



RELIGION AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS

"We ignore the global impact of religion, in my judgment, at our peril."

- Secretary of State John Kerry

Religion has a significant impact on a range of U.S. foreign policy priorities, making it critical that we continue and strengthen our efforts to assess religious dynamics and engage religious actors while pursuing our diplomacy and development objectives. With 84 percent of people around the world identifying with a religious group, religion is a powerful force in global politics and civil society—one that must be taken seriously.

Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement: A Presidential Priority

At the highest levels, the U.S. Government recognizes the relevance of religion to our diplomacy and development objectives. In July 2013, the White House issued a National Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement. The National Strategy calls for advancing U.S. foreign policy by engaging religious actors and institutions on three priority issue areas:

- Promoting sustainable development and more effective humanitarian assistance;
- Advancing pluralism and human rights, including the protection of religious freedom; and
- Preventing, mitigating, and resolving violent conflict and contributing to local and regional stability and security.

Building Capacity at the State Department: The Office of Religion and Global Affairs

The same month that the National Strategy was launched, Secretary of State John Kerry created the Office of Religion and Global Affairs (initially called the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives), selecting Dr. Shaun Casey as its leader. The office:

- Advises the Secretary on policy matters as they relate to religion;
- Assists Posts and Bureaus in their efforts to assess religious dynamics and engage with religious actors; and

- Serves as a first point of entry for individuals, both religious and secular, who would like to engage the State Department in Washington on matters of religion and global affairs.

In order to maximize strategic collaboration between special envoys and representatives working at the intersection of religion and foreign policy, the Secretary consolidated a number of existing offices within the Office of Religion and Global Affairs. The Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, the Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and the Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation are now part of the Office of Religion and Global Affairs but maintain their special mandates.

Promoting International Religious Freedom: An Enduring State Department Mandate

The Office of Religion and Global Affairs complements the work of the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and the Office of International Religious Freedom in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, which will continue to execute their Congressional mandate to monitor, report on, and promote the human right to religious freedom. The Ambassador-at-Large and his office remain the primary interlocutors for religious leaders, civil society, government officials and Posts on all issues regarding the right to religious freedom. The Ambassador-at-Large and the Office of Religion and Global Affairs coordinate their efforts and work closely on areas of overlapping concern, such as combatting anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

<http://www.state.gov/s/rga/>

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