

**NOMINATIONS OF THE 112TH  
CONGRESS—FIRST SESSION**

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**HEARINGS**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS**

**FIRST SESSION**

—————  
MARCH 16 THROUGH DECEMBER 8, 2011  
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Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Relations



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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
112TH CONGRESS—FIRST SESSION

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\*Note: WILLIAM C. DANVERS (assumed *Staff Director* position as of October 3, 2011)

## NOMINATION

TUESDAY, MARCH 29, 2011

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

Suzan D. Johnson Cook, of New York, to be Ambassador at Large  
for International Religious Freedom

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:31 p.m., in room SD-19, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Barbara Boxer, presiding.

Present: Senators Boxer, Menendez, Lugar, DeMint, and Lee.  
Also Present: Senator Gillibrand.

### OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BARBARA BOXER, U.S. SENATOR FROM CALIFORNIA

Senator BOXER. Could you take your seat, and we will start.

The full Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate meets to consider the nomination of Dr. Suzan B. Johnson Cook to be Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

Last month, President Obama nominated Dr. Cook to be the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom for the second time. Dr. Cook was nominated for this post in the last Congress, but the Senate did not complete action on her nomination before adjourning in December.

We hope Dr. Cook's second nomination hearing in 5 months will give all members of this committee the opportunity they need to complete questioning of Dr. Cook so that we can get her into her position as soon as possible.

This nomination is very important, particularly to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who specifically requested that we move on Dr. Cook's nomination when she appeared before this committee a few short weeks ago. During that hearing—hang on.

[Pause.]

Senator BOXER. During that hearing, Secretary Clinton noted that she believes Dr. Cook's professional background and demeanor are particularly well suited for the post. Dr. Cook holds a Doctor of Ministry from the United Theological Seminary and a Master of Divinity from the Union Theological Seminary, in addition to a number of other professional degrees.

From 1996 to 2009, she was the senior pastor at the Bronx Christian Fellowship Baptist Church. She also served as the first

female president of the Hampton University Ministers Conference, which brings together thousands of African-American clergy members from various denominations across the country.

You are a real pioneer here for women. You were the first female chaplain of the New York City Police Department; served as an associate dean of Harvard Divinity School at Harvard; served on the advisory board of President Bill Clinton's Initiative on Race. Most recently, she founded Wisdom Women Worldwide, which brings together women religious leaders from all over the globe.

If confirmed, Dr. Cook will serve as the principal adviser to the President and the Secretary of State on matters affecting religious freedom abroad, and we all know how important that is. She will be specifically charged with developing strategies and policies to promote religious freedom around the world, recommending appropriate responses by the United States when violations of religious freedom occur, and helping to promote reconciliation in areas where religion is a factor in conflicts. And again, we know this happens too often.

These are important responsibilities that will require tremendous dedication and persistence. In December 2009—would you just sit in any one of those chairs that you wish? In December 2009, the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life issued a report highlighting the fact that 64 nations in the world have high or very high restrictions on religion. Religious minorities bear the brunt of these restrictions.

The people living in these countries account for nearly 70 percent of the world's population of 6.9 billion. These figures are staggering and should serve as a reminder of why we should quickly fill this post.

As Secretary Clinton has said, "Religious freedom provides a cornerstone for every healthy society." At this time of tremendous change throughout the world, it is more important than ever that there be a strong voice from the United States to stand up for those who may be enduring brutality or seeing their rights slip away for no other reason than their religion.

And I am going to turn to Senator DeMint for any comments he may have, unless he yields to Senator Lugar. It is up to Senator DeMint.

Senator DEMINT. Senator Lugar, would you like to go first?

Senator BOXER. Either way. All right.

Then I will turn a moment and as soon as my colleagues finish, I am going to call on Senator Gillibrand because I know that she will briefly introduce Dr. Cook, and she is excited to do that. And then I know she has to depart for another commitment. But can you wait until the two Senators? OK.

Let us do it, 5 minutes each. Yes?

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JIM DeMINT,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM SOUTH CAROLINA**

Senator DEMINT. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Thank you, Dr. Cook. I appreciate your being here.

And thank you for your willingness to serve our country.

The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom is intended to be the principal adviser to the President of the United

States and the Secretary of State regarding matters affecting religious freedom abroad. This person also advises the U.S. Government on our policies, including appropriate responses when rights are violated.

Religious freedom is a very serious issue and requires effective leadership, attention, and, when necessary, pressure. Religious freedom is a cornerstone of the foundation that makes democracy and free enterprise work worldwide. Whether in Iraq, in Afghanistan, where we are giving blood and treasure, or India, the world's largest democracy where they are on the watch list for failing to ensure the rights of religious minorities, religious freedom must be a priority of our Nation.

As you know, there have been questions raised about the long vacancy of this post, who controls the International Religious Freedom Office, and how much of a priority this office is to the State Department. Just as important, there are a number of indications that international religious freedom is not your passion, nor your area of particular expertise.

Having an Ambassador that is well respected and prepared to address the challenges we face today is important to me and vital to our country. In fact, it is one of the biggest issues that I hear about around the world from missionaries and others doing humanitarian aid is the concern that the people we have there could not even openly practice their faith because of oppressive governments or the lack of freedom of religion.

And frankly, I have found it takes a very compelling argument and a lot of pressure to even get these other governments to listen to these concerns. So I am concerned about a person in this position we are talking about having the passion, the courage, the boldness to deal with this issue.

But thank you for being here. I am interested in hearing from you and look forward to your vision, your leadership for this position.

Senator BOXER. Thank you, Senator, very, very much.

And Senator Lugar, and then followed by Senator Gillibrand.

**STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD G. LUGAR,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA**

Senator LUGAR. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Today, the Foreign Relations Committee again considers the nomination of Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook to serve as Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. If confirmed, the nominee would serve as principal adviser to the President and Secretary of State on religious liberty issues.

Her responsibilities would include submitting the annual report on the state of religious freedom to Congress, engaging other nations on religious freedom issues, and recommending appropriate responses to violations of religious liberty.

Before Dr. Cook's hearing in November, I submitted 37 questions for the record to her regarding the organization and mission of the Office of International Religious Freedom, as well as countries of particular concern, such as Burma, China, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, and Sudan. I appreciate Dr. Cook's answers to these questions, as well as several more that I have submitted since that time. Dr.

Cook's answers are posted on my Web site for members and the public to review.

During the last decade, the Office of International Religious Freedom has engaged numerous countries on ways to improve their religious freedom practices. For example, an agreement negotiated with Vietnam involved new laws on religion, the release of dozens of religious prisoners, and the reopening of hundreds of places of worship. The office worked extensively in Saudi Arabia to remove intolerant teachings from school books and to advocate for the right of religious minorities to hold meetings. Advances of this type require painstaking diplomacy, but I believe it is important for the U.S. Government to be seen unmistakably as an advocate for religious freedom.

Dr. Cook, if confirmed, will have a difficult challenge ahead of her. The administration waited a year and a half before making this appointment, leaving the IRF office without the leadership and institutional strength that comes with an ambassador. Inevitably, this was perceived as a signal that the administration did not place a high priority on the role of the IRF Ambassador.

At the end of the last Congress, this nomination was delayed further when the nominee did not get a vote in the Senate. I join many Members of Congress who believe that the IRF office has a vital role to play in U.S. foreign policy. The office has shown that it can produce excellent results if it enjoys institutional backing from the State Department and the White House.

It is especially important that Dr. Cook has access to the Secretary of State and other top decisionmakers; that she has hiring and supervisory authority over her staff; that the staff is allowed to focus on the core mission of international religious freedom; and that the office retains independence and has sufficient operating funds.

I welcome Dr. Cook to the Foreign Relations Committee and look forward to her insights on religious freedom priorities.

I thank you, Madam Chairman.

Senator BOXER. Thank you so much. We are very honored that you are here, both of you. We are very happy.

And Senator Gillibrand.

**STATEMENT OF HON. KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW YORK**

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

I am delighted to be here today to introduce Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook for the position of Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

Chairwoman Boxer, Ranking Member DeMint, I really appreciate you holding this hearing. It makes an enormous difference, and I am very grateful to be here.

~~Not only has Dr. Cook distinguished herself as a New Yorker,~~ she clearly has the experience and qualities needed to be a successful Ambassador at Large. And Senator DeMint, you have asked for passion, concern, and boldness. I can assure you Dr. Cook has so much of each of those qualities, she will not only astound you, she will very much fit the bill.



She is a religious leader of high character and accomplishment, having served as the first woman senior pastor at the American Baptist Churches USA and the first female chaplain of the New York City Fire Department. Beyond her pastoral experience, she has been a leader in bridging faith and public service. She served with distinction in the Clinton White House and as a faith liaison at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

She is also experienced working at the international level, having led delegations to critical countries, such as South Africa, Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. Additionally, she is the immediate past president of the Hampton University Ministers Conference and founder of the Wisdom Women Worldwide, the first global center for women religious leaders.

As you know, religious minorities have recently suffered from recent attacks in a number of countries, including Indonesia, Pakistan, and Egypt. It is urgent that we promptly confirm an Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. It is vital that the United States has the leadership in place to work with the international community to protect the rights of religious minorities and advance the cause of religious freedom and tolerance across the globe.

I believe Dr. Cook will represent our country with great honor and distinction, and with great enthusiasm, I support this nomination as Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

And Dr. Cook, when you do give your testimony, please introduce your family.

Senator BOXER. Thank you, Senator.

Dr. Cook.

**STATEMENT OF SUZAN D. JOHNSON COOK, OF NEW YORK, TO BE AMBASSADOR AT LARGE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

Dr. COOK. Madam Chair, Senator Gillibrand, and members of the committee, thank you so much for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am truly grateful for your consideration of my nomination by President Obama as United States Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. I am deeply honored by the trust that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have placed in me by nominating me to serve our Nation in advancing the right for religious freedom.

I would like to thank my family and extended family, who are here with me today. This whole section here represents my family and extended family and two sons who have returned to school for premed and for law. I would like to thank them for your sacrifice, for your love, and for your endurance, and, most of all, your presence today.

As President Obama so eloquently stated in his historic speech in Cairo in 2009, "People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul."

Religious freedom is the birthright of all people everywhere. It is a foundation of civil society. It is a key to international security, and it must always be a pillar of U.S. foreign policy.

The dramatic events in the Middle East and North Africa remind us that the desire for freedom within the human spirit, that inherent desire of all people to live according to their beliefs without government interference and with government protection should be had. Secretary Clinton has also made clear that we need to do much more to stand up for the rights of religious minorities. She also said we must speak out more and hold governments accountable. If confirmed, this will be my core mission.

In my travels, I have found that my experience as an African-American woman and faith leader has enabled me to identify with other minority communities, both religious and ethnic. African-Americans, as you know, did not enjoy full religious freedom in this land for centuries, and religion was used by many to justify slavery and segregation. So I am particularly committed to this issue in the United States, for people of all faiths around the world.

Immediately following and since the attacks of 9/11, where I served on the front line as the chaplain for the New York City Police Department, I have been called upon to aid many citizens from many faiths and diverse national backgrounds. We were tragically reminded just weeks ago that the universal value of religious freedom is not embraced by all. The assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Minister for Minority Affairs and a courageous champion for religious freedom, is a painful reminder that our challenge is not easy. It requires an unwavering commitment to support those around the world who are risking their lives to stand up for religious freedom.

If confirmed, I will carry out the full congressional mandate, as established in the IRF Act, including serving as the principal adviser to the President and the Secretary of State on religious freedom. I will bring bold and passionate leadership to advance and defend religious freedom abroad. I will ensure the integrity of the annual international religious freedom report to Congress and draw on these reports, while engaging governments and societies toward safeguarding the right of individuals to believe or not to believe.

If confirmed, I will press for the timely and appropriate designation of countries of particular concern and Presidential actions, a critical tool to motivate progress on religious freedom. And I will seek to expand training projects that address systemic issues, including blasphemy, apostasy, and the right to change one's religion.

The life and professional background I offer this position is unique. My international experiences have particularly shaped my perspectives. I have brought people of different faiths together to achieve common objectives, including religious freedom and respect for people of all faiths and beliefs.

I have traveled to five continents to engage Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Jews, and those of other spiritual traditions. I have led interfaith delegations to Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, and the Caribbean. And I have worked with World Vision in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, in its efforts to combat global poverty.

In Zimbabwe and South Africa, I met with Zulu faith leaders to promote religious freedom and tolerance. And I have worked and lived with Operation Crossroads Africa, having participated in a

cross-cultural exchange group with spiritual groups in Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria.

Now, if confirmed, I will also engage grassroots faith-based communities, which have enormous impact on cultivating a climate more receptive to religious freedom in difficult places. As a religious leader myself, I would bring this perspective to encourage diverse religious communities to jointly defend and advance religious freedom and foster a climate of mutual respect.

America has learned much from our experience with religious diversity. We must share our lessons, stand with the persecuted, and encourage all governments to respect and protect the universal rights of all people.

As President Obama said on Religious Freedom Day on January 14, "The United States stands with those who advocate for free religious expression and works to protect the rights of all people to follow their conscience, free from persecution and discrimination."

If confirmed, I will seek to work with all religious groups, as well as human rights organizations, think tanks, universities, media partners, foreign governments, Congress, and of course, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF. I will work with colleagues across our Government to assure that, together, we advance religious freedom. The mission is too important to be left to one official or one office in the U.S. Government.

If confirmed, I especially look forward to working closely with you, Congress, in advancing this agenda together on behalf of the American people, our national interests, and the values that we all hold dear.

I thank you for considering my nomination. I thank you for this opportunity for a hearing, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Thank you.

And thank you for your introduction.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Cook follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY SUZAN D. JOHNSON COOK

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today. I am truly grateful for your consideration of my nomination by President Obama as United States Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. I am deeply honored by the trust that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have placed in me by nominating me to serve our nation in advancing the right to freedom of religion abroad. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family and extended family, who are here with me, for their sacrifice, love, and endurance.

As President Obama so eloquently stated in his historic speech in Cairo in 2009, "People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul." Religious freedom is the birthright of all people everywhere; it is a foundation of civil society, it is a key to international security, and it must always be a pillar of U.S. foreign policy. I believe this in my mind, heart, and soul. Religious freedom is a universal principle, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and protected in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The dramatic events unfolding in the Middle East and North Africa remind us that the desire for freedom lies deep within the human spirit. No greater freedom exists than the inherent desire of all people to enjoy the freedom to live according to their beliefs without government interference and with government protection. I am deeply disturbed by the increase of persecution and violence against religious minorities in this region and in many other parts of the world. These developments belie both our values and our security.

In addition to violence, Christians, Bahais, Jews, Ahmadis, and other religious minorities often face social, political, and economic exclusion or marginalization. Secretary Clinton has made clear that "We need to do much more to stand up for the rights of religious minorities" She also said we have to speak out more and to hold governments accountable. If confirmed, this will be my core mission.

In my travels around the country and around the world, I have found that my experience as an African-American woman and faith leader has enabled me to identify with other minority communities, both religious and ethnic. African-Americans did not enjoy full religious freedom in this land for centuries, and religion was used by many to justify slavery and segregation. So I am particularly committed to this issue, in the United States and for people of all faiths around the world. Immediately following and since the attacks of 9/11, as the Chaplain for the New York City Police Department, I have been called upon to aid many citizens from many faiths and diverse national backgrounds.

We were tragically reminded just weeks ago that the universal value of religious freedom is not embraced by all. The March 2 assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Minister for Minority Affairs, and a courageous champion for religious freedom, is a painful reminder that our challenge is not easy. It requires an unwavering commitment to support those around the world who are risking their lives to stand up for religious freedom. President Obama paid tribute to Minister Bhatti with these words: "Minister Bhatti fought for and sacrificed his life for the universal values that Pakistanis, Americans, and people around the world hold dear—the right to speak one's mind, to practice one's religion as one chooses, and to be free from discrimination based on one's background or beliefs."

If confirmed, I will carry out the full congressional mandate as established in the IRF Act, in letter and in spirit, including serving as the principal advisor to the President and the Secretary of State on religious freedom. I will bring bold leadership to advance and defend religious freedom abroad. I will ensure the integrity of the annual International Religious Freedom Report to Congress and draw on these reports, while engaging governments and societies on the importance of respecting and protecting religious communities and safeguarding the right of individuals to believe or not believe. If confirmed, I will press for the timely and appropriate designation of Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs) and Presidential Actions, a critical tool to motivate progress on religious freedom. I will seek to expand training of diplomats on religious freedom. I will use program resources to implement projects that address systemic issues challenging religious freedom—including blasphemy, apostasy, and the right to change one's religion.

The life and professional background I offer this position is unique. My international experiences have particularly shaped my perspectives and brought me to this point. I have been privileged to enjoy a range of experiences in bringing people of different faiths together to achieve common objectives—including religious freedom and respect for people of other faiths and beliefs. I have traveled to five continents to engage Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Jews, and practitioners of several other spiritual traditions. I have led interfaith delegations to Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, and throughout the Caribbean. I worked with World Vision, in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, in its efforts to combat global poverty. I have traveled to Zimbabwe and South Africa to meet with Zulu faith leaders to promote religious freedom and tolerance. As a young woman, I worked with Operation Crossroads Africa, and participated in a cross-cultural exchange with spiritual groups in Ghana.

If confirmed, I will engage government and religious leaders, as well as grassroots faith-based communities around the world, which have enormous impact on cultivating a climate more receptive to religious freedom in difficult places. As a religious leader myself, I would like to bring this perspective and use my skills and experience to encourage diverse religious communities to jointly defend and advance religious freedom and foster a climate of mutual respect.

America has learned much from its experience with religious diversity. We must share our lessons, stand with the persecuted, and encourage all governments to respect and protect the universal rights of all people. As President Obama said, on Religious Freedom Day, January 14, "The United States stands with those who advocate for free religious expression and works to protect the rights of all people to follow their conscience, free from persecution and discrimination."

I have learned important lessons and wisdom from each of my experiences. If confirmed, to serve as Ambassador at Large, I will seek to work with all religious groups. And I will work with human rights organizations, think tanks, universities, media partners, foreign governments, Congress, and, of course, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. If confirmed, I will seek appropriate resources needed both for the IRF Office and for innovative programs and other activities to

advance our priorities. I will work with colleagues at the Department, our Ambassadors overseas, and the White House to ensure that all parts of our government are working together to advance religious freedom. This mission is too important to be left to one official or one office in the U.S. Government.

I also want to acknowledge and commend the efforts of the two previous Ambassadors at Large, Robert Seiple and John Hanford. Both embraced the mandate of the IRF Act and were responsible for overseeing the Office of International Religious Freedom in the Department of State. If confirmed, I pledge to build on their efforts as faithful stewards of this congressional mandate and President Obama's vision of focusing U.S. attention on issues of religious freedom and working with persons of all faiths to pursue this critical goal.

If confirmed, I especially look forward to working closely with Congress in advancing this agenda together on behalf of the American people, our national interests and the values we hold dear. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Senator BOXER. Thank you so much, Dr. Cook.

And we are having this hearing because a couple of folks wanted to hear more about you. And I have got to say, I am so impressed. It is impressive.

And you speak about traveling to five continents, which I think is a tremendous education. And is it true you speak Spanish?

Dr. COOK. Yes; it is. I lived in Valencia, Spain.

Senator BOXER. That is very good, too. And that, you know, to me, you have presented just a wonderful resume and a very strong presence here.

I would like to ask those who came with you, family and extended family, just to stand for a minute. If they would stand? You don't need to introduce them all. I just feel they should be recognized because I know you traveled to be here with Dr. Cook, and I just want to thank you for that.

Because when people come before us like this, they need support, and thank you very much for being here. Really, it means a lot to her, and I know I am very impressed that you are all here.

So let me say I am convinced in terms of all that you have done in your life that you are ready for this challenge. And I so admire Secretary Clinton and Senator Gillibrand, who know you so well. And so, I am excited that you are willing to do this.

I have a couple of questions on topics that I hope you are prepared for. If not, you can just get back to me on the record.

As you know, violent attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt have increased significantly in recent years. In January 2010, on Coptic Christmas Eve, six Coptic Christians and a Muslim security guard were killed in a driveby shooting outside a church.

On New Year's Day 2011, a suicide bomber killed 23 people in an attack on a church in Alexandria, Egypt. And just a few weeks ago, violent clashes between Muslims and Coptic Christians in the capital of Cairo left at least 13 dead and 140 wounded.

This violence against Coptic Christians, who make up 10 percent of Egypt's population, is concerning, especially now while the Egyptian people are looking forward to a new lease on life for them. In her testimony before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in January, Nina Shea, a commissioner of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, stated, "The U.S. and the community of nations have a fundamental obligation to address the violence and protect those religious minorities."

If confirmed, how will you work to ensure that U.S. prioritizes the protection of religious minorities and the prosecution of violators in its discussions with Egypt about its future?

Dr. COOK. Thank you, Senator.

I share your concern certainly about the Coptic Christians and other minorities in Egypt. Having traveled there and lived there, I know many of the religious leaders. It has been disheartening to learn of all the institutions that have been forbidden to be built or be renovated. So it has been ongoing.

In this transition, it is important that there be dialogue and engagement with civil society. The U.S. Government high-level officials have had numerous occasions to have dialogue with Egypt, including Secretary Clinton. And if confirmed, I would build upon those conversations and draw on the tools that are available to me, at my disposal.

One of the keys that is happening is that religious leaders are emerging as voices, and it would be important, if confirmed, to sit down with all sectors and begin a dialogue that would include protection for Coptic Christians and others.

Senator BOXER. So you would agree that this is a moment in time that we shouldn't waste when it comes to religious freedom—

Dr. COOK. Without question.

Senator BOXER [continuing]. In Egypt particularly, and these other countries that are going through this dramatic revolution, some peaceful, some not. I would say in that vein, and this would not be your portfolio, but I think this is really a moment in history where we should look at religious freedom and also equality for women because, you know, this is a rare moment.

The other question I have, and then I will yield to Senator DeMint. I have questions for the record on the Congo. If I don't have a chance to answer it and some others, but this one I thought I would ask you.

The spiritual leader of many of my constituents and hundreds of millions of Orthodox Christians around the globe is His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. As you know, his nearly 2,000-year-old sacred see is in Istanbul, Turkey, has faced tremendous discrimination at the hands of the Turkish Government over the better part of the past century.

Fortunately, Turkey has taken some steps regarding the religious freedom of the Ecumenical Patriarch in recent months, including providing Turkish citizenship to potential successors of the patriarch and returning important property to the church. But much remains to be done, including reopening an important orthodox seminary that was closed by the Turkish Government in 1971 and recognizing the title of Ecumenical Patriarch.

If confirmed, how would you work to significantly improve religious freedom and human rights for the Ecumenical Patriarch and for ethnic Greeks living in Turkey?

Dr. COOK. Thank you for your question.

A large part of my constituency is also Greek Orthodox. I had the pleasure of serving with Father John Poulos in Astoria, Queens, as a police chaplain. And so, for many years, that issue has been a highlight of my priorities.

I have also had the pleasure of serving with Father Alex and Archbishop Demetrios in the New York region. And just Friday at the White House, I celebrated Greek Independence Day with them. So I am very attuned to the subject matter.

If confirmed, I would continue to press the government to recognize the Ecumenical Patriarch. We are pleased that 12 metropolitans were confirmed as citizens, which broadens the pool for the next Ecumenical Patriarch. But that would be one of the first trips in my priorities that I would like to take, to visit and see the Ecumenical Patriarch. Long overdue.

Senator BOXER. Well, it is music to my ears. I thank you.

Senator DeMint, the floor is yours.

Senator DEMINT. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I am sure the State Department would take exception to my comments. But over several administrations, I have seen an unwillingness at the State Department to address seriously religious freedom and religious persecution issues. I think, when pressed, they tend to pat you on the head, and I am speaking of my head at this point, and saying, "That is important," rhetorically. But it is, frankly, too messy to compromise a political or economic relationship.

And that is why I mentioned the importance of a real passion and boldness because I don't expect this administration or the next within the State Department culture to really take these issues as seriously as they should. Because one of the things that I know is important and true, that we are not going to have economic and political freedom where no religious freedom exists.

I just would like to ask your response. As we look at violations in Afghanistan, where we have Americans of all faiths fighting, giving their lives, billions of dollars being spent, an Afghani who converted to Christianity was sentenced to death, effectively. And fortunately, because of I think a lot of political pressure, that is not going to happen, but that person no longer can live in their home country.

What would you do? How would you deal with this? Because it is not just Afghanistan. It is Iraq. It is other places where American blood has been shed, and now we are faced with governments we have helped install who are not supporting religious freedom. What would you do in Afghanistan?

Dr. COOK. Thank you for your question, Senator.

I share the concern deeply because there is a lot of violence and persecution, and there are many laws that are written totally against those who are religious minorities. If confirmed, I will work together with partners, international partners who have been working on religious freedom issues for a long time.

We are heartened by the release of Said Musa, who, although he is not able to live any longer in his country, it was the U.S. Government, as well as many of my partners, NGO partners, who have worked for his release and his reuniting with his family. So we are concerned. And if confirmed, I would continue to press the Afghan Government for protection of all of its citizens and to also work with them in terms of promoting religious freedom.

Senator DEMINT. Would you be willing to do that publicly, to speak to the media, or I know is the State Department will tell me and you, let us do this under the radar. Let us not make any

waves. And so, the international pressure that we would like to be there is often not present.

And I am not saying that some of the behind the scenes work does not pay dividends. As in Afghanistan, we did not establish religious freedom, but we saved the person's life. Frankly, for what we are fighting for, I am not sure that that should be our end goal.

But you have mentioned working with our partners, or I mean, can you be more specific? We have that very real situation right now where countries where our troops are on the ground, where religious freedom does not exist. How would you work with our Government and those governments? How would you exert the pressure that is needed to get the attention here as well as there?

Dr. COOK. Thank you for your question.

The beginning of your question was would I certainly use public diplomacy as one of the tools? I would use all of the tools that are available to me to elevate religious freedom to the highest level, both in our Government and around the world.

There are times situationally that public pressure and the headlines is important, and there are times, in the case of Said Musa, situationally that you need to do it more quietly. And Afghan is a very complicated situation, and there are times that you have to move quietly for the saving of a person's life and for the reunification of his family.

So one of the tools that I am strong at is public diplomacy, and when appropriate, certainly I will use that and all the tools that are available to me.

Senator DEMINT. OK. Just one final question. It appears from what we see that this position has kind of been lowered in status at the State Department. Yet we expect you to be the primary adviser to the President on religious issues, which means, again, probably in the pecking order, you would have to use strong personality and a lot of push in order to get some attention. And again, that is very important.

How do you anticipate dealing with that inside the structure there at the State Department?

Dr. COOK. Well, thank you again for your question.

I bring a 30-year, three-decade-long experience. You asked initially in your opening statement for boldness, courage, and passion, and those are three qualities that I have. But I don't see the position as lowered. I see it as being a premier bureau, the DRL bureau. I see a team of 20 wonderful full-time civil servants and also Foreign Service officers who are really on their game, their A game, and have worked very hard.

They are just missing an Ambassador at Large to complete a strong team. And so, if confirmed, I would join that team, and we would elevate, again, religious freedom to the highest levels possible.

Senator DEMINT. Thank you, Dr. Cook.

~~Senator BOXER. Senator DeMint, thank you for those excellent questions.~~

Senator Menendez, welcome.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Reverend Cook, thank you for coming again. I was ready to vote for you the last time you were here.



Dr. COOK. Thank you, Senator.

Senator MENENDEZ. And I, having heard some of your answers that were preempted by the chair that I had to the questions of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which is something that I am passionate about. Senator Snowe and I, in a bipartisan effort, are circulating a letter to the President on this issue, which we expect many Senators to join us on.

And we are concerned that while we have made some progress with Turkey on this issue, especially with regard to objecting to referring to his All Holiness as ecumenical and proving some aspects of patriarchal succession, but there is a lot more that needs to be done. And you and I have had the opportunities in your visits before your nomination or as you were nominated, but before you were in the committee, in your responses to me the last time.

And from what I have heard of your responses to Senator Boxer that are in line with the type of advocacy that I would want someone in this position to have, not only as it relates to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, but to religious freedom internationally. And I know one thing. That until we get someone in this position, there will be no advocacy in the world for the religious freedom that we all believe in and espouse passionately. And so, I think it is incredibly important to get someone into this position as the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

Let me ask you, since I know some of my colleagues have the concern about the nature of the position and the structure of it and what not, before you took this nomination, I am sure you wanted to have a role to be effective.

Dr. COOK. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. So what understandings did you come to in terms of what is going to be your ability, both individually and within the State Department and beyond, to be able to be that voice and make that case and to have the ear of those who can shape policy?

Dr. COOK. Thank you for your question, Senator. It is good to see you again.

As I came to this position, I read very carefully the IRF Act and understand critically that I would be the principal adviser to both the Secretary of State and the President of the United States, and I would carry out the IRF mandate as it is written fully to its potential. I have no problem doing that. The structure that is in place still allows me to do that.

Again, I share we have a tremendous team of Foreign Service officers and civil service workers who make up or comprise about 20. I would head the IRF office and would do that to my full ability. I don't feel the position is diminished whatsoever. What is lacking is the person in the post of Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom.

So I am prepared to do that. I am ready to do that. And certainly, visiting the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Vatican is something this office has not done, and that would be one of my priorities when assuming the post, if confirmed.

Senator MENENDEZ. I appreciate that. Now do you know Secretary Clinton?

Dr. COOK. I know her very well, and I would have access to the Secretary.

Senator MENENDEZ. You have known her since before she was the Secretary of State?

Dr. COOK. I knew her before. I was in the Clinton White House when she was the first lady. Also, she was the Senator for my very famous State, New York.

Senator MENENDEZ. And she must have known you during that period of time?

Dr. COOK. Very much so and very closely.

Senator MENENDEZ. And so, therefore, you know the Secretary in a way that maybe some other nominee would not know the Secretary and be able to get her ear. Is that fair to say?

Dr. COOK. That is very fair to say, sir.

Senator MENENDEZ. OK. Do you know President Obama?

Dr. COOK. I know President Obama as well, thank you. And I could have his ear also.

Senator MENENDEZ. Do you know him well enough that you will have the wherewithal to be able to, when you feel that it is fitting and appropriate and necessary on some issue of religious freedom in the world, to be able to make your case to him?

Dr. COOK. Yes, sir. I do.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, that is ultimately the two main opportunities that we want, for this person who would have this position to be able to speak to the Secretary of State and to the President of the United States when they feel that it is important, appropriate, fitting, and necessary to promote religious freedom in the world and to have the ears of those individuals.

So I am once again ready and willing to vote for your confirmation. I believe from my conversations with you, not only as it relates to the Ecumenical Patriarch, but other concerns I have in the world, that you will be a strong advocate and not a shrinking violet in this respect.

And so, thank you very much for coming once again before the committee.

Dr. COOK. You are welcome, and thank you.

Senator BOXER. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Lugar.

Senator LUGAR. Dr. Cook, my colleagues have tried to help us all define your role as Ambassador at Large, and of course, you have related responses to questions from Senator Menendez your relationship with the President and the Secretary of State.

Let me ask a question this way. A Pew Foundation study from December 2009 indicated that approximately 70 percent of the population of the world lives in areas where religious freedom is severely restricted. Now I suppose whether it is your own initiative, that of the 20 talented persons who are working with you, or even on occasion a thought from the President or the Secretary of State, how do you go about prioritizing what exactly you are going to do, and which countries you will be visiting?

I ask this question because if you have two-thirds of the world where restrictions on religious freedom are very substantial, there is, of course, a long list of possibilities. How do you plan to occupy your time most profitably? Or, is this a situation where you wait

for a crisis to occur and then head out to the front and see what you can do?

Dr. COOK. OK. Thank you, sir, for your question, Senator Lugar.

The Pew study goes on to say that not only 70 percent are persecuted daily, but also more than 200,000 million Christians each day are persecuted and discriminated against. And in the 20th and 21st centuries, more people have been killed because of their faith than in the other 19 centuries combined. So I am very concerned about the lack of this office being filled.

My priorities would be such that we can't cover all the 198 countries, but we are mandated by the IRF Act to give a report on those countries. I would sit down with our staff and our team and our wider partners, NGOs and academy and others who have been working on religious freedom, and determine those priorities.

Certainly the Middle East right now is urgent, and that cannot be ignored. I would want to travel immediately to Egypt and to Iraq. In Asia, I would love to travel to Vietnam and to Afghanistan and Pakistan and certainly China, where we are developing relationships. And then, in sub-Saharan Africa, would love to go to Nigeria, which is also of urgent concern, as well as stopping by Liberia, which is having the same conflict as Nigeria. But they are one of what we call a "promising practice," and I would use that as a model perhaps for Nigeria and other countries that are experiencing religious freedom issues.

So those would be my priorities immediately. Certainly sitting down domestically with people who have been working on religious freedom for issues. Just as when religious freedom, the IRF Act was developed, there was a summit called of the academy scholars, NGOs, who were working on religious freedom, I would want to have those conversations as well. But those would be my priorities.

Certainly a visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch and to the Vatican, which this office has not done for the last decade, I think, out of respect and as a priority.

Senator LUGAR. Well, you have named some very excellent priorities. But now how do you conduct yourself when you arrive? You come on the scene. You have already made a study indicating that things are not going well in terms of religious freedom.

In a concrete sense, what do you actually propose? A plan for better conduct by that government, by the society? In other words, specifically what action does an Ambassador at Large take that makes any particular difference in the minds of those leaders?

Dr. COOK. Thank you for your question.

Certainly the tools that are available to me, first of all, is getting, securing the report and reporting on religious persecution in the 198 countries. But the second tool is diplomacy. We would work with the embassies and posts where we have a post on the ground as my first point of entry, and then also with the NGOs and civil society in those societies.

Where there are diplomatic relations that are lacking, I would work with multilateral fora and also partners who are related to those countries. So there will be a strategic plan. I would not go without a plan. I would move strategically, not emotionally, and certainly work with those partners that are already on the ground.

But wherever we have embassies, we would secure that relationship first.

Senator LUGAR. How do your responsibilities interact with those of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom? Where do they fit into the picture?

Dr. COOK. Oh, they fit very complementarily. We have not had a chance to sit down, but that would be part of the conversations I would have initially if I am confirmed. That would be one of the first conversations with the commissioners, and I would be an ex officio member of USCIRF. And so, part of that would be to have presence.

One of the acronyms—this is a city of acronyms, and so I have had to learn a new language coming before you. So I have developed one, which is MAP, putting religious freedom on the MAP. And the M is for multilateral relationships and meetings that matter. A is for accessibility and availability of the Ambassador. And P is for policy, partnerships, and presence and using those tools that are available to me.

So USCIRF would be one of those entities that I would sit with, that we, together, would put religious freedom on the map and work in a complementary collaborative relationship.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you very much.

Dr. COOK. You are welcome.

Senator BOXER. Thank you very much, Senator Lugar.

Senator Lee.

Senator LEE. Thank you for joining us today, Ms. Cook.

Dr. COOK. Thank you.

Senator LEE. I wanted to talk to you for a minute about Iraq's indigenous Christian population. Do you have any thoughts that you could share with us about what you would do to help Iraq's Christians?

Dr. COOK. Yes; thank you, sir, for your question, and welcome.

It is good to—there has certainly been a lot of violence and a lot of discrimination against Iraq's Christian population. There has been a shift certainly in military action there, and so part of what is going to be necessary is to also have conversations with General Petraeus and the military chaplains who are there.

Being a religious leader, I also bring that camaraderie of relationship with the chaplains who are on the ground. But also we have Ambassador Bodde, who has been assigned to Iraq, and there also is Deputy Assistant Secretary Corbin, who has been assigned to Iraq. Those would be conversations that I would need to have with them as well, because they have been doing the work, and also partner with them and build upon the relationships that they have built in Iraq.

Senator LEE. OK. What about in Pakistan, defamation laws? Those have proven problematic for religious liberty, as I suspect you would agree. Have you given any thought to those and how you might deal with those in this capacity?

Dr. COOK. Well, yes. Pakistan is very complicated. It has some societal issues, as well as religious freedom issues. But we are thankful that on last Thursday, the antidefamation resolution, an alternative was presented by Pakistan, and defamation is no longer in the title. The United Nations Human Rights Council met in Ge-

neva, and an alternative resolution was passed unanimously so that it will protect religious minorities.

We are very concerned certainly about the Ahmadi communities there and the Christian communities and other religious minorities. And in our wider group of friends and partners, I have a wonderful friendship with an Ahmadi family, Mr. Nasir Ahmad. And so, talking with those persons from those communities which have been oppressed is certainly something that we want to continue to do.

But Pakistan represents many complexities, and we will continue to work forward. We will certainly—our condolences certainly went out to Prime Minister Bhatti's family and to Governor Taseer's family, and we would hope that as we continue that they will have a new champion for religious freedom. But in the meantime, we certainly have to build upon the work that they did.

Senator LEE. Do you feel well equipped to come into a role that is still in the process of being defined?

Dr. COOK. I think the role is very defined, and I feel very equipped and compatible with this role. So I think that I am very prepared. Courageous and boldness and passion is what Senator DeMint asked for, and I bring those qualities to it, as well as a wealth of experience.

Senator LEE. Thank you.

Senator BOXER. Thank you very much, Senator.

Well, Dr. Cook, I want to thank you and all of your family and extended family who came today. I speak for myself in saying you are an incredible witness before this committee. You have acquitted yourself, I think, magnificently. You have answered every question in detail. You never ducked a question.

And I think you have shown, I hope—I hope—this committee that you are ready. I think you are more than ready for this job. So I thank you.

I know Senator DeMint has a few questions. I have a couple of questions. Others may. So we will leave the record open for 24 hours. So stay close to us, and get those answers back.

Senator BOXER. And then we will work with the Foreign Relations Committee to have your nomination moved forward.

Again, thank you so very much.

And this hearing stands adjourned. Thank you, colleagues.

Dr. COOK. Thank you, Senator.

[Whereupon, at 3:16 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

#### ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF SUZAN JOHNSON COOK TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY  
SENATOR JOHN F. KERRY

*Question.* What level of input will you have in the administration of the Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF)? How would you ensure that religious freedom considerations are taken into account during the programming of HRDF funds?

*Answer.* Established under President Clinton, the HRDF has funded such projects as promoting the rule of law, advancing democratic values, and supporting religious freedom efforts and worker rights in over 50 countries. Over the last 3 years, more than \$10 million of the HRDF has been committed to religious freedom programming. As Ambassador at Large, if confirmed, I would be directly involved in the review and selection process on all proposals related to religious freedom.

Religious freedom programming currently supports such areas as: (1) training religious groups, civil society, and lawmakers to develop legal and policy protections for religious freedom, (2) addressing expressions of intolerance, antidefamation, anticongression, and antiblasphemy laws that restrict religious expression; (3) increasing public awareness of religious freedom through media outlets and opinion makers; and (4) strengthening capacity of religious leaders to promote faith-based cooperation across religious and sectarian lines.

If confirmed, I will collaborate closely with DRL's programming office, on HRDF programs that are reviewed and approved generally under DRL authority, paying particular attention to those proposals where religious freedom is integrated with the larger promotion of freedom of expression. For example, programming on Internet freedom has direct and significant benefits for the advancement of freedom of religion.

*Question.* The forces of change in the Middle East may pose a risk to religious minorities, particularly in those countries experiencing violent turmoil. What steps would you take to protect the religious freedom of minority communities in that region? How would you support moderate voices and encourage dialogue on religious freedom among representatives of different faiths?

*Answer.* If confirmed as a principal advisor to the President and Secretary of State on international religious freedom issues, I look forward to promoting religious freedom as a core objective of U.S. foreign policy. Religious freedom is a fundamental human right and a pillar of a democratic society. The Middle East must be a top priority for promoting religious freedom, especially given recent attacks on religious minorities in the region. I am deeply disturbed by the increase of persecution and violence against religious minorities in this region and in many other parts of the world. I will impress upon governments that religious freedom enhances stability, and that restrictions on religious communities only serve to encourage more sectarian tensions and violence.

The changes that we are seeing in the Middle East have been dramatic and often inspiring, yet violence and intolerance remain sources of concern—particularly for religious minorities in this region. We are observing a mixed picture in the region, and I would encourage those voices promoting religious freedom among the emerging political leadership and strengthened minority-community voices. Minority religious communities in Middle Eastern countries where they had previously been repressed should have new opportunities for engagement with governments, interfaith dialogue, and progress toward greater religious tolerance and religious freedom. It will be one of my top priorities to support those voices inside the region using these opportunities to increase respect for religious freedom and interfaith dialogue.

If confirmed, I will lead the U.S. Government's efforts to press for reform with governments that violate religious freedom, work with governments that share our views, and reach out to religious leaders worldwide to urge them to work with the United States in this region to promote religious tolerance and freedom. The Secretary is deeply engaged on religious freedom issues, and the first line of defense on religious freedom is our hard-working embassies and missions worldwide. The IRF Act provides many tools to advance this agenda. I will use all the tools of diplomacy and engagement, including public and private messaging, pressure, and programs.

I will work with my colleagues in the State Department and with civil society to advocate for a change in the Egyptian law to remove severe restrictions on building and renovating Christian places of worship. I would also press the Iraqi Government to protect vulnerable religious minorities by taking effective measures to prevent future attacks and to bring to justice the perpetrators of attacks on Christians and other minorities.

If confirmed, I also look forward to engaging political and civic leaders directly to encourage greater reforms and protection of religious minorities. I specifically hope to travel to Egypt and Iraq soon to meet with my counterparts in the governments to urge them to fulfill their international obligations to respect freedom of religion and ensure the safety of its religious minorities. I will work more broadly with communities around the region to advance religious freedom by engaging religious leaders and civil society; through programming and exchanges; and by promoting interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and mutual respect through education.

*Question.* In Uzbekistan, government restrictions on religious freedom have led to the arrest and imprisonment of thousands of persons, including many Muslim individuals and registered and unregistered religious groups. What strategy would you employ to encourage the Government of Uzbekistan to abide by its international commitments on religious freedom, including its commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights?

**Answer.** I am deeply concerned about the Uzbekistan Government's restrictions on and abuses of religious freedom. If confirmed, I intend to build on the important work of State Department colleagues and press the Government of Uzbekistan to take specific actions to support religious freedom. Uzbekistan has been designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) since 2006. Since the CPC designation, State Department officials have met numerous times with Uzbek officials, both in Uzbekistan and in Washington, most recently during the Annual Bilateral Consultations in Tashkent in February 2011. Secretary Clinton also raised religious freedom, among other human rights issues, with President Karimov during her December 2010 visit to Tashkent following the OSCE summit.

If confirmed, I would work with U.S. colleagues, key international partners, USCIRF, and NGOs to advocate for progress and help Uzbekistan improve its practices and legislation. If confirmed, I plan to travel to Uzbekistan to reinvigorate and elevate our dialogue on religious freedom. I will press hard for the Uzbek Government to simplify the registration process for religious groups and reduce the requirements for registration, and will also urge the Uzbeks to reduce or eliminate the civil and criminal penalties for unregistered religious activity. I will work to ensure that advocacy for religious freedom continues to be an integral part of future Annual Bilateral Consultations and will work with my colleagues to utilize all diplomatic tools to motivate and persuade the Uzbek Government to make improvements. I would use appropriate public diplomacy and program assistance toward that goal.

**Question.** The status of the Rohingya in Burma, Bangladesh, Thailand, and other Southeast Asian countries remains precarious. Lacking citizenship, they often face restrictions on access to education and other basic services, live in deplorable conditions, and do not enjoy the right to certain fundamental human freedoms, including rights to freedom of religion, association, and movement. What role would your office play in encouraging greater protections for the Rohingya against policies that discriminate on the basis of religion?

**Answer.** I am very concerned about the plight of the Rohingya, particularly in Burma where the government continues to refuse to recognize them as citizens, rendering them stateless, and imposes restrictions on their movement and marriage. I am also concerned about the treatment of Rohingya refugees in Thailand and Bangladesh. If confirmed, I will work with our embassies in the region as well as the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration to continue to press for the rights of Rohingya in Burma and throughout the region. I will follow this issue closely, highlight Rohingya human rights problems in our annual reports, engage governments in the region to end discrimination against the Rohingya, and work toward developing regional solutions to address their plight.

Burma is designated a Country of Particular Concern for its ongoing violations of religious freedom. The U.S. Government has a wide array of financial and trade sanctions in place against Burma for its violations of human rights. Our Embassies also offer support to local NGOs and religious leaders and exchange information with otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders.

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RESPONSES OF SUZAN JOHNSON COOK TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY  
SENATOR BARBARA BOXER

**Question.** As you may know, DRC has been called the "rape capital of the world." The United Nations estimates that 200,000 women and girls have been raped in the DRC over the past 12 years, and that 15,000 women were raped in eastern DRC in 2009 alone. This level of brutality is simply incomprehensible and it must be stopped once and for all. According to the U.S. State Department's 2010 Report on International Religious Freedom, "Nearly 90 percent of the population" of DRC "attends religious services each week." Given that the vast majority of Congolese citizens regularly attend religious services, what, in your opinion, is the role of religious communities in raising awareness about violence against women? If confirmed, how will you work to encourage religious communities to take a leadership role in stopping violence against women in DRC?

**Answer.** I know your staff visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo recently and applaud your efforts to raise awareness of these human rights issues. I share your concern about the broader human rights issues in the country, particularly the horrific widespread violence against women. As a religious leader myself, I believe that communities of faith, working in concert with traditional leaders, can and should play an important role in raising awareness to combat violence against women and elevating the role and status of women in society.

If confirmed, I would strongly encourage churches and all religious communities to use their combined influence to address this horrific problem. Communities of faith can and should have a voice in reducing violence against women. If confirmed, I hope to travel to the DRC to help bring together these communities and urge them to demonstrate leadership in this important issue.

*Question.* On Thursday, March 24, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passed a resolution on "Combating Intolerance and Violence Against Persons Based on Religion or Belief." This was widely hailed by many religious groups and religious freedom advocates as a victory over a "defamation of religions" resolution that has long been championed by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Many feared that the "defamation of religions" resolution would be used to further criminalize peaceful criticism of religion, including reinforcing blasphemy laws in countries such as Pakistan where violations carry the risk of death. As noted by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the new resolution "properly focuses on protecting individuals from discrimination or violence, instead of protecting religions from criticism."

- If confirmed, how will you work to build on this resolution? And how will you work to encourage countries to eliminate blasphemy laws, particularly those that carry the death penalty such as in Pakistan and Afghanistan?

*Answer.* The consensus resolution adopted by the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC) represents a significant step forward in the global dialogue on countering intolerance, discrimination, and violence against persons based on religion or belief. The State Department, including staff from the Office of International Religious Freedom, worked intensively on developing this new approach.

If confirmed, working with member states from the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the European Union, I will urge robust implementation of the concrete measures outlined in the resolution such as education, awareness building, government outreach, service projects, dialogue, and countering offensive speech with more speech. I will also partner with governments, civil society, and religious leaders on constructive joint initiatives to combat intolerance, discrimination, and violence against persons based on religion or belief.

In countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, I am deeply concerned about abuses under the blasphemy laws. In Pakistan, the implementation of these laws has resulted in the arrest of, and attacks on, hundreds of Pakistani citizens, both Muslim and non-Muslim. If confirmed, I will urge the Government of Pakistan to address these problematic laws. I will also actively engage with the country's religious leadership and civil society actors advocating for tolerance and interfaith efforts. Our message is simple: we need to work together to reduce interfaith tensions and violence; blasphemy laws have actually contributed to violence and are thus counterproductive to their stated aims.

In Afghanistan, although in recent years the death penalty has not been carried out either by local or national authorities, these kind of discriminatory laws and practices are rooted in intolerance that governments should combat. If confirmed, I will urge the Government of Afghanistan to uphold its international obligations to freedoms of religion and expression, and also work in coordination with the international community, including our European partners, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and other like-minded partners to reinforce the importance of freedom of religion, tolerance, and respect. This will be a long process and progress will be measured in increments. If confirmed, I will use all of the tools at my disposal to engage with religious leaders and civil society—like the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), and I will help develop programs and exchanges to support these policies.

*Question.* The Government of Vietnam has a long history of intolerance to religious freedom despite provisions contained within the Vietnamese Constitution that provide for individual belief.

The government is especially harsh to individuals associated with religious groups that are not officially recognized. However, even members of churches that are acknowledged by the government, such as the Catholic Church, suffer persecution. Security officials interfere with religious gatherings, confiscate religious literature, and harass religious leaders with frequent interrogation.

In some instances, government officials have destroyed churches and religious structures. Religious groups and activists are threatened, harassed, and even sometimes imprisoned, such as in the case of former prisoner of conscience, Father Nguyen Van Ly, who was sentenced to 8 years in prison in 2007. He was released last year on medical parole; an order that expired on March 15, 2011. As a result, Father Ly faces possible rearrest by the government.



- If confirmed, how would you personally work to protect individuals who are at risk of harassment and detainment as a result of their religious activities?
- How will you work to more broadly to advance religious freedom in Vietnam?

Answer. If confirmed, Vietnam will be one of my top priorities, and I will use all the tools at my disposal to promote true religious freedom there, including reporting, diplomatic engagement, public diplomacy, and targeted programming. While there has been some overall progress in religious freedom over the last decade, Protestant minorities in the Central and Northwest Highlands, the Catholic Church, and individual religious believers of a variety of faiths still face serious problems. The State Department already engages regularly with the Government of Vietnam in Hanoi and in Washington, including at our annual Human Rights Dialogue, the most recent of which was led by Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Assistant Secretary Michael Posner in December 2010 in Hanoi.

If confirmed, I will travel to Vietnam to meet with religious freedom activists and with the families of imprisoned activists to consult on how best to advocate for them. I will advocate with the Vietnamese Government in Hanoi, and I will engage the Embassy of Vietnam in Washington. If confirmed, I will raise individual cases and I will address the broad institutional and societal issues that obstruct full freedom of religion. I will also work with my colleagues in the State Department, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and other NGOs in the United States working on these issues, with Members of Congress, Vietnamese civil society, and the Vietnamese diaspora in the United States to bring about positive improvement toward full religious freedom in Vietnam.

RESPONSES OF SUZAN JOHNSON COOK TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY  
SENATOR JIM DEMINT

*Question.* Do you believe the international standard for religious freedom protects the right of individuals to share their faith publicly (proselytism) and to change their faith (conversion)? If so, how will you work with foreign governments that have laws that criminalize the peaceful expression, teaching, or sharing of religion? Please be specific on how you intend to work with the most egregious government violators.

Answer. It is clear to me that international human rights standards protect the ability of individuals to change their beliefs and to share their beliefs in public. These rights are protected under the freedoms of religion, of expression, and of associations as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. If confirmed, I will address this issue directly through communications with governments that place restrictions on the ability to proselytize or convert. The State Department has closely followed the development and implementation of anticonversion laws, blasphemy laws, and apostasy laws in South Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East. These laws generally violate human rights law. Moreover, they can often lead to increased societal tensions and violence.

Therefore, in addition to directly pressing governments to bring their laws into conformity with international law, I will also engage civil society and religious leaders to hear their concerns and to engage them in building cultures of religious tolerance. I will also engage like-minded partners in the international community and raise these issues in regional and international human rights fora.

In countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, I am particularly concerned about abuses under the blasphemy laws. In Pakistan, the implementation of these laws has resulted in the arrest of and attacks against hundreds of Pakistani citizens, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Last fall these laws led to a death sentence for a Christian convert, Aasia Bibi. If confirmed, I will urge the Government of Pakistan to address these problematic laws. I will also actively engage with the country's religious leadership and civil society advocates for tolerance and interfaith efforts.

In Afghanistan, although in recent years the death penalty has not been carried out either by local or national authorities, discriminatory laws and practices that ban conversion are rooted in societal intolerance. If confirmed, I will urge the Government of Afghanistan to uphold its international obligations and commitments to respect freedom of religion and freedom of expression, and I will also work in coordination with the international community, including our European partners, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and other like-minded partners to reinforce the importance of freedom of religion, tolerance, and respect. This will be a long process and progress will be measured in increments. If confirmed, I will use all of the tools at my disposal, such as engaging religious leaders and civil society, like the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC).

I will also rely on programming and exchanges, and will promote interfaith efforts, tolerance, and mutual respect through education.

*Question.* Will you recommend sanctions for the most egregious violators? What actions will you recommend for Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs) for the most egregious violators?

*Answer.* The IRF Act mandates a Presidential Action for all CPCs, and provides specific examples of sanctions. If confirmed, I will recommend for consideration by the Secretary sanctions against egregious violators of religious freedom as appropriate to motivate improvement of the country's respect for religious freedom. The President also has the authority to waive the action only if the waiver would "further the purposes of the Act," or if "an important national interest" is at stake. The CPC status remains, even if a waiver is granted.

Presidential Actions are a critical tool in an effort to push a CPC toward improving conditions of religious freedom. For the most egregious violators, any sanction listed in the section 405 (9) (15) of the IRF Act, or a commensurate action is appropriate. Sanctions are one of a number of tools under the IRF Act. To expect real progress on religious freedom, they should be part of a broader engagement strategy to address restrictions on religious freedom. The ultimate goal underlying the CPC designation process is to realize actual progress and improvements in religious freedom. If confirmed, I will seek as many opportunities and use as many tools as possible to achieve this goal.

*Question.* Please explain how the Human Rights and Democracy Fund (HRDF) operates. You stated that roughly \$4 million in HRDF funding would be at your disposal. Is that figure correct? For what purpose do you intend to use the HRDF? What measurable outcomes have there been, related directly to religious freedom, as a result of this funding?

*Answer.* The HRDF supports the U.S. foreign policy goals of defending human rights and strengthening democratic institutions. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) has administered the HRDF to implement innovative projects in over 50 countries since the HRDF was established. The HRDF supports projects that advance U.S. foreign policy goals such as promoting the rule of law, strengthening democratic institutions, and defending religious freedom and worker rights.

Over the last 3 years, more than \$10 million of the HRDF has been committed to religious freedom programming. These programs support: (1) training religious groups, civil society, and lawmakers to develop legal and policy protections for religious freedom; (2) addressing expressions of intolerance, antidefamation, anticonversion, and antiblasphemy laws that restrict religious expression; (3) increasing public awareness of religious freedom through media outlets and opinion makers; and (4) strengthening capacity of civil society leaders to promote interfaith cooperation.

For example, the HRDF has funded a group of experts to analyze, identify, and eliminate hateful language in textbooks and increase content on tolerance in Israeli and Palestinian schools. In Vietnam and Laos, HRDF funds have supported joint trainings on religious freedom for government officials and religious leaders from diverse backgrounds. HRDF religious freedom programs are in place to increase discourse on religious freedom in the Middle East, Indonesia, and Pakistan in a wide variety of media, through print programming.

If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues in the International Religious Freedom office, DRL, and throughout the State Department to strengthen the creative development, monitoring, and evaluation of this programming.

*Question.* Will you be responsible for hiring and other employment decisions for the Office of International Religious Freedom? Please explain.

*Answer.* If confirmed as Ambassador at Large, under the mandate of the IRF Act, I will head the Office of International Religious Freedom. This mandate includes overseeing hiring and employment for the office, within U.S. Government guidelines. The Office Director and the Deputy Director, in their supervisory capacities, handle the day-to-day responsibilities of personnel management.

~~*Question.* Do you intend to meet with all new Ambassadors before they leave for their posts? Do you believe that the level of current training is sufficient?~~

*Answer.* If confirmed, I would make it a priority to meet with ambassadors appointed to serve in countries where we have concerns about religious freedom. In some cases, I would also want to meet with ambassadors going to countries or missions with whom we collaborate to advocate for religious freedom. I will seek opportunities in my travel and when Chiefs of Mission are in Washington to promote

collaborative strategic initiatives to promote religious freedom. Ambassadors and their staffs are the critical front line in advancing U.S. religious freedom policy. It is crucial that we work together to pursue common goals. If confirmed, my priority will be to cultivate constructive working relationships with our embassies.

If confirmed, I look forward to participating in the new courses being developed at the Foreign Service Institute, our National Foreign Affairs Training Center, to help officers in Washington and abroad promote human rights and religious freedom. Much of the current training for ambassadors and other State Department officers is excellent in focusing on the challenges in the field of promoting religious freedom.

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor—including the Office of International Religious Freedom—together with the National Foreign Affairs Training Center (FSI), are working to create new courses dealing with religious freedom issues, for both senior and working levels, and including interagency courses. In a recently developed course, religious freedom has been a significant part of training on human rights. A new 3-day course in June will be offered with a specific focus on Religion and Foreign Policy, and the Office of International Religious Freedom is providing significant input on course design. I understand demand for all these courses is very high. If confirmed, I will also personally work with FSI, to ensure they have the resources and expertise they need on religious freedom issues to prepare diplomats to engage boldly and constructively on issues of religious freedom.

*Question.* What is the Muslim Brotherhood?

*Answer.* The Muslim Brotherhood is a transnational Islamic organization founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna as a religious, political, and social movement. It was established to advocate the centrality of Islam to all facets of life—including politics—and it argued for the creation of an Islamic state in Egypt based on Islamic law (Sharia). In modern times, the organization seeks to implement Islamic law in Egypt. Offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood have spread throughout Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, and North Africa. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt renounced domestic violence in the early 1970s, although it has defended the right to armed jihad in some cases, such as for Palestinians.

The Brotherhood can also be seen as a broad ideological movement that has given birth to political parties in several countries, such as the Islamic Action Front in Jordan and Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank. These parties liaise and sometimes receive support from the Egyptian Brotherhood but today generally remain operationally independent from Cairo. In Egypt under Mubarak, the group was the frequent target of large-scale campaigns of arrest and intimidation by the government and was not allowed to participate legally in the political process, although “independent” candidates aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood were occasionally elected to Parliament, most notably in 2005.

The stated goal of the Egyptian Brotherhood’s current leader or General Guide, Muhammad Badie, is to “show the world the true Islam, the Islam of moderation and forgiveness that respects pluralism in the whole world.” However, in 2008, Muhammad Madhi Akef, then the Brotherhood’s General Guide, said his organization supports democracy, but only the “right kind . . . one that honors Sharia.” While the Brotherhood continues to eschew violence and has consistently condemned al-Qaeda, its leadership has generally viewed attacks by groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah as legitimate because the Muslim Brotherhood views attacks by Hamas and Hezbollah as being categorically distinct from al-Qaeda violence. In their mind, Hamas and Hezbollah are using violence in pursuit of legitimate national liberation goals in the face of foreign occupation. They view al-Qaeda attacks as indiscriminate, disconnected from any achievable political goals, and guilty of killing too many Muslims. In 2007 it released a draft political party platform statement that indicated a broad commitment to democratic norms, although some elements suggested ongoing ambiguity regarding universal civil rights and the status of Sharia. The movement’s youth wing, which took part in the demonstrations in Tahrir Square, has expressed interest in reforming the Muslim Brotherhood by elevating the role of women within the organization, incorporating religious minorities, and placing less emphasis on the direct implementation of Islamic law.

The Muslim Brotherhood has expressed its intention to participate in the post-Mubarak political process in Egypt and supported the constitutional amendments. A number of other Islamic parties have emerged since Mubarak’s fall, some of which have come out of the Brotherhood itself. This reflects the variety of agendas and generational differences found today within this broad movement.

*Question.* Do you believe that past actions by the United States against countries labeled by the Department of State as Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs) have been effective? If so, how? Please give examples.

Answer. The effectiveness of past actions against CPCs has varied between countries. I am committed to the use of CPC designations and will use Presidential Actions as appropriate. The range of CPCs, the diversity of the abuses and restrictions on religious freedom, and in some cases the restrictions on direct engagement (such as North Korea and Iran), require evaluation on a case-by-case basis and targeted strategies. Past actions have yielded significant results in some countries. For example, an agreement in 2006 with the Government of Vietnam led to enactment of a new legal framework that opened the door to recognition of new religious groups and increased registration of Protestant churches. Despite this progress, significant issues remain, and, if confirmed, I will focus on Vietnam as a priority country. Even when CPC designation leads to progress toward religious freedom, we must remain vigilant and continue our diplomatic engagement.

Actions taken by the United States against a country of particular concern must be part of a broader engagement strategy with that country to truly realize progress. If confirmed, I will develop broad engagement strategies—tailored to each country—that complement the important tool of a Presidential Action under the IRF Act. This engagement is critical to the IRF Act mandate for the Ambassador at Large “to advance the right to freedom of religion abroad.” For example, we can complement the threat or use of a Presidential Action through a range of tools, including diplomatic advocacy, working directly with religious and other civil society leaders, consulting with diaspora communities in the United States, funding effective and creative programs on the ground, and collaborating with other governments and NGOs to advance religious freedom.

*Question.* What tools will you use other than public diplomacy?

Answer. If confirmed, I will lead the U.S. Government’s efforts to press governments that violate religious freedom, engage governments that share our views, and reach out to religious leaders and civil society worldwide to urge them to work with me on an agenda in their countries and regions to promote religious tolerance and freedom. I would work with my colleagues throughout the U.S. Government, particularly our ambassadors overseas, to develop robust strategies to monitor, promote, and report on religious freedom around the world. The IRF Act provides many tools to help advance these goals, including sanctions and other Presidential Actions when appropriate.

We must also leverage multilateral efforts, especially in collaboration with like-minded partners, to reinforce the importance of freedom of religion. I would also work with religious leaders and other civil society groups in an effort to increase their influence on government policies and assist their efforts to confront societal pressures that cause religious persecution. Exchanges are also an important tool, bringing government and religious leaders to the United States to experience firsthand our policies on religious freedom and sending speakers from the United States to promote religious freedom abroad. In multireligious societies, there are many opportunities for creative programs such as training religious groups, civil society, lawmakers, and government officials to develop legal and policy protections for religious freedom; increasing public awareness of restrictions on religious freedom and international rights; and promoting interfaith tolerance and mutual respect through education, training, and media tools. Each country presents unique challenges and opportunities, and almost always will require a multi-faceted approach.

*Question.* Given the recent unrest in Middle East, what new opportunities for involvement do you see that did not previously exist? Please outline in detail your strategy for the region.

Answer. The Middle East must be a top priority for promoting religious freedom, especially given recent attacks on religious minorities in the region. I am deeply disturbed by the increase of persecution and violence against religious minorities in this region and in many other parts of the world. I will impress upon governments that religious freedom enhances stability, and that restrictions on religious communities only serve to encourage more sectarian tensions and violence.

The changes that we are seeing in the Middle East have been dramatic and often inspiring, yet violence and intolerance remain sources of concern—particularly for religious minorities in this region. We are observing a mixed picture in the region, and I would encourage those voices promoting religious freedom among the emerging political leadership and strengthened minority community voices. Minority religious communities in Middle Eastern countries where they had previously been repressed should have new opportunities for engagement with governments, interfaith dialogue, and progress toward greater religious tolerance and religious freedom. It will be one of my top priorities to support those voices inside the region using these opportunities to increase respect for religious freedom and interfaith dialogue.

If confirmed, I will lead the U.S. Government's efforts to press for reform with governments that violate religious freedom, work with governments that share our views, and reach out to religious leaders worldwide to urge them to work with the United States in this region to promote religious tolerance and freedom. The Secretary is deeply engaged on religious freedom issues, and the first line of defense on religious freedom is our hard-working embassies and missions worldwide. The IRF act provides many tools to advance this agenda. I will use all the tools of diplomacy and engagement, including public and private messaging, pressure, and programs.

In Egypt, if confirmed, I would lead U.S. efforts to foster strategic dialogue between Muslims and minority groups who desire a civil state where all people, irrespective of religious identity, share equal rights, duties, and opportunities. I will work with my colleagues in the State Department and with civil society to advocate for a change in the Egyptian law to remove severe restrictions on building and renovating Christian places of worship. In Iraq, I would work with other U.S. officials to continue to press the Iraqi Government to protect vulnerable religious minorities by taking effective measures to prevent future attacks and to bring to justice the perpetrators of attacks on Christians and other minorities. I would also focus on Saudi Arabia, in particular pressing for meaningful reform of educational curriculum, which continue to incite hatred and intolerance toward non-Muslims and certain Muslims. I will seek to reinvigorate our dialogue with the Saudis to reduce systemic restrictions on religious freedom for all Saudis, including Shia Muslims.

RESPONSES OF SUZAN JOHNSON COOK TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY  
SENATOR RICHARD G. LUGAR

*Question.* The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 established the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to review annually the state of international religious freedom and to make policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. The Commission's mandate is set to expire September 30, 2011. Does the administration support the reauthorization of the Commission? Why or why not?

*Answer.* USCIRF has played and continues to play an important and positive role in advocating for religious freedom throughout the world. The respective roles of the Department of State and USCIRF under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRF Act) are complementary. Each continues to focus on the mutual goal of promoting religious freedom while fulfilling their statutory mandates, which include publishing annual reports. If confirmed I will seek out USCIRF's input and will welcome their recommendations. I will increase collaboration between USCIRF and the Department of States' Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF Office) toward our shared goal of ending religious persecution and advancing freedom of religious belief and practice around the world. With regard to a reauthorization, I understand that the legislation that has not yet been introduced. Since I am not confirmed, I am not yet in a position to speak on legislative matters.

When enacted 13 years ago, the IRF Act envisioned clear and distinct roles for the Ambassador at Large as head of the IRF Office, and USCIRF as an independent congressionally funded Commission. Passage of the IRF Act brought heightened emphasis to the cause of religious freedom as a central component in U.S. human rights policy and U.S. foreign policy generally. In 1998, as evidenced by the structure of the IRF Act itself, Congress created USCIRF as an additional voice on religious freedom, and to evaluate progress on U.S. religious freedom policy and make recommendations accordingly.

*Question.* In Pakistan, a Christian government official, and the first-ever Federal Minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, was shot and killed after advocating the reformation of local blasphemy laws. This assassination followed on the heels of the assassination of Punjab Governor, Salman Taseer in January 2011 who also called for the reformation of these laws. What strategy would you employ to combat such religious intolerance?

*Answer.* I am very concerned about the attacks on religious minorities in Pakistan, including abuses under the blasphemy laws; the treatment of Christians, Ahmadis, and reform-minded Muslims; and the increase in the number and severity of reported high-profile cases against members of religious minorities.

I am deeply saddened by the brutal killing of Minister Bhatti and Governor Taseer and condemn the killings in the strongest possible terms. My deepest sympathies are with their families and friends. Both men gave their lives to defend the principles of religious freedom, equality, and human rights for all Pakistanis. The



assassination of Minister Bhatti, merely 2 months after the assassination of Governor Taseer, emphasizes the need for aggressive advocacy of religious freedom and tolerance in Pakistan.

I am committed to the same principles Minister Bhatti and Governor Taseer fought for, and, if confirmed, I will prioritize and elevate U.S. efforts to promote freedom of religion in Pakistan. I will work with Government officials to urge them to take the necessary measures to address the serious religious freedom problems in the country and to address discriminatory and repressive blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws. These laws have been exploited to harass religious minorities, sectarian opponents, and Muslims, and to retaliate in personal disputes. I will also work with civil society, including religious leaders, to encourage voices of tolerance and to support their efforts to promote religious freedom and interfaith respect and understanding in Pakistan.

*Question.* A New Year's Day car bombing in Alexandria, Egypt killed 21 worshippers at a local Coptic church and marked one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in Egypt since 2006. Many Coptic Christians worry that religious persecution will escalate given the uncertain political landscape in Egypt at this time. What role, if any, would your office play in addressing religious violence in the region and protecting religious minorities?

*Answer.* The Middle East must be a top priority in promoting religious freedom, now more than ever, given both the attacks on members of religious minorities in the region and opportunities to build upon the common purpose that emerged as Muslims and Christians supported each other in Cairo's Tahrir Square. If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues in the U.S. Government to support those in Egypt and throughout the region who seek meaningful progress on religious freedom. If confirmed, I will encourage opportunities that have emerged from calls for political reform. I will join forces with my colleagues to combat efforts to exploit sectarian tensions. I remain very concerned about longstanding violence and discrimination against members of religious minorities in Egypt and elsewhere in the region.

If confirmed, I would plan to visit this region soon and press the governments to protect religious freedom, and to discourage sectarian violence and societal intolerance. Governments that justify restricting religious freedom out of security and stability concerns only encourage impunity and often lead to more sectarian violence. I would emphasize that point to governments in the region. I would work with my USG colleagues to press governments to protect members of vulnerable religious minorities by taking effective measures to prevent future attacks and to bring to justice the perpetrators of attacks on Christians, Jews, and members of other religious minorities.

I will also work to strengthen civil society that promotes religious tolerance, and programs that promote tolerance and mutual respect between different religious communities. If confirmed, I will advocate for increasing U.S. programs and activities to support initiatives in several areas directly related to religious freedom, such as funding for programs that work with Coptic and Muslim community groups, reform of official curricula to remove religious bias, as well as support for NGOs that monitor the country's media for occurrences of sectarian bias.

Regarding Egypt in particular, if confirmed, I will work closely with our Ambassador and other USG officials to advocate for an end to acts of sectarian violence, for greater protection of religious freedom and equal rights under the law for persons of all faiths. I will advocate for the removal of laws that discriminate against religious minorities and for the adoption of a unified law on places of worship. I will also work with the Government of Egypt in its efforts to address concerns of the Coptic community. I am heartened to see that the Egyptian Prime Minister has met with the leadership of the Coptic community following the recent destruction of a Coptic church in Sol.

I have also been encouraged by calls for unity and mutual respect among Egypt's various religious groups. If confirmed, I will support and encourage our Embassy in Cairo in its continuous efforts to promote religious freedom values with government officials, civil society, and political and religious leaders. I will also strongly support our Embassy's efforts to maintain and broaden an active dialogue with leaders of the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Baha'i religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists.

*Question.* While religious minorities in Iran face constant persecution and harassment, many members of the Baha'i community have been arrested for proselytizing in Tehran, Bam, and Kerman, and seven Baha'i leaders who were sentenced to 20 years in prison in August 2010. Given the lack of diplomatic relations the United

States has with Iran, what strategies, if any, would your office employ to foster religious freedom in Iran?

Answer. I have been following the persecution of Baha'is and other religious communities in Iran with great concern. I understand that the State Department is working closely with representatives of these communities and other like-minded countries to develop best strategies for improving both religious freedom in Iran and the morale of the persecuted populations. President Obama's criticism of the Iranian Government's persecution of the Baha'i and Sufis in his March 20 remarks marking the Persian holiday Nowruz, got the attention of the Iranian Government and was enthusiastically received by Baha'is and other religious minorities in and outside of Iran.

If confirmed, I will continue these efforts of targeted and effective statements, partner with like-minded governments and the newly created U.N. Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Iran, and develop additional opportunities to sanction those who continue to persecute Baha'is because of their faith.

Under the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010, the U.S. Government has applied targeted sanctions against Iranian officials for serious human rights abuses. Just last month, the Prosecutor General of Tehran—who among his many actions against minorities and others, ordered the arrest of seven Baha'i—was added to the sanctions list.

