Committee on House Oversight and Government Reform
Sub-Committee on National Security

Examining the Government's Record on
Implementing the International Religious Freedom Act

Statement for the Record
Chris Seiple, Ph.D.
President
Institute for Global Engagement

13 June 2013

Mr. Chair, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the privilege of discussing this foundational issue, especially this month, and this week. On June 1, 1660, Mary Dyer was hung on the Boston Common for not believing in God the same way as the Protestant majority did. 321 years ago this week, citizens of Salem, Massachusetts, were convicted and hung as "witches." And fifty years ago this week, George Wallace proclaimed "segregation forever" between a white Protestant majority and a black Protestant minority (incredibly, a full 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation).

As we look in the mirror, mindful of such memory, there can be no recourse but humility. Yet, that same mirror also brings honor.

We also remember this week our first Catholic president, who did not tolerate the intolerance of George Wallace. He asked us, that warm June 11th evening, not to be defined by what we are against, but by what we are for; because all Americans must be treated as equal citizens under the rule of law. President Kennedy reminded us fifty years ago this week that "We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution."

In 1636, another man from Massachusetts, Roger Williams, fled the theocracy of that state to found Rhode Island. He believed strongly that "forced worship stinks in the nostrils of God." Therefore, God was glorified when every single human being—created by Him, in His own image—had the opportunity to choose faith freely. As a function of his Christian faith, Williams lived the example of a society where, from the bottom-up, Native Americans (from whom he bought the initial land), Jews, Baptists, Quakers, to name a few, lived in civil manner toward each other.

As a result, Rhode Island was also a state that was stable. "Witches" and Quakers were not hung in Rhode Island because beliefs other than the majority were not considered a mortal threat to the state. Instead, Rhode Island citizens discussed their differences; for example,

Roger Williams publicly debated the Quakers, with whom he disagreed vigorously, but not violently. Williams' brilliance, however, was to institutionalize this thinking from the top-down. The 1663 Colonial Charter of Rhode Island explicitly links the civility of society and the stability of the state through religious freedom.

In other words, as our founding fathers realized, religious freedom was not only the right thing to do, according to the Golden Rule found in most holy scriptures; it was in everyone's self-interest, and needed to be institutionalized in the constitution. President Kennedy was exactly right. While the holy scriptures command us to love neighbor, and enemy, they can be and have been used to validate violence. The God-given liberty of the human condition must be ordered to ensure that the right thing is done.

And that is the exceptionalism of the American experiment: we have a system capable of self-critique and therefore self-correction, based on a socially-owned and legally-protected freedom of conscience to believe whatever we want. Only such a system could have evolved from the original sin of our founding, slavery, such that the majority Protestant culture could treat a different race, largely of the same religious tradition, as equal citizens under the rule of law. But it took the top-down of our government through Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and the bottom-up of the faith communities, led by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to make it happen.

It took too long, and we have work to do, but this top-down/bottom-up approach, rooted in mutual respect and self-interest, is not only unique, it is the model for our future. Religious freedom/respect-for-the-other just doesn't happen: there must be an intentional strategy to constantly re-weave it into the fabric of our own society, and the structures of our state, as we come alongside other countries that seek the same.

*****

As president of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), a religious freedom organization, I live these issues every day. For more than a decade, IGE has worked at the critical intersection of faith and international affairs, toward a future in which people of all faiths and none have full freedom of conscience and equal citizenship. IGE advances the view that religious freedom—properly implemented—is integral to a flourishing society, and a stable state. IGE does so transparently, convening, connecting, and facilitating consensus among government officials, religious leaders, and scholars about the essential role of religious freedom in their region and country.

Like Roger Williams, we are clearly Christian who just as clearly work for all faiths and none. That is, we believe that each individual on this planet has the God-given freedom to choose, change, share, or reject any and all faiths. As a result, we also believe that each individual has the same freedom to bring his/her beliefs—the essence of their identity—into the public square and debate any faith or any issue according to the teachings of his/her faith (with the obvious

exception of those whose "faith" teaches violence against others, which is a criminal/terrorist issue, not a religious one).

When faiths are allowed to teach and live out their respective and often irreconcilable theologies amidst the public context of principled pluralism, then the common good is served. Such theology makes for better citizens who resist corruption; who honor the sanctity of a contract and promote good business practices; and, who confront those who would manipulate belief for political gain. Such a result requires the government to allow such teaching and practice; and it requires faith communities to ensure that those who lead and teach their congregations are equipped to do so. For the state, "seminary" is good for society and security.

Of course, the opposite is also true. Where there is repression of the freedom of conscience or belief, and the capacity of the religious community to contribute to the common good, there is more likely to be significant social if not security problems. No one likes to be tolerated, and no one likes to be restricted in practicing the core of their identity. It is not long before repressed people agitate against the state.

At IGE, we work to create a space where government and (especially ethnic minority) religious leaders can discuss how faith contributes to the well-being of society, in a mutually respectful manner. IGE works with local partners, including the top-down of government officials and the bottom-up of religious leaders, to help build a public table, as it were, where all faiths and none are invited to dinner. Through the inclusion of all as equal citizens, an awareness is created that, no matter the particular issue, all faiths and none can contribute to the common good, i.e., to a society that is civil and a state that is stable.

Our relational diplomacy varies by country, but we and our partners seek a religious freedom that is socially-owned from the bottom-up, and legally-protected from the top-down. Such an approach requires nuance, as religion, or particular religious minorities, are often understood as the problem. We (IGE and its partners) work to demonstrate that the best of faith defeats the worst of religion, if given the chance. In short, we are in the business of changing mindsets in order to change behavior; and that requires not just a space for the conversation, but the scholarship and training standard to inspire and institutionalize a different approach to religious freedom.

For example, we just celebrated the 10th anniversary of our journal, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, the only one of its kind in the world (Routledge Press). Moreover, in the last three years we have co-authored or co-edited three thought leading books: *International Religious Freedom Advocacy: A Guide to Organizations, Law, and NGOs* (Baylor Press, 2009); *Religion and Foreign Affairs* (Baylor, 2012); and, *The Routledge Handbook on Religion & Security* (2013).

As a think-and-do-organization, however, this thinking must be applied through training, at home and abroad, if citizens are to maintain or first understand this universal principle in the context of their culture and the rule of law. Since 2010, for example, we have trained over 6000

Asian officials and religious leaders at the national and provincial levels in religion and the rule of law; religion, security, and citizenship; religious freedom; conflict resolution; and peace-building.

As an outgrowth of these experiences at the intersection of hard and soft power, we have established the Center for Women of Faith & Leadership. The only thing less included in international affairs than religion, is religious women. They are needed now—in every vocation—to demonstrate practically how faith contributes to the civility and stability of society and state.

Personally, I have also had the privilege of helping to create a training course on social-cultural-religious engagement for the U.S. Army Chaplaincy (2010-2012), and I have keynoted the Foreign Service Institute's first four elective courses on religion and foreign policy (2011-2012, with the fifth taking place in August).

Finally, with the blessing of the above experiences, I have had two relevant leadership opportunities. First, I co-founded and co-chair the "International Religious Freedom Roundtable" (2010-present), a bi-monthly meeting of religious freedom organizations that meets here on Capitol Hill to share ideas and invite each other into our respective initiatives. Critically, the first half of that meeting is for NGOs only, after which we invite government officials in to share what we are thinking; i.e., the bottom-up of civil society is inviting the top-down of government into our conversations.

In similar fashion, I was asked by the State Department to serve on its Federal Advisory Committee for the Secretary's "Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society (2011-2015), serving as a senior advisor to the Dialogue's working group on "Religion and Foreign Policy." This working group consisted of approximately 100 scholars, experts, and faith community leaders, producing a "White Paper" last year with recommendations about how the State Department and faith communities might share ideas and partner as appropriate. Put differently, the top-down of the State Department took the initiative to invite the bottom-up of civil society to speak into how U.S. foreign policy is formed and informed.

Both initiatives are unprecedented; and both reflect the nature of our times. I believe that such sharing and partnerships require not only an inherent philosophy or theology of the other—after all no global challenge can be addressed unless we, individually and institutionally, are willing to partner with someone who does not pray or look like we do—but that change is unsustainable unless the top-down and bottom-up are working together in a regular and intentionally organized manner.

*****

It is in the historical, institutional, and personal context of the above, that I make the following observations and recommendations regarding the implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

Foremost, two basic facts should drive our consideration of the issue, past, present, and future. First, 84% of the world's people believe in something greater than themselves. Faith cannot be placed in one category; it permeates all sectors of life.

Second, 75% of the people on our planet now live with government restrictions on their individual freedom of conscience or belief.[1] And new research confirms what we have always known: that where there is less religious freedom, there is less women's empowerment, less economic development, and *more* political instability, conflict, and terrorism.[2]

In other words, at a time when religion is clearly part of the problem, even as faith has never been more relevant amidst the psychological and spiritual dislocation that comes with regional upheaval and globalization, religious freedom worldwide has become worse since the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998.

We can debate this and that but here's the bottom line: What we are doing is not working. And, we are all to blame.

To be sure, IRFA reminded us and institutionalized the best of this country's founding in the U.S. State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Through the reporting of both, America has not only been a voice for those persecuted and harassed for their beliefs, we have created a global standard against which all countries, including our own, should be measured.

Meanwhile, foreign governments know that our government will hold them accountable. As a senior Communist official said to me once, "Whether we like it or not, we recognize religious freedom as a permanent U.S. national interest."

Both have been necessary first steps. But neither is sufficient.

In general, America's religious freedom reporting has been reactive, detailing the mistakes of others. To some extent, this perspective, at least initially, was quite natural: it is much easier to quantify the problem, naming and punishing the symptoms, than to think through the root causes and their interrelationship with other issues in the local context. And, it is hard to fault anyone with such a perspective when our culture, and, as a result, our international relations programs nationwide (from which our Foreign Service Officers graduate), has long believed and therefore taught that one does not talk about religion and politics in polite company.

---

[1] Please see see Brian Grim's work at: http://www.pewforum.org/Government/Rising-Tide-of-Restrictions-on-Religion-findings.aspx.

[2] Brian Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). Also, see Grim's April 2013 TedX talk at the Vatican: http://www.tedxviadellaconciliazione.com/speakers/brian-j-grim/.

September 11, 2001, however, (should have) changed all that. Since then, the United States has engaged multiple areas worldwide where religion suffuses the local environment; so much so that it is like the air, invisible and forgotten. Similarly, and unfortunately, there has been no intentional national strategy to engage religious actors and communities, let alone help build religious freedom in a proactive manner, sensitive to culture and consistent with the rule of law. Consider, for example, that the most recent Quadrennial Defense Review, Quadrennial Diplomacy & Development Review, and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security do not mention "religious engagement," or "religious freedom."

Therefore, if the United States government is to promote and build religious freedom worldwide, it needs to re-consider how it is organized and equipped for this mission, which further requires us to revisit how we conceptualize the mission in the first place.

*****

To begin with, we must think clearly about religious engagement, and religious freedom: Is religious freedom a lesser included set of religious engagement, or vice versa? Personally, I believe that everything is a lesser included set of religious freedom, because everything in this globalized age begins with how I engage the other (in other words, as noted above, nothing gets done without partnering with someone who does not vote or pray as you do).

On the other hand, most do not think that way, and it is hard to institutionalize such thinking, conceptually and structurally. For example, if religious communities across Sub-Saharan Africa are partnering with USAID and other governments to reduce malaria, this partnership would not easily be first understood as religious freedom (even though it does demonstrate that faith communities are contributing to the common good, and thus, are not a threat to social cohesion and stability).

My recommendation, therefore, is that we think of religious freedom as a lesser-included set of religious engagement. Put differently, the U.S. government needs a focal point for religious engagement, beginning at the State Department, that is clearly linked to the Office of International Religious Freedom at the State Department. Such a change to the State Department's structure would allow the Office of International Religious Freedom to focus on just that: religious freedom. (Instead of being a "catch-all" for anything religious, because it is the only office that formally addresses religion in the State Department.)

As I wrote in 2004:

> "There needs to be a one-stop-shopping place where U.S. agencies can go for these issues. There does not now exist an analytical focal point for religion and religious freedom at the operational or strategic level of our government. A "center of excellence" for these issues would serve as a living repository of lessons learned that any U.S. agency might reference for its own global operations. It could also offer timely assessments of the potentially positive and negative implications of a given religion

> across a range of issues and regions. This kind of analysis would, in turn, lead to new models and measures of effectiveness for gauging religion and U.S. policy in international affairs."[3]

Next, the U.S. government needs a global religious engagement strategy—as part and parcel of its national security strategy—that further integrates religious freedom into America's global engagement. The formation of such a strategy would consider how the U.S. actively builds religious engagement and religious freedom into diplomacy, development, and defense in a proactive manner, from the top-down, and the bottom-up. All of which explicitly supports democracy.

Third, the U.S. government must intentionally educate and train U.S. government personnel to integrate religious engagement and religious freedom into their spheres of influence and sectors of work. If 84% of the world believes in something greater than itself, it reasonable to expect religion/religious freedom to be a part of most issues that the U.S. government engages.

Fourth, the U.S. government should follow-up on the recent report of the General Accounting Office on religious freedom. Serious structural and reporting issues were identified that need to be actively addressed; not least the decreasing size of the International Religious Freedom Office, and the reporting structure for the Ambassador-at-Large.[4]

Finally, the U.S. government should consider and develop new structures of engagement and partnership. For example, the State Department's "Religion & Foreign Policy" working group and civil society's "International Religious Freedom Roundtable" are models that need further examination, if not replication: within our government, and worldwide.

Combined, these recommendations might call for a new act of Congress regarding the Global Religious Engagement of our country, detailing the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the relevant government agencies and commissions, while calling for a strategic review after each presidential election.

*****

In a global age defined thus far by our inability to live with our deepest religious differences, America must look to its founding, to the essential element of the American experiment: religious freedom. Meanwhile, the U.S. government must engage faith communities worldwide

---

[3] Chris Seiple, "Religion & Realpolitik: Recommendations for the President," St. Paul Pioneer Press, 12 November 2004 (now available at: https://www.from-the-president-religion-realpolitik-recommendations-for-the-president). Also see, "Religion and the New Global Counterinsurgency," where I argue that a "mature understanding of religious freedom is the greatest preemptive weapons against religious terrorism that we, and the world, possess." (Available at: http://archived.globalengage.org/issues/articles/582-religion-and-the-new-global-counterinsurgency.html.)

[4] Please see GAO Report, "International Religious Freedom Act," March 2013 (available at: http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-196).

pursuant our common global problems: from sex-trafficking and maternal health care to terrorism and issues of citizenship and the rule of law.

Yet, to state the obvious, 2013 is not 1998…simply, the world moves faster, and our people and platforms must have agility and alacrity of mind and action if they are to have any influence, let alone sustainable impact.

We have every reason to be humbled by the worst of our past. But we have every reason to honor the best of our past, by working to include religious communities at home and abroad, partnering where appropriate, demonstrating that they are essential to a society that is civil and a state that is stable. This is true religious freedom. If we honor our values, we will take care of our interests.

Again, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify this month, this week, on this foundational issue. Thank you.

Dr. Seiple Biography

http://globalengage.org/about/people/dr-chris-seiple1

Chris Seiple, Ph.D., is the president of the Institute for Global Engagement, a research, education, and diplomatic institution that builds sustainable religious freedom worldwide through local partnerships.

A graduate of Stanford, the Naval Postgraduate School, and the Fletcher School for Law & Diplomacy, he is also the founder of The Review of Faith & International Affairs, a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (Philadelphia), and a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (London).

His book, The U.S. Military/NGO Relationship in Humanitarian Interventions (The U.S. Army War College, 1996), is a seminal work in the field. Seiple is the co-author of International Religious Freedom Advocacy: A Guide to Organizations, Law, and NGOs (Baylor University Press, 2009), and the co-editor of The Routledge Handbook on Religion & Security (2012). He wrote his 2007 Ph.D. dissertation on the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Uzbekistan.

Seiple is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and serves on its religious advisory committee. Dr. Seiple also serves on the Federal Advisory Committee to the Secretary of State's "Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society" (2011-2015) where he acts as a Senior Advisor to the Committee's "Religion and Foreign Policy" working group.

He is the co-founder and co-chair of the "IRF Roundtable," a non-partisan consortium of Washington-area international religious freedom (IRF) NGOs that meets bi-monthly on Capitol Hill to discuss how best to promote religious freedom in Washington policy circles and worldwide. In addition, Seiple is the Vice-Chair for the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on the Role of Faith (2012-2014).

A former Marine infantry officer, Seiple's last posting was to the Pentagon, where he was a member of the Strategic Initiatives Group, an internal think tank for the Commandant of the Marine Corps. In this capacity he helped to envision what a new national security act might look like, as well as develop and implement the Chemical-Biological Incident Response Force (serving as its liaison to the FBI and the Centers for Disease Control during the 1996 Summer Olympics).

Dr. Seiple is an invited, contributor to the National Journal's national security blog, the Washington Post's "On Faith" blog, and the Social Science Research Council's (SSRC) web forum on religious freedom.

He speaks regularly at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute, U.S. military schools, and within the intelligence community regarding national security, social-cultural-religious engagement, and the interdependence of religion and realpolitik. At the request of the U.S. Army Chaplaincy, Dr.

Seiple designed and implemented the Chaplaincy's first training program for social-cultural-religious strategy and engagement (2010-2012).

Over the years, he has appeared on BBC, MSNBC, Fox News, Saudi TV, Pakistan News One, Vietnam National TV, CN8, and CNN.

Dr. Seiple serves on the Wycliffe Bible Translators, USA, board of directors, and also on the board of advisors for Carolina for Kibera, Inc. He resides in Virginia with his wife, Alissa, and their children, Liam, Hanan, Hadessah, and Ashrei.

To contact Dr. Seiple with a publication or appearance request, please write to Ms. Lindsay Kuntz at lkuntz@globalengage.org.