

Agenda Item 5: “Promotion of constructive interfaith dialogue, consultation and exchange”

**Delivered by the Delegation of the United States of America
Sixth Forum on Minority Issues
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Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

The United States welcomes the contributions of all religious communities in our society and encourages constructive interfaith efforts throughout the world. We are resolutely committed to building a more peaceful and prosperous world through interfaith cooperation. As President Obama stated in his address to the General Assembly last year, “More than at any point in human history -- the interests of nations and peoples are shared. The religious convictions that we hold in our hearts can forge new bonds among people, or they can tear us apart.”

We all know, unfortunately, that everywhere in the world there are some extremists who seek to misuse religion to divide, rather than unite. The United States actively partners with governments and civil society to forge new bonds among people of all religions and beliefs. Interfaith efforts can be among the best protections against intolerance and religious hatred.

In pursuit of the President’s vision, the U.S. Government has greatly expanded efforts to foster interfaith engagement. At home, we are encouraging service and volunteer projects to bring together Christians, Muslims, and Jews, and peoples of other faiths to partner on shared initiatives. The White House is home to an Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, which serves as a primary liaison with domestic faith-based and interfaith service organizations.

Over the last few years, we have put more emphasis on interfaith engagement in our foreign policy. Many senior State Department officials – including the Secretary of State, the Special Advisor for Faith-Based Community Initiatives, the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, the President’s Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism – regularly engage in interfaith dialogue in their travels and in their regular work. Every year the President and Secretary of State, as well as domestic agencies across federal, state, and local governments, hold such meetings with religious leaders. And civil society organizations,

including student groups, do this as well. U.S. embassies also regularly sponsor and engage in interfaith dialogue, including by participating in roundtables and meeting with religious leaders, and by hosting religious leaders at interfaith events like Ramadan iftars or Passover Seders.

This year, Secretary Kerry created a new Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives at the State Department to help set Department policy on engagement with faith-based communities and work in conjunction with State Department bureaus and diplomatic posts to reach out to those communities to advance the Department's diplomacy and development objectives. As part of Secretary Kerry's Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society, the State Department and White House co-chair a Working Group on Religion and Foreign Policy, which includes a Sub-Group on International Religious Freedom, Democracy, and Stability through which we engage with U.S. and foreign civil society representatives to advance this fundamental freedom and foster mutual respect for diversity.

Drafted: DRL/IRF: AMcIntyre

Cleared: IO/HRH: PFrayne (ok)
DRL/MLGA: ASuleman (ok)
IO/HRH: RKris (ok)
DOJ/CRT: ETreene (ok)
Geneva: STownley/ANeedham (ok)