

## **Congress Urged to Take Action on Global Crisis in Religious Persecution**

*Lack of strategy will have catastrophic consequences for “persons of faith everywhere,” U.S. national security, says bipartisan group of national thought leaders*

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WASHINGTON (July 20, 2015) – A bipartisan group of national thought leaders has called upon Congress to take action now to develop a national strategy addressing the tragic global crisis in religious freedom. With the current catastrophic state of international religious persecution, violence and terrorism, a deficient foreign policy will have dire consequences for religious minorities worldwide as well as for U.S. national security.

The letter was hand delivered Thursday, July 16, 2015, to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Speaker of the House John Boehner, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi.

Representing people of all faiths, the signatories include a broad and bipartisan cross section of religious leaders, public intellectuals and scholars from universities, policy organizations, national commissions and churches. They include **Ken Starr**, president and chancellor of Baylor University; Former **Sen. Joe Lieberman**; **William Galston**, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution; **Imam Talal Eid**, Islamic Institute of Boston and former Commissioner, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom; **Leonard Leo**, former Chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom; **Dr. Douglas Johnston**, president of the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy; **His Eminence Cardinal Donald Wuerl**, Archbishop of Washington; **Rick Warren**, founder and senior pastor of Saddleback Community Church; **Mary Ann Glendon**, Learned Hand Professor of Law at Harvard University; and **Alan Dershowitz**, Professor of Law, Emeritus and Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law, Emeritus, Harvard Law School.

The group has urged Congress to support H.R. 1150 (introduced by Rep. Chris Smith along with Rep. Anna Eshoo), which would amend the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. This action would give the Ambassador-at-Large for international religious freedom the authority and resources to develop a national strategy to protect global religious freedom and advance the cause of religious liberty in American foreign policy. This would include mandatory training for all foreign service officers, deputy chiefs of mission and country ambassadors.

“The freedom to practice one’s religion without fear is the precious birthright of every human being, of whatever class, status, or location on the earth,” the letter states. “It is also the providence of persons of faith, everywhere. Of all people, we Americans should be united in defending this human right – on behalf of those who suffer grievously for its absence, and for the noble and essential cause of protecting our own beloved country.”

The letter is below.

July 14, 2015

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader of the Senate  
United States Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Boehner  
The Speaker of the House of Representatives  
United States Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Minority Leader of the Senate  
United States Capitol

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader of the House of Representatives  
United States Capitol

Washington, D.C. 20515

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Dear Senator McConnell, Senator Reid, Mr. Speaker and Minority Leader Pelosi:

We write as a diverse group of religious leaders, public intellectuals and scholars to urge Congressional action on the issue of international religious persecution that threatens people of faith worldwide and our national security.

We are gratified that religious liberty will be a subject of discussion between President Obama and Pope Francis during the Pope's visit to the White House this September.

The attention of these two world leaders to this issue is both timely and urgent. We are witnessing a tragic, global crisis in religious persecution, violence, and terrorism, with dire consequences for religious minorities and for the national security of the United States.

According to the non-partisan Pew Research Center, over three-quarters of the world's people live in countries where restrictions on religion are severe. Anti-Semitism is rising at an alarming rate in the Middle East and, most troubling of all, in Europe. Christians in the Middle East, South and East Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa are being subjected to horrific violence. The very presence of the ancient Christian community in Iraq is at risk.

Muslim minorities, and disfavored members of Muslim majority communities, are increasingly subjected to persecution. Indeed, religious minorities the world over are suffering unjust discrimination and unconscionable persecution.

But the catastrophic state of international religious freedom affects more than the victims. It undermines the national security of the United States. Without religious freedom, aspiring democracies will remain unstable. Economic growth and development will be more difficult to achieve. The advancement of the rights of women and girls will continue to be obstructed.

Perhaps most important of all, religious terrorism will continue to be incubated, nourished, and exported. In 1998 Congress passed – unanimously – the International Religious Freedom Act, which mandates the protection of religious freedom in America's foreign policy. The policy created by that law has developed under three administrations of both parties. Four ambassadors at large for international religious freedom have served our country. We wish to express our support for the current ambassador at large, David Saperstein.

Ambassador Saperstein's job is at once exceedingly important and exceedingly difficult. He must develop and implement a strategy for the United States to undermine religious persecution and protect the free exercise of religion in scores of nations around the world. And yet, notwithstanding the stakes involved, Ambassador Saperstein lacks both the authority to develop a national strategy and the resources to carry it out.

H.R. 1150 would remedy these deficiencies by amending the International Religious Freedom Act to give Ambassador Saperstein the status that other ambassadors at large at the Department of State enjoy, the authority to develop an interagency strategy to protect global religious freedom, and the resources he needs to implement that strategy. It would also mandate training for all foreign service officers, deputy chiefs of mission, and country ambassadors. This training would ensure that our diplomats fully understand and can effectively defend the free expression of religion worldwide, the enduring value of religious freedom and its relationship to national security, and how to advance the cause of religious liberty in our foreign policy.

We urge you to support H.R. 1150. This is not a partisan or party issue. The freedom to practice one's religion without fear is the precious birthright of every human being, of whatever class, status, or location on the earth. It is also the providence of persons of faith, everywhere. Of all people, we Americans should be united in defending this human right – on behalf of those who suffer grievously for its absence, and for the noble and essential cause of protecting our own beloved country.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Winston Starr  
*President and Chancellor, Baylor University*

Don Argue, Ed.D.  
*Ambassador At Large, Convoy of Hope and  
Former Vice Chairman, United States  
Commission on International Religious Freedom*

Gerard V. Bradley  
*Professor of Law, University of Notre Dame*

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, ofm cap  
*Archbishop of Philadelphia*

Michael Cromartie  
*Vice President, Ethics & Public Policy Center*

Alan Dershowitz  
*Professor of Law, Emeritus and Felix  
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Most Rev. William Murphy  
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Chris Seiple  
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*Founder and President, Center for  
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*His Eminence Cardinal Donald Wuerl  
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*Affiliations, where provided, are for  
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