nations General Assembly adopted the UDHR on December 10, 1948. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, it is the most universal human rights document in existence, delineating the thirty fundamental rights that form the basis for a democratic society.

USCIRF: The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) was created under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act. USCIRF monitors the violations of religious freedom abroad and makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. USCIRF uses two tiers to rank countries on which it reports.

U.S. Helsinki Commission: The U.S. Helsinki Commission, also known as the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), is an independent U.S. government agency created

in 1975 to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) commitments. The CSCE seeks to promote human rights, military security, and economic cooperation in 57 countries in Europe, Eurasia, and North America. The Commission consists of nine members from the House of Representatives, nine members from the Senate, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce. The House and Senate share the positions of Chair and Co-Chair, which rotate every two years when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

Watch List Countries: Those countries identified as having engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom, but which do not meet sufficient criteria to be designated as countries of particular concern, are instead included on the President's "Special Watch List." The new class of designation was added to IRFA with The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-281). This authority was delegated to the Secretary of State.

AUTHORS

Erin Rodewald

Ms. Rodewald is a writer, researcher, analyst, and communications strategist specializing in international religious freedom, foreign policy, and American politics. She joined 21Wilberforce in 2018 as Editor.

With more than 25 years of communications experience, Erin has provided strategic public relations counsel for public affairs, business-to-business, and high tech clients. She served as the press secretary for the president of the Los Angeles City Council, and helped organize and execute the international events and initiatives of the Ronald Reagan Centennial Celebration, commemorating the 100th birthday of the 40th president.

She is the co-owner of a Los Angeles-based high tech public relations firm. Erin holds a Masters of Public Policy degree from Pepperdine University and a bachelor's degree in Communications from California State University, Fullerton.

Lou Ann Sabatier

Ms. Sabatier has four decades of experience in publishing, marketing and communications. Early in her career Sabatier was in senior management for publishing operations in the U.S. and globally. Sabatier then pivoted to consulting to publishers and content creators. For 25 years she has led a global consulting consortium with 15 professionals experienced in multiple disciplines of publishing and communications.

With more than 200 assignments completed, clients include a list as diverse as World Vision/ Save the Children, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD, the Federal Reserve Bank, National Geographic, the U.S. Marine Corps, and the Chronicle of Higher Education. Sabatier served on the board of Magazine Training International (MTI) for five years and continues to provide training for MTI around the world.

Sabatier currently serves as the Director of Communications for 21Wilberforce where she oversees the website, newsletters, social media, collateral material, press and the International Religious Freedom Congressional Scorecard.