Ambassadors share concerns about religious freedom threats

March 8, 2022

KELLER—Three U.S. ambassadors for international religious freedom—a Muslim, a Jew and a Christian—raised concerns about threats to global liberty of conscience during the Global Faith Forum in Keller.

Current Ambassador Rashad Hussain and his two predecessors, Rabbi David Saperstein and former Sen. Sam Brownback, participated in the forum at Northwood Church.

"Unlikely Allies Building Flourishing Communities" was the theme of the March 6-7 event, sponsored by the Multi-Faith Neighbors Network.

"Religious freedom is a critical human right," and its protection globally "doesn't end with conversations in Washington," Hussain said.

Hussain, who grew up in Plano and visited his parents at their home there prior to the forum, reflected on his drive through Colleyville—scene of a recent hostage situation at the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue.

"It was a powerful reminder of the fact that there's so much work that needs to be done here and around the world," he said, "but also a powerful reminder of the incredible effort that people of all faiths are making to meet this challenge."

Hussain emphasized not only the importance of “collaboration between government and civil society,” but also the vital role of families and houses of worship in teaching the importance of mutual respect for people of all faiths.

“It starts with all of us,” he said.

Hussain highlighted multiple global issues—the treatment of practicing Christians in some Muslim-majority countries, the oppression of the Rohingya people in Myanmar and the genocide of the Uyghur Muslims in China.

When asked what keeps him awake at night, Hussain—the father of an infant daughter—responded, “What kind of world will our children grow up in?”

Call to maintain perspective

Whether the oppressed people are Uyghurs in China or Jews in many parts of the world, minorities are the “vulnerable victims of majorities,” Saperstein said.

Pointing to growing divisiveness and intolerance in the United States and elsewhere, he said: “It’s not clear to me that democracy will survive.” Rather, it may ultimately be seen as “a 200-year blip” on the radar screen of history, he said.

However, he said, people of faith can make “an indispensable contribution” by teaching respect for all people, promoting peace and standing against injustice.

Saperstein acknowledged the genuine tension in the United States between competing claims of people whose deeply held religious convictions may be in conflict with the civil rights other people.

Even so, people of faith around the globe “pray for the day” when the worst challenge they face is the tension caused by those kind of issues. Instead, they face real danger of imprisonment, beating or death because of their beliefs.

“Keep perspective,” he urged.

While Brownback said he doesn’t stay awake at night worrying because he believes in the sovereignty of God, he pointed to Russian aggression in Ukraine, the growth of “a virtual police state” in China and the threat that terrorist states pose for Israel.

“We could be in three major wars by spring,” he said.

In response to the threats, Brownback called on people of faith to pray.

“Please pray, and let that prayer lead your heart to action,” he said.