

Statement of Governor Sam Brownback
Nominee to be Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 4, 2017

Good Morning Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Kaine, and Members of the Committee,

It is an honor to appear before the Committee as the President's nominee for the position of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. I thank the President, Vice President, and Secretary Tillerson for their confidence in me in making this nomination.

Religious freedom is a fundamental right of every human no matter where they live, who they are, or what they believe. It is the right to do with your own Soul what you choose, without the interference of any government or group.

So declares Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

So states our Constitution.

So says our hearts in our universal yearning to be free.

Freedom begins on the inside. It is the nature of our hearts to chaff against bondage. Yet millions in the world live in countries where they are not free to worship and indeed risk their lives to pursue their faith. This Administration will not tolerate the continued assault on of religious freedom.

Promotion of international religious freedom is in our national interest, and it directly supports national security priorities including the defeat of ISIS and other violent extremist groups. When Secretary Tillerson released the 2016 International Religious Freedom Report recently, he noted that, "Where religious freedom is not protected, instability, human rights abuses and violent extremism have a greater opportunity to take root," and, "no one should have to live in fear, worship in fear or face discrimination for his or her beliefs."

Further, the Secretary emphasized that protection of the rights of religious minorities and other victims of violent extremism is a human rights priority for the Trump administration, and that the administration will "continue working with our regional partners to protect religious minority communities from terrorist attacks and to preserve their cultural heritage."

The Congress is to be commended for focusing the federal government on this alarming deterioration of freedom with the groundbreaking International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, an Act I was honored to sponsor. During my fourteen years serving in the United States Senate, I was involved in a diverse range of issues related to religious freedom. I spoke out against atrocities committed against Christians in the Sudan, and pushed passage of the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act in 2005, to expand peacekeeping and logistical support for the region. In 2009, I co-sponsored a resolution condemning the state sponsored persecution of the Baha'i minority in Iran. In 2000, I was instrumental in enacting the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Human trafficking of individuals is often associated with religious persecution.

As a Senator serving on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for eight years, I presided over Senate oversight hearings of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. I fully understand the important role of the Commission in informing United States decision makers and other world leaders about religious freedom. Last year, you passed, and President Obama signed into law, the *Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act* to further address and focus the U.S. government on the dire plight of religious minorities around the world.

This position of Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom is integral to our priority foreign policy goals, and if confirmed I pledge to use my energies and the range of diplomatic tools to strengthen international religious freedom issues and concerns in U.S. foreign policy. As called for in the *International Religious Freedom Act*, I pledge to: “[Stand] for liberty and [stand] with the persecuted, to use and implement appropriate tools in the United States foreign policy apparatus, including diplomatic, political, commercial, charitable, educational, and cultural channels, to promote respect for religious freedom by all governments and peoples.”

You have spoken with clarity and conviction of the commitment of our people to this most basic right. It is now incumbent on the Executive Branch to fully implement the law. If confirmed, I will do my utmost to implement the law to its fullest by working with Department bureaus, posts and missions to elevate and fully integrate international religious freedom into security strategies and strategic planning, and will work with other government agencies to develop a comprehensive whole-of-government approach.

Further, if confirmed, I will press the leaders of other countries for the release of religious prisoners and for needed reforms, and be on alert for bilateral and multilateral opportunities to protect religious freedom victims and advance international religious freedom. I will also review diplomatic training to ensure that there is a strong curriculum that sensitizes all Ambassadors, Chiefs of Mission, officers departing for overseas posts, and all entry-level officers, and ensures that international religious freedom is fully integrated into policy, programs, casework and other initiatives.

Finally, if I am confirmed I will reach out to USCIRF in order to optimize our cooperation, and will meet with religious leaders, people of faith, and civil society groups to pursue our religious freedom goals. And I pledge to look to Congress for wisdom and help, as I know first-hand of the long-standing dedication you have to this cause, and I value your advice.

Time is short. Every passing day finds more people persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and even killed for simply practicing their innermost convictions.

We cannot let this dire situation continue without an aggressive response. We as Americans must stand strong for this first freedom or we will see the world spin into increasing conflicts and violence. We must act to protect and preserve this most basic right for all people.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to your questions.