

# Evangelicals look overseas to global concerns

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ARLINGTON, Va. (RNS)— When United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon recently addressed U.S. evangelical leaders in a historic forum, there was nervousness on all sides.

Some religious conservatives clung to long-held skepticism about the world body. Meanwhile, some evangelicals were ready to make a bold step in demonstrating their commitment to engage social justice issues on the foreign policy scene.

In the end, Ban called evangelicals “good allies,” and National Association of Evangelicals Vice President Richard Cizik dubbed the U.N. chief “a friend of evangelicals.”

The two-day conference of U.S. and overseas evangelicals demonstrated the challenges and possibilities ahead for evangelicals’ growing interest and influence on U.S. foreign policy.

“We’re going to be involved in conversations, (and) we’re going to be involved in dealing with issues that make us feel a little uncomfortable,”

said Geoff Tunnicliffe, international director of the [World Evangelical Alliance](#), who spoke of the nerves that accompanied the meeting. “We’re going to be going down some uncharted paths, and that’s OK.”

As religious leaders and foreign policymakers mark the halfway point in reaching U.N. goals to significantly reduce poverty by the year 2015, Ban said evangelicals play a key role in efforts to address the world’s poor and hungry.

“We cannot do it alone,” Ban told an audience of some 300 people. “We need good allies such as you here this evening.”

Evangelicals have long been known for their missions to the world, marked by evangelism and humanitarian aid, and in recent years, their growing clout in domestic politics. Now, their focus on international social justice matters is starting to gain them even more visibility.

“Evangelical Christians are much more inclined now than they were five or 10 years ago to get involved in the policy issues, the justice issues that affect poor and hungry people around the world,” said David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, a Washington-based anti-hunger group.

Those issues include combating sex trafficking and torture to protecting the poor in developing countries from the effects of climate change. All of that and more were discussed during the meeting, sponsored by the [National Association of Evangelicals](#) and [Micah Challenge USA](#), a global Christian campaign against poverty.

Ban specifically mentioned the evangelical attention to global warming—an issue that continues to generate skepticism among some high-profile evangelical leaders like James Dobson and others.

“With faith and will, we can make a difference,” he said.

Opening the gathering, Cizik noted the “clout” Ban’s speech gave to evangelicals and said the invitation marked a change in the negative, one-world-government impression some conservatives have had about the international body.

“There are people who do have those negative ideas, and I think you have to address them with positive ideas,” Cizik said. “We are the evangelical Christians who invited a Christian man to come and talk about what we’re about.”

Oswaldo Munguia, co-founder of Mopawi, a Christian development and conservation organization in Honduras, said he is “inspired” by evangelical interest in his causes, which involve helping the poor affected by depleted forests.

“I can see that more and more the evangelical church is becoming interested in the poverty we face in our country and the environmental destruction we are facing,” said Munguia, a Baptist forester.

Foreign relations experts urged U.S evangelicals to continue to effect change in policy as American lawmakers make economic and trade decisions.

“In a sense,” said Carol Welch of the [United Nations Millennium Campaign](#), “you’re ambassadors for the world’s poor in the halls of power.”