

APRIL 2019

**“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:10**

“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” 2 Timothy 3:12

Dear Friends,

Religious freedom is one of the key principles set forth in the U.S. Declaration of Independence and Constitution, as well as the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. It is also one of the primary issues that Advocates focuses on.

Unfortunately, religious persecution across the globe continues to increase. According to the Pew Foundation, the number of people living in nations with high or very high restrictions on their religious freedom rose in the past decade from less than 3 in 4 in 2009 to almost 4 in 5, or 80 percent today. And Christians are, by far, the largest group on the receiving end of that persecution in 144 different countries.

Twenty plus years ago Advocates International was one of the key players advocating for the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). That law established an Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom at the U.S. State Department. Despite the tremendous efforts of previous ambassadors, the position was never treated by past administrations with the respect the ambassadors deserved or that IRFA required.

Thankfully, with the appointment of Sam Brownback—former U.S. Senator and Governor of Kansas—to that post, and with the full support of the current administration, the U.S. Government is tackling religious freedom around the globe in ways never seen before.

As I shared last August, I attended the first ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom. It was attended by representatives from 84 nations plus over 500 nongovernmental delegates from around the world, representing just about every religious group. This year from July 16-18, the State Department will be hosting the 2nd Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom and plans to host over 1000 delegates. We are looking forward to once again being engaged in this effort.

Advocates is a member of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP), a collaborative effort of 40+ ministries focused on helping the persecuted church and religious liberty for all. I serve on the RLP Leadership Team. In March, I attended the annual RLP Consultation in Abuja, Nigeria, where we had our largest ever attendance with over 120 from 29 different countries. In addition, a large contingent remained for a Gender & Religious Freedom conference.

In addition to the RLP, AI is also engaged here in Washington, DC, with the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable, a movement of all faith traditions advocating for religious liberty for all. The original IRF Roundtable happened back in the 1990s when AI played a key role, with leadership from Sam Ericsson, as well as Karen Lord, and others. The primary focus of that roundtable was on the opportunities in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union. Once IRFA was passed, the roundtable disbanded.

Then about eight or nine years ago, the IRF Roundtable was reconvened as it became clear that religious persecution was once again rearing its ugly head.

Prior to Ambassador Brownback's appointment, the IRF Roundtable met every other month, with the occasional visit from previous ambassadors. Now, under his leadership, we convene monthly, or more often, and the Ambassador himself attends whenever he is not traveling. In March, the meeting was attended by over 200 and it was a standing-room only crowd. Moreover, we are now seeing a growing movement of IRF Roundtables being established across the globe in places as diverse as Nigeria, South Korea, Taiwan, UAE, Iraq, Belgium and Colombia.

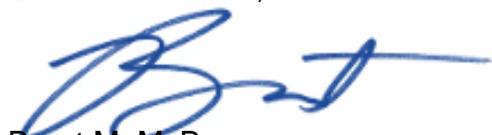
Please pray with us that the world will see a decrease in religious persecution. Pray also that the efforts to raise the awareness of the importance of religious freedom for all will be strengthened. German pastor and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminded us that:

Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.

Thank you for your continued prayers and financial support. Your investment helps us to inspire and mobilize Advocates everywhere to do justice with compassion and to speak out for religious freedom for all and act on behalf of the persecuted church.

May the Lord bless and keep you in His perfect . . .

Grace and Peace,



Brent M. McBurney
President & CEO

