

January 30, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
The Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Executive Summary: Countering the global worsening of religious freedom

The state of religious freedom worldwide is at its lowest point in 16 years, and current strategies for combatting the deterioration of this [universal human right](#) are insufficient. The solution is to adopt a new strategy that harnesses a powerful and untapped force with a vested interest in building religious freedom worldwide. *That's business.*

The good news is that top global businesses are already engaged in building religious freedom for millions of working people by making their workplaces faith friendly at home and abroad. Accordingly, I offer five recommendations including that the next Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom be a senior business leader with a passion for international religious freedom.

Recommendations to the State Department:

1. Call on companies worldwide to adopt and benchmark faith-and-belief-friendly practices as a way to build religious freedom for billions of working people of all faiths and beliefs.
2. Develop a global coalition of business leaders who can inspire their peers to advance peace by advancing religious freedom and interfaith understanding.
3. Prioritize funding international religious freedom initiatives that can be sustained through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.
4. Develop a business toolkit that incorporates the best practices and lessons learned from successful “religious freedom building” initiatives such as those described below.
5. Recommend to the President that he nominate an Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom who has global business experience and can have world-changing impact by promoting the positive socio-economic and bottom-line benefits of religious freedom.

Invitation: In support of the businesspeople “building religious freedom” at home and abroad, we request the honor of you keynoting our 6th annual [Fortune 500 Faith@Work Global Summit](#) at the at The Catholic University of America’s Busch School of Business in Washington, DC on May 21, 2025.

Brian J. Grim, Ph.D.
Founding President, [Religious Freedom & Business Foundation](#)

Details on all of the above follow.



Details

The Problem

The latest [data](#) show that governments harassed religious groups in 186 countries and territories, up from 118 in 2007, the year I led the [first](#) Pew Research Center annual study of restrictions on religious freedom. Compounding the problem is that when harassment by social actors is included, religious groups in 192 out of the world's 198 countries and territories (97%) experienced such harassment, which is a [new peak level](#). (This also includes harassment of non-religious people by religious groups.)

The situation has only worsened since President Trump cited Pew's data at a special event during the 2019 United Nations General Assembly:

“Regrettably, the religious freedom enjoyed by American citizens is rare in the world. Approximately 80 percent of the world’s population live in countries where religious liberty is threatened, restricted, or even banned. And when I heard that number, I said, ‘Please go back and check it because it can’t possibly be correct.’ And, sadly, it was. Eighty percent.”

These data are in part based on the Pew Research Center's quantitative analysis of the State Department's own [annual reports](#) on international religious freedom mandated by and submitted to the U.S. Congress.

Given that violations of religious freedom occur in 97% of countries, a strategy that does more than just calling out the most egregious violators is needed.

The Solution

I left the Pew Research Center in 2014 with a mission to find a more effective way to combat this rising tide of restrictions on freedom of religion or belief around the world. The data and experience were clear: the most powerful and untapped force with a vested interest in building religious freedom worldwide is *business*.

As Roger Finke and I show in our Cambridge University Press book, [The Price of Freedom Denied](#), *religious freedom for all (including those without a religion)* is a recipe for peace and human flourishing. It also promotes sustainable development and global competitiveness, as shown by research findings which I published at the World Economic Forum. Specifically, that study finds that religious freedom is positively associated with nearly all of the pillars of global competitiveness (as measured by the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index) and is one of three factors significantly associated with global economic growth.



Accordingly, I have five recommendations based on the successful experience and initiatives of the [Religious Freedom & Business Foundation](#) around the world, including in the Middle East, India and the People's Republic of China.

Recommendation 1

The State Department should convene and call on companies worldwide to adopt and benchmark faith-and-belief-friendly practices as a way to build religious freedom for billions of working people.

For instance, our [Corporate Faith-Friendly Index](#) survey helps global companies benchmark their progress in creating faith-friendly work environments. In 2024, more than 3.4 million people are employed by companies participating in the Index, working in all 50 states and scores of countries. These include, for example, Fortune 500 companies Accenture, American Airlines, Equinix, DELL, Intel, Salesforce, Tyson Foods, AIG, American Express, PayPal, Intuit, Texas Instruments, Google, Bosch, Citi, CMS Energy, ServiceNow, Altria, Aramark, and more.

These companies have found that when people's faiths and deeply held beliefs are welcomed, respected and celebrated in the workplace, this significantly boosts employees' motivation, which increases retention, recruitment and revenue -- all bottom-line business benefits.

Our Index tracks 11 best practices to create such work environments, including, for example, providing for the spiritual care of employees.

Spiritual care is one of the four core pillars of health recognized by [McKinsey & Company's Health Institute](#). For example, Tyson Foods does this through their chaplains that provide compassionate care to all their employees across the nation. American Airline's chief flight dispatcher is also an ordained Anglican priest who provides chaplaincy care for employees. This is not unlike chaplaincy programs provided in prisons, hospitals, military installations, and even in Congress itself.

Companies like Accenture meet the need for spiritual care by creating a culture of belonging that includes providing for faith-based counseling services as part of their Employee Assistance Programs. Many companies have employee business resource groups (EBRGs) that also provide spiritual support for employees, including organizations as diverse as Rolls-Royce, KPMG, Qualtrics, and BMC Software.

Recommendation 2

The State Department should develop and convene a coalition of global business leaders who can inspire their peers to advance peace by advancing religious freedom and interfaith understanding.

The Religious Freedom & Business Foundation's [Global Business & Interfaith Peace Awards](#), for example, recognize business leaders advancing peace. Recipients include CEOs and Chairs of major corporations ranging from Intel and EY to Tyson Foods and Hyundai.



They hail for more than 30 countries and all five continents. These include heroes who are funding and carrying out peace initiatives in the Holy Lands, such as Dr. Judith Richter, CEO of Medinol, and in India, such as King Husein, Chairman and CEO of Span Construction and Engineering:

- Medinol CEO Dr. Judith Richter founded the NIR School of the Heart to help high school students not only understand cardio-vascular career opportunities but also connect the hearts of people from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Dr. Richter helps students build bridges across cultures through the process of learning. As one of the graduates summed up the experience, The NIR School of the Heart “will make the whole Middle East a better place.” The program has become widely popular and currently has 826 graduates from Israel, the Palestinian territories, Jordan and Egypt who are functioning as ambassadors for peace, out of which 225 are also pursuing careers in medical-related professions.
- King Husein, Chairman and CEO of Span Construction & Engineering, has played a critical role addressing the rising global tide of restrictions on religious freedom. King’s efforts range from helping found the South Asian Consortium for Religion and Law Studies, to helping kick off the first-ever Business Roundtable to advance International Religious Freedom during the 2019 UN General Assembly in New York City. In diverse venues such as the Horasis Global Conference in Portugal and the IRF Summit in Washington DC, King shares how religious ethics benefit business. His advocacy also looks toward the next generation by his helping launch an initiative at BYU Hawaii to equip students from across Asia to know how to advance religious freedom when they return home.

Recommendation 3

The State Department should prioritize funding international religious freedom initiatives that can be sustained through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

The Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, through its Dare to Overcome initiative, has developed and piloted a [human rights and business skills curriculum](#) for high school students in India that companies worldwide could adopt as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) project. Such projects can be scaled up for corporate support worldwide.

Recommendation 4

The State Department should develop a business toolkit that incorporates the best practices and lessons learned from successful “religious freedom building” initiatives such as those just described.

This has already been done in the United Kingdom. The Religious Freedom & Business Foundation worked with the UK’s APPG FoRB (All Part Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief) to launch a [toolkit to help businesses “build” religious freedom for all](#) through faith-friendly workplace policies and programs.



Former Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, embraced this approach at an [event on the margins of the UN General Assembly](#) after President Trump’s 2019 speech, and I now ask that you reinvigorate the State Department’s efforts to call businesses and business leaders at home and abroad to embrace faith-friendly workplace policies and programs that accommodate rather than discriminate. It’s not just a practical way to build religious freedom for everyone everywhere, it’s also very good for business. This leads to a fifth recommendation.

Recommendation 5

The State Department should recommend to the President that he nominate an Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom who has global business experience and can have world-changing impact by promoting the positive socio-economic and bottom-line benefits of religious freedom.

Indeed, the benefits that religious freedom offers to businesses and economies are substantial. For example, generative AI being developed by technology companies can benefit religious freedom but at the same time pose unique challenges, as was [documented during the 2024 International Ministerial Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief in Berlin](#). Therefore, it is critical that the next Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom understand business and technology and especially engage this sector actively and knowingly. Since religious freedom is in the self-interest of business and business has tremendous culture-shaping power and resources, now is the time for a business leader with a passion for international religious freedom to take on this role.

Invitation

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Respectfully yours,

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