

# Executive Summary

## **THE ISSUE**

- The International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), signed into law by President Clinton, established a mandate to advance religious freedom using the tools of U.S. foreign policy.
- Religious freedom is valued highly by Americans and most foreign publics (if not their governments or religious leaders) and is affirmed in international law. Advancing this fundamental human right is a matter of justice.
- International religious freedom (IRF) is also an international security issue. Its absence is associated with religious terrorism and instability. Its presence is necessary for stable democracy, including civil society, economic growth, and social harmony.

## **THE PROBLEM**

- U.S. IRF policy to date has focused more on rhetorical denunciations of persecutors and releasing religious prisoners than on facilitating the political and cultural institutions necessary to religious freedom. Accordingly, U.S. policy has had minimal effect on global levels of persecution and even less on the institutions of religious freedom.
- U.S. IRF policy is often viewed abroad as an attack on majority religious communities, as cultural imperialism, and as a front for American missionaries. However inaccurate, these perceptions have dramatically curtailed the policy's impact.
- U.S. IRF policy has not been integrated into U.S. democracy programs, public diplomacy, counterterrorism, or multilateral diplomacy and international law.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

### *Set a Clear Policy Course*

- The President and Secretary of State should publicly proclaim that U.S. IRF policy:
  - » is vital to U.S. interests in the world, including our quest for justice and our defense of American security.
  - » will be expanded under the Obama administration to address sympathetically the religion-state problems faced by societies transitioning to democracy, and to address the needs of majority, as well as minority, religious communities.
  - » will be integrated into democracy promotion, public diplomacy, counter-terrorism, and multilateral strategies.

### *Retool American Diplomacy*

- Appoint an IRF Ambassador-at-Large with experience in foreign policy *and* religious freedom, one capable of integrating IRF into other policy areas.
- Place the IRF Ambassador under the Secretary of State, as IRFA intended.
- Institute a religion/religious freedom subspecialty under the political, economic, and public diplomacy career tracks for Foreign Service Officers.
- Mandate, in the President's letter of instruction to U.S. ambassadors, the allocation of embassy resources to engage religious actors, ideas, and communities, and to advance religious freedom broadly understood.
- Require every U.S. mission abroad, and every regional bureau at the Department of State, to develop a religious freedom strategy as part of its annual program planning.
- Encourage the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to monitor the administration's progress toward integrating IRF policy into the mainstream of foreign policy.
- Encourage the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to establish sub-committees on IRF.

### *Reenergize Democracy Promotion*

- Integrate religious freedom into all U.S. democracy planning and programs, such as those at the U.S. Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy.
- Integrate the office of the IRF Ambassador-at-Large into all strategic and operational decisions regarding democracy promotion and programming.
- Support, via foreign aid and democracy funding, religious and secular non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world who seek to advance religious freedom as part of democratic development.
- Encourage nations and multilateral institutions that have been supportive of IRF to integrate IRF strategies into democracy and civil society programs.

### *Make Public Diplomacy More Effective*

- Encourage institutions such as the U.S. Commission on IRF to provide resources on IRF to public diplomacy officials. Likewise, President Obama's new Advisory Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships should address these issues as it works with the National Security Council to foster interfaith dialogue with leaders and scholars around the world.
- Appoint public diplomacy leaders who understand the significance of religious liberty in America and abroad. Public diplomacy leadership calls for more than communications and marketing credentials.
- Ensure that expertise on the relevance of religious freedom to public diplomacy is present in the State Department's regional bureaus.
- Ensure U.S. public diplomacy officials are familiar with theological principles within various religious traditions that support civil society and constitutional government.
- Seek the counsel of religious individuals and NGOs with experience in target cultures. Establish within the Department of State a formal outreach program to key American religious minority communities.
- Encourage existing public and private diplomatic institutions to increase

interfaith dialogues and exchanges. In addition, encourage the establishment of privately funded Islamic and Hindu Institutes of American Studies.

***Employ Religious Freedom as an Element of Counterterrorism Strategy***

- Establish under the aegis of the National Security Adviser an interagency task force to examine how IRF policy can contribute to diplomatic counterterrorism strategies. Issue a national security directive integrating IRF policy into counterterrorism policy.
- Provide a representative from the State Department IRF office to all counterterrorism agencies. The IRF Ambassador-at-Large should serve as a Special Assistant to the President on religion and national security issues. Assign a senior advisor on counterterrorism to the IRF Ambassador-at-Large.
- Seek the counsel of religious actors and groups who have deep experience in target cultures, as well as American-based clerics and scholars, in order to increase American understanding of extremist and terrorist groups and how to defeat them.
- Encourage the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to continue and expand its efforts to study the effects of religious freedom on religious extremism.

***Engage Multilateral Institutions and International Law***

- Reinvigorate U.S. leadership on religious freedom in multilateral institutions. Strengthen existing UN institutions that have specialized expertise on religious freedom. Place a senior IRF official in the U.S. mission to the UN.
- Form coalitions of like-minded countries and other international actors who have a shared interest in promoting religious freedom in a particular country or region.
- Increase the administration's commitment to international human rights monitoring institutions, including those that monitor and report on human rights and religious freedom in the United States.
- Internationalize the President's "bully pulpit" with respect to religious freedom promotion. President Obama should seek opportunities to speak jointly with other world leaders about religious freedom as a universal human right.

- Develop programs in key countries to educate religious groups and lawyers about victim's rights under international law and about complaint and reporting mechanisms available to them within international institutions.