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It is a great pleasure to be here and I want to thank the International Coalition for Religious Freedom for the invitation to speak at this important conference on religious freedom. I believe the issue of religious freedom is one of the most crucial issues facing governments in the United States, Europe and throughout the world.

The United States of America was founded on the fundamental principle of freedom of religion. America's Founding Fathers believed that religious freedom and a strong democratic system were inseparable. Our first president, George Washington, said that "of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports." The founder of the state of Pennsylvania, William Penn declared, "if we will not be governed by God, we must be governed by tyrants." The French writer, Alexis de Tocqueville, wrote in the early part of the nineteenth century that, "Americans combine the notions of religion and liberty so intimately in their minds, that it is impossible to conceive of one without the other." The founders saw the idea of religious freedom as coming from God, Himself. As the Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty stated, "its authors were well aware that Almighty God had created the mind free, that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burdens or by civil incapacitation's are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion."

The history of religious freedom in America actually began in Europe, of course. The establishment of the Church of England as the Crown's official church, and subsequent persecution of dissenters, led scores of individuals with differing religious beliefs to flee England in search of religious freedom in the North American colonies. They founded a nation based on, in the words of the Declaration of Independence, "the laws of nature and nature's God." Given their experience with religious persecution, it is not surprising that the founders, from the very beginning, displayed a profound understanding of the essential relationship between religious freedom and democracy.

The Declaration of Independence in 1776 announced the colonists' intention to break free of the mother country, and its words reflected the important role of religion in the lives of those colonists who would soon be building a nation. The Declaration not only celebrated the existence of natural, unalterable rights, but attributed the source of these rights to a Supreme Being. The famous words still ring forth with power today: "We hold these truths to be

self-evident that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Furthermore, listing “the long list of reasons” for the colonies’ right to independence, the Declaration concluded with a paragraph containing two references to God, references that stand like pillars upon which the rest of the document rests. The first sentence asks for the blessing of the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions.

From the very beginning, the architects of the fledgling country understood that a nation without the blessing of God could not flourish for long. The last sentence of the Declaration expresses a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence. This declaration of faith precedes the signers’ mutual pledge to each other of their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. The enduring words of the Declaration of Independence reflected its’ signers passionate beliefs, and provided a blueprint for their revolutionary success.

Once the war was over, the revolutionaries, now in the position of statesmen, turned their attention to the creation of another document suitable for governing the new nation. The first attempt, the Articles of Confederation proved to be unsatisfactory. Therefore, in 1787, the Constitution of the United States was proposed to create a more unified and stronger country. Many citizens feared that this new constitution, calling for a stronger national government, would in time lead to circumstances not unlike those suffered under the Crown. The document, amended only 27 times in the 211 years of our Union, allocated limited powers among the three branches and reserved the balance of power to the states or people. The original Constitution did not contain an enumeration of fundamental rights, such as the free exercise of religion, freedom of speech, and the right to be secure against unreasonable searches and seizures. In Article 6, however, the Constitution did set forth a prohibition on the use of religious tests or requirements as a qualification to hold office or public trust under the United States.

Individuals suspicious of the Constitution were promised, during the course of the ratification debate, that amendments guaranteeing fundamental freedoms would be enacted following the ratification of the new Constitution. The free exercise of religion is the first freedom mentioned in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. This portion of the Amendment states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The second clause, containing the phrase “free exercise,” guarantees a citizen’s right to express religious beliefs, and act in accord with those beliefs. As Thomas Jefferson noted, “all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion. And the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil liberties.”

The right to free exercise, of course, is not absolute. It cannot be exercised in ways that would

substantially infringe upon the rights of other citizens. In the view of the current chief justice of our Supreme Court, the word “establishment” in the first clause of the First Amendment forbids the establishment of a national religion, as well as preference among religious sects or denominations. The primary motivation for this provision was to prevent the establishment of an official national religion analogous to the Church of England. It does not mean that the government cannot recognize and acknowledge the existence of religion in a non-discriminatory manner.

The founding fathers recognized that differing interpretations of the Constitution would exist among the citizenry of the United States. Therefore, they designed our governmental system to reconcile these views and, ideally, to allow truth to prevail through open debate and the separation of powers in three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial.

In the United States today, an increasingly vocal minority has advocated what I believe to be a distorted concept of what is known as the wall of separation between church and state. Under this view, the government is to be protected from any religious ideas or influences. The result of this view has been hostility toward religion. In short, those who hold this view demand that wherever government is present, religion should be removed.

Some individuals also worry that religion in America has slipped from its former prominence in the public consciousness. In his 1993 book, *The Culture of Disbelief*, Yale law professor, Steven Carter, argues that “elite culture has so trivialized religious devotion that religion is no longer an acceptable topic of discussion in the political process and elsewhere.” Professor Carter further asserts that the distorted concept of separating church and state is now so broadly accepted that publicly discussing issues in explicitly religious terms is considered impolite. Many believe that the topic of religion is simply taboo.

Despite these circumstances, which primarily affect the elite in the United States, the United States remains one of the most religious nations in the world. Our second president, John Adams, wrote: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.” According to recent public opinion polls, the American people agree. Ninety-two percent of Americans profess a belief in God, and 57 percent pray on a daily basis. The commitment of most Americans to maintaining religious freedom remains as strong today as it has ever been.

A bipartisan priority in the Congress this year is the passage of legislation to help ensure that

government does not, even unintentionally, place substantial burdens on the free exercise of religion. The legislation is necessary to undo the consequences of certain unfavorable court decisions that threaten religious freedom, particularly the freedom of small groups that lack political power.

I would like to use my remaining time this morning to illustrate the United States' desires to foster religious liberty, not only at the domestic level, but also at the international level. The Congress and the American people are very concerned about the attacks on religious expression and practice by governments in many corners of the world. Persecution of religious believers in communist countries persists, and in some cases is on the rise. In many countries, governments persecute non-Muslims and religious converts from Islam. Some of the egregious abuses are being perpetuated by the government of the Sudan, which is waging a self-described religious war against Christians, other non-Muslims and moderate Muslims using torture, starvation, enslavement, and murder.

The People's Republic of China has persecuted Christians, and interfered with their peaceful religious expression and worship. China has also intensified its control over the Tibetan people by interfering with the selection of the Panchen Lama, propagandizing against the religious authority of the Dalai Lama, and restricting religious study and traditional religious practices. In Sinkiang, an autonomous region of China formerly known as the Independent Republic of East Turkistan, the Muslim religion is inextricably linked with the dominant culture. The Chinese government has systematically suppressed religious authority there by restricting religious practice, destroying mosques, and increasingly persecuting clergy and practitioners.

The ability to worship God is a fundamental human right, which should transcend national boundaries. Yet Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and other religious believers around the world continue to be persecuted because of their religious affiliations, practices, and beliefs. Americans, while celebrating and working to strengthen religious freedom in the United States, strongly oppose the suppression of this freedom abroad. Consequently, the United States Congress is currently considering legislation known as the Freedom From Religious Persecution Act of 1998. The act has already passed the United States House of Representatives.

This legislation creates a federal office of religious persecution monitoring. The director of that office would be charged with investigating violations of religious freedom around the world. The secretary of state would use the information gathered by that office to determine which governments either suppress religious freedom, or fail to undertake serious and sustained efforts to eliminate persecution by non-governmental entities. Soon after the evaluation by the

secretary state, these governments will automatically face substantial sanctions, including the suspension of non-humanitarian foreign aid, a ban on the export of persecution facilitating products to these countries, and opposition by the United States to International Monetary Fund loans which would benefit such countries. Although people of good faith may disagree about which policies will be most effective in enhancing respect for religious liberty, we should all be able to agree that supporting religious freedom should be an important object of government policy, including foreign policy.

In the case of the serious religious persecution being perpetrated by the government of Sudan, the Freedom From Religious Persecution Act, upon enactment, will impose sanctions on that country proportionate to the seriousness of the Sudanese government's actions. The act will not permit anyone from the US to engage in financial transactions with Sudan, including the extension of credit or loans. No article grown, produced, manufactured, or exported by Sudan will be imported into the United States. Except in cases of emergency, no airline or plane owned or contracting with Sudan will be allowed to fly to the United States. Further sanctions, in addition to the ones I have just mentioned, will be imposed upon Sudan until its government recognizes that its persecution of people of faith cannot continue.

The Freedom From Religious Persecution Act would be a significant step toward ending international religious persecution. Countries that display a disregard for religious freedom will be forced to reflect on the consequences of the mistreatment of their own citizens who are people of faith.

In conclusion, I want to commend the organizers of this conference for their attention to the critically important issue of religious freedom. It is an issue that urgently deserves to be addressed. As we have seen from recent accounts of persecution based on religion, this is truly a salient issue for our time. America was founded on the unyielding belief that religious freedom should be protected. While we continue to work out the definition of religious freedom within the United States, I believe there is a strong commitment in America to preserve this fundamental right. In addition, I believe that the governmental authorities in the United States are ready to work with our friends in Europe, Asia, Africa and all over the globe to help foster governmental policies that ensure the right to worship freely.

Just like America's founding fathers, we must make religious freedom a priority, for this right of men and women to worship as they see fit is essential to the respect of human dignity. As we are seeing freedom increase across the globe, it is important for us to remember that political freedom and economic freedom are incomplete and insufficient whenever the most fundamental longing of the human heart, the desire to worship and serve God, is not protected. Thank you

very much.