



**International Religious Freedom: Toward a Model of Transatlantic Cooperation
October 8-9, 2015: Georgetown University**

Several European countries, the European Union, and Canada have recently addressed religious freedom in their foreign policies. Given that United States policy is already shaped by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) passed by Congress, the potential exists for transatlantic cooperation in promoting religious freedom. However, differences among Western democracies are significant. This two-day event—the first in a year-long series on IRFA policy—aimed to identify these differences and find ways to accommodate or overcome them in the urgent task of advancing international religious freedom.

The first day began with an audience of nearly 200 people, and featured an opening keynote by Peter Berger and responses from Os Guinness and Walter Russell Mead. The dynamic conversation between the speakers focused on the new paradigm of religion and modernity and expected future challenges. This was followed by the day's first panel on religious freedom policy, where panelists shared their thoughts on the benefits and best practices in promoting religious freedom abroad. During the lunchtime conversation, speakers discussed the challenges in promoting this policy, and proposed innovative ways to construct a united, transatlantic coalition to foster cooperation and promote common interests. During the final panel of the day, scholars addressed the security benefits of religious freedom both at home and abroad, including its relationship to violence and extremism. The day concluded with a rousing speech by Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom David Saperstein, who spoke about the lessons other countries could draw from the American experience, as well as opportunities for improving the lives of religious minorities worldwide.

The second day consisted of a private session that featured the research and work of conference speakers, and was open to an audience of about 60 scholars, policymakers, and opinion shapers.

It began with a panel on violent extremism and broader security issues in the Middle East. Panelists encouraged communication between conflicting religious communities and argued that religious freedom must be a large component of any lasting peace solution in the Middle East. The conference then shifted to India and the Far East, where a new group of scholars described the religious freedom problems in their respective countries of study, such as India and China. The panel addressed whether Western countries should exert diplomatic pressure to counter religious freedom violations and discussed the benefits of religious freedom for economic and political stability. Eastern Europe and Orthodoxy was the focus of the next panel, which covered the unique Russian and Soviet experience with religious freedom and its impact on recent developments in Ukraine. The issue of church and state partnerships was vigorously debated.

In the final panel of the day, RFP Director Tom Farr noted that he was encouraged by the joining of so many experts on religious freedom. The two-day event brought together over 30 scholars and practitioners, including prominent voices like Anne Leahy, Mustafa Akyol, Monica Toft, and Fenggang Yang, in addition to the ones already mentioned. Several hundred audience members packed the Copley Formal Lounge at Georgetown University. The conference ended on this optimistic note, as speakers emphasized that progress was, in fact, being made to promote religious freedom around the globe.

For more information about this event, visit the official web page [here](#).