

November 8, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you as national leaders to express our support for the reauthorization of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom as it has been configured since its inception and to express our concern about a recent legislative proposal (HR 2867) that would significantly reduce the number of Commissioners appointed to the Commission from 9 to 5. In addition, we would ask the Congress to restore the full funding of the Commission, or if cuts need to be made, to ensure it has the resources to do its work. We do not believe the current House proposal provides those levels.

It is essential that the Administration recognize the importance of maintaining a Commission that reflects the diversity of America's religious communities. In particular, we are concerned that a reduction in the number of Commissioners could result in the exclusion of voices from minority religious communities. These Commissioners advise the Administration and Congress on critical issues of international religious freedom that, in turn, affect diverse religious communities worldwide. The Commission is more productive in its current form and more able over the years to have its membership drawn from diverse communities than it would were it reduced in size.

Furthermore, the Commissioners serve in unpaid positions and a reduction in their number will not have a commensurate effect of saving a proportionate amount of government spending. Commissioners do not have staff working for them individually, nor do they have offices at the Commission. The reduction proposed in HR 2867 would disproportionately and unnecessarily cut back the Presidential appointees as well.

We urge you to support reauthorization of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to maintain the current size of the Commission, and to ask Congress to provide full funding so it may continue its important work.

Respectfully,



Imam Mohamed Magid
President
Islamic Society of North America



Rabbi David Saperstein
Director and Counsel
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism



Rabbi Steve Gutow
President
Jewish Council for Public Affairs



Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon
General Secretary
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA



Dr. Welton C. Gaddy
President
Interfaith Alliance



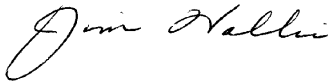
Aisha H.L. al-Adawiya
President
KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights



Dr. Sarah Sayeed
President
Women in Islam, Inc.



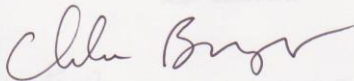
Dr. A. Roy Medley
Director, Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue
Jewish Theological Seminary



Jim Wallis
President and CEO
Sojourners



Rev. J. Brent Walker
Executive Director
Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty



The Rev. Chloe Breyer
Executive Director
The Interfaith Center of New York



Rev. Richard Killmer
Executive Director
National Religious Campaign Against Torture



Richard T. Foltin
Director of National & Legislative Affairs
American Jewish Committee



Dr. Michael Trice
Associate Dean, Ecumenical & Interreligious Dialogue
School of Theology & Ministry, Seattle University



Stanley Noffsinger
General Secretary
Church of the Brethren



Dr. William F. Vendley
Secretary General
Religions for Peace USA



Rev. Craig C. Roshaven
Witness Ministries Director
Unitarian Universalist Association

Reverend Julius R. Scruggs
President
National Baptist Convention, USA

Reverend William J. Shaw
Immediate Past President
National Baptist Convention, USA

Rev. Dr. Guy Campbell, Jr.
President
General Baptist Convention of NJ

Rabbi Burton Visotzky
Director, Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue
Jewish Theological Seminary

Rabbi Dr. Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer
Director, Dept. of Multifaith Studies & Initiatives
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Preeta D. Bansal
Former Chair & Commissioner
US Commission on International Religious Freedom