

International Religious Persecution

CIVIL SOCIETY/
DEMOCRACY BUILDING

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

*File
Int'l
Rel. Association*

Question:

Last year, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a Statement of Conscience which outlined disturbing findings about instances of worldwide religious persecution. I am concerned about the fact that American tax payers are supporting regimes where such tragic oppression is occurring. Currently, the U.S. Government gives millions of dollars in aid and supports multilateral bank loans to countries that routinely persecute or discriminate against people of various faiths. Do you believe guarantees against religious persecution in a country should be a condition for US foreign aid or financial guarantees?

Answer:

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended, requires the United States "to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion" and stipulates that "assistance may not be provided ... to a country the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights...." Countries eligible to receive US assistance are reviewed for their record of compliance with internationally recognized human rights standards. We believe this legislation is sufficient to provide the US Government with necessary leverage to press governments for an improvements in their human rights record, including compliance with standards of freedom of religion.

The US Government regularly expresses concerns about government compliance with international standards on human rights, narcotics, arms proliferation, and other issues. The record of governments are openly discussed at International Financial Institutions and are taken into consideration when determining whether to vote to extend loans. In practice, the US Government does voice opposition to loans to countries in which we have serious human rights concerns. In recent years, we have voiced our concerns and have not voted to support loans to Burma, China, Iran, and Mauritania. Respect for religious freedom is one of the criteria in our human rights considerations.

Drafted: DRL/LEA:AArriaga (ph: 7-1422, fax: 7-0431)

Clear: EB/IFD/ODF:LizDibble (ph: 7-5686, fax: 7-5585)
G:JMeer
P:RSanders

Questions for the Record Submitted by Senator Helms to
Secretary of State Designate Madeleine Albright
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
January 8, 1997

Question:

Do you agree that, as we approach the 21st century, religious persecution constitutes one of the most serious threats to individual freedom, and that addressing this problem must be a top priority in U.S. human rights policy?

Answer:

One disturbing aspect of the post-Cold War world has been the persistence, and in some cases the intensification, of religious intolerance and of the use of religious and ethnic differences for narrow and violent political ends; the conflict in Bosnia is but one tragic example of this trend. People of faith are persecuted for their beliefs and cultural loyalties in many parts of the world.

At the same time, many religious communities are actively engaged in promoting tolerance and religious freedom and in trying to resolve conflicts among groups, and this is one heartening feature of our world.

The U.S. Government uses both quiet diplomacy and public condemnation to combat religious intolerance. Our aim has been to secure the release and improve the treatment of individuals

in countries where they face incarceration or harassment because of their faith. At international fora, our Government has focused attention on the need for religious tolerance and reconciliation, as well as the need for multilateral opposition to the persecution of persons on the basis of their religious beliefs. Every year, the State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices publicly document the practice of governments around the world on issues of religious freedom and other human rights. Last year, Secretary of State Warren Christopher formed an Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad to advise the US Government on means of advancing religious freedom and help bring greater attention to this important issue.

As Americans, we must remain true to our values, and freedom of conscience and belief is one of the bedrock principles of our republic. This value goes hand-in-hand with our interests, as we want to see a world where people are free to practice their faith. Promoting freedom of conscience and religion and supporting the work of religious communities for that freedom and for the peaceful resolution of conflicts must play a significant role in our diplomacy.

Drafted by: DRL:YMirsky
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Helms #1

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
DRL:AArriaga
G:JMeer
P:RSanders
H:DKillion
EAP:PSlutz

Question:

Regarding the improvement of reporting on religious persecution in the State Department's Human Rights Reports, will you require that the reporting be more detailed so that adequate coverage is given to the treatment of various religious groups?

Answer:

With every passing year, the State Department's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices garners increasing praise from human rights activists, academics and the public at large for the fairness, consistency and thoroughness of its reporting. We have made this progress because we are constantly looking for ways to improve the Country Reports and regularly direct posts to provide thorough and accurate information. Reporting of religious persecution has always been a major feature of the Reports, and will continue to be so. We welcome the input of the Congress and of the Non-Governmental community on ways in which we can deepen and enhance the coverage of this issue along with any others.

Drafted by: DRL:YMirsky
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Helms #2

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
DRL:AArriaga
G:JMeer
P:RSanders
H:DKillion

Question:

Would you agree that there are more individuals in prison in China because of religious activities than in any other nation in the world?

Answer:

It is impossible to determine the number of individuals imprisoned because of religious activities, since the Government of China restricts access to such information. We do monitor and raise both the general topic of human rights and individual cases with Government officials in the course of our bilateral dialogue.

We have indicated in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and in public statements that we are aware of increased restrictions on the activities of unregistered religious groups. Chinese officials have closed dozens of unregistered churches, mosques, temples, and seminaries, and hundreds of Protestant "house church" groups, many with significant membership, properties, and financial resources. Some leaders of such groups have been detained for lengthy investigation.

Drafted by: DRL:AArriaga
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Helms #3

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
G:JMeer
P:RSanders
H:DKillion
EAP:PSlutz

Question:

Has the U.S. Government lodged any protests or otherwise communicated with Chinese authorities about the plan to systematically destroy Vatican-loyal Roman Catholic congregations?

Answer:

On his recent trip to China, Secretary of State Warren Christopher raised a range of human rights concerns and called for the release of prisoners of conscience incarcerated for the peaceful expression of their religious, political, or social views.

In recent years, our Embassy has monitored and reported on persecution of Catholics and other religious minorities. Our bilateral discussions have focused on fundamental human rights issues, including freedom of religion. Over the years, as we have passed to the Chinese lists of prisoners to request their release, those persecuted for their religious beliefs have been included. In addition, we always cover the issue of religious freedom in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. In 1996, we have documented increased repression of unofficial Christian groups. The repression of Catholics and other unofficial religious group in China is the source of great concern.

As Secretary of State, I intend to give high priority to religious freedom. I will ensure that this issue remains part of our human rights agenda with the Chinese Government.

Drafted by: DRL:AArriaga
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Helms #4

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
 G:JMeer
 EB/IFD/ODF:OGrant
 P:RSanders
 H:DKillion
 EAP:PSlutz

Question:

Is it true that the aforementioned plan calls for the imprisonment of Roman Catholic priests and bishops for celebrating mass and administering the sacraments without official authorization, as well as the destruction and confiscation of church property?

Answer:

The State Department's Country Reports indicate that the Government of China restricts all actual religious practice to government-supervised religious organizations and registered places of worship. In recent years, Chinese authorities have intensified enforcement of State Council regulations signed in 1994 requiring all religious groups to register with government religious affairs bureaus and come under the supervision of official "patriotic" religious organizations.

The "unofficial" Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church claims a membership far larger than the 4 million persons registered with the official Catholic Church, although hard figures are hard to come by. In 1996, unregistered religious groups were subjected to increased pressure at national direction, but with the degree of restriction varying significantly in different regions of China. China's police raided and closed dozens of unregistered churches, mosques, temples, and seminaries, as well as hundreds of Protestant "house church" groups. Some leaders of such groups were detained for lengthy investigation; there were unconfirmed reports of deaths of detainees by beating.

Drafted by: DRL:AArriaga
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Helms #5

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
G:JMeer
P:RSanders
H:DKillion
EAP:PSlutz

Question:

How do you propose to deal with religious persecution which may occur in countries friendly to the United States?

Answer:

As you know, a one-size-fits-all approach to our policy with regard to any issue or region is simply untenable given the complexity of our world. At the same time, our policy everywhere must be shaped by a core commitment to our country's values, and to our long-term interest in a free world.

The U.S. has not hesitated to criticize and seek to change the human rights practices of its friends and allies within the framework and with the tactics most suitable to those particular bilateral relationships. Thus we have, for example, closely engaged the governments of Russia and the NIS on their treatment of Jews and other religious minorities, have made clear to Germany our concerns for the fair treatment of Scientologists, and have engaged in quiet dialogue with Egypt on the treatment of its Christian citizens.

We have a range of policy options in dealing with any human rights situation and will make use of that repertoire of options in dealing with situations as they arise.

Drafted by: DRL:YMirsky
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Helms #6

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
DRL:AArriaga
G:JMeer
P:RSanders
H:DKillion
NEA/ENA:TDuffy

Question:

Will you pledge to the Committee that the Administration will work closely with us to find ways to combat more effectively religious persecution abroad, and to support meaningful legislation to that end, if necessary?

Answer:

We look forward to actively exchanging ideas and information on how to respond to religious persecution around the world, and will of course be open to discussions of legislation that can help us reach our shared goals.

Drafted by: DRL:YMirsky
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Helms #7

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
 DRL:AArriaga
 G:JMeer
 P:RSanders
 H:DKillion

Questions for the Record Submitted by Senator Ashcroft to
Secretary of State Designate Madeleine Albright
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
January 8, 1997

Question:

Last year, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a Statement of Conscience which outlined disturbing findings about instances of worldwide religious persecution. I am concerned about the fact that American tax payers are supporting regimes where such tragic oppression is occurring. Currently, the U.S. government gives millions of dollars in aid and supports multilateral bank loans to countries that routinely persecute or discriminate against people of various faith. Do you believe guarantees against religious persecution in a country should be a condition for U.S. foreign aid or financial guarantees?

Answer:

The United States provides assistance to countries for a broad range of U.S. national objectives. We require flexibility if we are to obtain these objectives.

The US Government regularly expresses concerns about government compliance with international standards on human rights (including freedom of religion), narcotics, arms proliferation, and other issues.

In the International Financial Institutions, the US Government does voice opposition to loans to countries in which we have serious human rights concerns. In recent years, we have voiced our concerns and have not voted to support loans to China,

..

. Iran, Mauritania and Sudan. Respect for religious freedom is one of the criteria in our human rights considerations.

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended, requires the United States "to promote and encourage respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms throughout the world without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion" and stipulates that "assistance may not be provided ... to a country the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights...." Countries eligible to receive US assistance are reviewed for their record of compliance with internationally recognized human rights standards.

Drafted by: DRL:AArriaga
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Ashcroft #9

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
G:JMeer
EB/IFD/ODF:OGrant
P:RSanders
H:DKillion

Question:

In 1996, Congress overwhelmingly responded to public outcry about worldwide religious persecution with letters and resolutions -- asking the Administration to take a more active role. The recent formation of a State Department Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad is a positive step. I believe, however, that the Administration should take even more visible and coordinate steps. As Secretary of State, do you intend to speak out against regimes that persecute people for their faith?

Answer:

I have throughout my career, and because of my own experience, never hesitated to call things by their proper names and speak out in defense of fundamental human freedoms and I have every intention of continuing to do so.

Drafted by: DRL:YMirsky
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Ashcroft #10

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
DRL:AArriaga
G:JMeer
P:RSanders
H:DKillion

Question:

Will the new State Department Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad have sufficient clout in the international arena?

Answer:

As you know, the operation of all State Department Advisory Committees is governed by relevant statutes and regulations which offer specific guidelines as to the range of their activities. By law, Advisory Committee members are not themselves diplomats of the U.S.

The Committee will prove to be an invaluable resource on specific policy matters as well as on raising the profile of issues of religious freedom within the U.S. Government. We look forward to working with Committee members to explore ways in which the U.S. Government can better address these issues and to support the activities of nongovernmental organizations working to promote freedom of religion.

Drafted by: DRL:YMirsky
SEARRIAG 695, 1/14/97, 7-1422
Ashcroft #11

Cleared: DRL:SCoffey
DRL:AArriaga
G:JMeer
P:RSanders
H:DKillion