

## **Remarks to the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group**

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**The Secretary's Strategic Dialogue With Civil Society**

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Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be with you today and to be able to speak to such a distinguished audience of religious studies scholars and leaders at the launch of this Working Group on Religion and Foreign policy.

Today's event is part of a larger effort by Secretary Clinton to reach out to civil society. At the State Department, we know that if we're going to tackle the tough issues of the 21st century, from climate change, to the Arab Awakening, to religious intolerance around the globe, we must partner with leaders from beyond the halls of government. That is precisely why Secretary Clinton launched the Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society this past February. This Dialogue provides a platform to amplify the voices of civil society activists and help us work together to address common goals. While it is regular diplomatic practice for us to engage with other nations through strategic dialogues, this Dialogue recognizes the urgent need to engage beyond the halls of government.

In addition to Religion and Foreign Policy, senior diplomats here at the State Department are leading working groups focused on:

- 1) Governance and Accountability;
- 2) Democracy and Human Rights;
- 3) Empowering Women, and
- 4) Labor affairs.

Today we come together -- U.S. government officials and a diverse group of religious leaders, academics, and leaders from faith-based and secular nongovernmental organizations -- for a focused dialogue on how the U.S. Government -- along with domestic and international NGOs -- can work together at the crossroads of religious engagement and conflict, democracy and humanitarian needs.

Our dialogue comes at an opportune time.

The events of recent months remind us that there is no shortage of global challenges -- from famine in the Horn of Africa to the democratic revolutions in the Middle East. While the enormity of the problems is daunting, it is the promise of someday solving them that drives each of us every day.

As Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs, I have had the opportunity to meet with religious groups and faith based organizations around the world, who share

our commitment to protecting human rights and promoting peace in every corner. No matter where I am, from Indonesia to Uganda, I am struck by the thread that unites the vast majority of the world -- a faith that is bound by hope and defined by love of family and our fellow man.

Last year, I met an American woman who was from a conservative evangelical church. She and her family had taken in a refugee from Southeast Asia -- likely the first time they had met a refugee, much less accepted him into their home and community. I asked her what most surprised her about getting to know refugees. She told me: how easy it is to love them.

I tell that story because it shows the kind of transformation that takes place when walls are broken down and we are allowed to recognize the human spirit of acceptance and love that runs through us all. Together, we can work towards that transformation in our most pressing foreign policy challenges.

There is no question that faith is hard, and walls are not easy to bring down. Religion can be as dangerous as it is powerful when carried with zeal and fervor. We see every day how religion is used by human rights advocates and terrorists alike to defend their actions.

But, for those of us in this room today, we believe in religion as a force good in the world -- and we are here to see how we can better leverage it in the pursuit of a stronger society -- a society that is unified in progress rather than divided by difference.

This working group is particularly important because eighty-five percent of people worldwide participate in a faith tradition -- and organized religion supports and sustains civil society around the world. Faith groups run many of the world's schools and health care facilities. Major development and charitable groups are run by religious organizations or are founded upon a religious commitment to compassion. Indeed, the activities of these groups are a crucial thread in the economic and political fabric of society. So, we need to engage with religious communities in order to have a holistic understanding of the factors at play in any given country.

Under the Obama Administration, we have seen a shift in dialogue towards mutuality and partnership with religious communities. We have challenged discrimination and intolerance, and fought to protect religious freedom, both at home and abroad. The U.S. government has condemned acts of religious intolerance -- whether they are against Copts in Egypt, Buddhists in Tibet, or Muslims in Dearborn, Michigan. And we look forward to working with all of you to tackle pressing challenges in your own communities and globally.

We are fortunate to have two leaders with us today -- Dr. Chris Seiple, President of the Institute for Global Engagement and Dr. Bill Vendley, Secretary General of

Religions for Peace -- as our two civil society senior advisors for the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group.

I am honored to serve as co-chair of this working group with Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Suzan Johnson Cook, and Joshua DuBois, the Director of the White House's Office on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

I'd now like to give my two co-chairs the opportunity to say a few words. It's my pleasure to introduce to you my friend and colleague Ambassador Johnson Cook.