

December 17, 2020

TO: Biden-Harris Transition Team

We are U.S. religious institutions and faith-based organizations engaged with partners throughout the world. We urge you to re-create the Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs to serve as head of a revitalized Office of Religion and Global Affairs (S/RGA).

Since the Obama Administration the State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs has been a vital partner for us and our work. Under the Obama Administration this office carried out a wide variety of vital functions but was subsequently reduced in scope and effectiveness.

Religion plays a vital role in every society, and religious leaders, institutions, and constituents have a tremendous impact on national policies. The Office of Religion and Global Affairs has served as a unique and irreplaceable focal point where U.S. government officials can deepen their own knowledge of religious actors and foster relationships with and across religious communities. The Office helped the government to assess religious dynamics and engage religious actors in support of foreign policy goals. As religious communities, we could support that office and further our mutual goals of peace and development. In today's world such engagement is more critical than ever.

When operating at its originally intended capacity and purpose, the Office of Religion and Global Affairs serves U.S. policy goals and assists our organizations in many ways, such as:

- Opening doors for our partners around the globe to meet with Administration officials who are decision-makers in the development of policies that directly affect their countries and communities.
- Making it possible to bring our experience from troubled regions of the world to the attention of State Department decision-makers, serving as a critical link between concerned U.S. people of faith who live or work outside of the United States and U.S. officials interested in supporting effective solutions to global challenges.
- Helping reduce and/or avert violence in global conflict areas by engaging the perspectives and on-the-ground experience of U.S. faith communities and our partners abroad.
- Including U.S. religious organizations and institutions in the policy formulation process to ensure that U.S. policies are culturally appropriate and speak to a variety of religious principles that highlight the importance of economic, environmental, and health-related issues.
- Developing a sophisticated understanding of global religions and religious actors so as to provide in-depth analysis and information to help shape nuanced U.S. policy approaches and responses.

- Convening discussions on how State Department personnel can engage with local faith-based organizations (FBOs) in areas of conflict/humanitarian crises that affect our partner religious communities around the world.
- Providing crucial information that helps us galvanize support for U.S. foreign policies of importance to people of faith in the U.S. and our partners around the world.

We also highly value the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) and believe that IRF and S/RGA work best as separate offices under the Secretary of State. We urge President Biden to restore the State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs to full capacity and designate the Special Advisor to the Secretary as its head.

The Special Representative and Office of Religion and Global Affairs can once again serve the United States as a valued nexus between U.S. policymakers and people of faith in addressing international concerns.

Thank you and blessings.

Africa Faith and Justice Network
 American Jewish World Service
 Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
 Bread for the World
 Center on Conscience and War
 Christian Connections for International Health
 Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
 Church World Service
 Churches for Middle East Peace
 Creation Justice Ministries
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
 Food for the Hungry
 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
 Helping Hand for Relief and Development
 Islamic Relief USA
 Jewish Council for Public Affairs
 Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
 National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
 National Council of Churches
 National Religious Campaign Against Torture
 Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church
 Pax Christi USA

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Shoulder to Shoulder

The Episcopal Church

The Union for Reform Judaism

The United Methodist Church- General Board of Church and Society

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

World Renew

World Vision

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