

Religious freedom leader applauds unalienable rights group

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WASHINGTON (BP)—The U.S. State Department's new Commission on Unalienable Rights underscores the nation's commitment to religious rights internationally, Tony Perkins said in his new role as chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

"We applaud the creation of this commission as another way of ensuring that the protection of these fundamental rights—the most foundational of which is freedom of religion or belief— is a core element of strategic policy discussions," Perkins said.

The diverse bipartisan commission will advise U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on human rights, Pompeo said in announcing the group in a July 8 press briefing.

"It's a sad commentary on our times that more than 70 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, gross violations continue throughout the world, sometimes even in the name of human rights," Pompeo said. "The time is right for an informed review of the role of human rights in American foreign policy."

Scholars and advocates named to group

Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon, a pro-life advocate and former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, will chair the 12-member group. Pompeo

described Glendon as a “world-renowned author, beloved professor, an expert in the field of human rights, comparative law and political theory.”

Other commission members are Stanford professor Russell Berman, Stanford political scientist Peter Berkowitz, Notre Dame law professor Paolo Carozza, Sunni leader Hamza Yusuf Hanson, Harvard sociologist Jacqueline Rivers, Orthodox Rabbi Meir Soloveichik, former USCIRF chair Katrina Lantos Swett, philosopher Christopher Tollefsen and University of California professor David Tse-Chien Pan.

Kiron Skinner, the state department’s director of policy planning, is the committee’s executive secretary, and attorney Cartright Weiland will serve as the commission’s rapporteur, Pompeo said.

“These individuals will provide the intellectual grist for what I hope will be one of the most profound reexaminations of the unalienable rights in the world since the 1948 Universal Declaration,” Pompeo said. “I hope that the commission will revisit the most basic of questions: What does it mean to say or claim that something is, in fact, a human right? ... Is it, in fact, true, as our Declaration of Independence asserts, that as human beings, we—all of us, every member of our human family—are endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights?”

Support pledged for advisory group



Tony Perkins

Perkins, at the helm of international religious freedom commission since June 17, pledged to support the new commission by providing advice and recommendations regarding international religious freedom. Perkins is an ordained Southern Baptist minister and head of the Family Research Council.

USCIRF Vice Chair Gayle Manchin also applauded the group.

“To the degree that this new commission within the State Department can help further communicate from Washington to the department’s farthest outposts the importance and urgency of religious freedom concerns as a fundamental human right, we believe this will lead to higher impact negotiations on behalf of the more than 70 percent of the world’s population that is currently suffering persecution or abuse,” Manchin said.

The advisory group is expected to meet at least monthly, and at other times as needed, according to the U.S. government daily journal, *The Federal Register*.