

REPORT

FROM THE

CAPITAL

Magazine of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty

Supreme Court hears travel ban case

HOLLY HOLLMAN: The government cannot enact laws designed to harm a religious group

Baptist-Muslim dialogue bridges gaps, creates conversation

AMANDA TYLER on the new faith-based initiative



A THREAT TO ANYONE'S RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS A THREAT TO EVERYONE'S RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Go beyond these pages: **Ideas for action**

As you will see in this edition of *Report from the Capital*, there are many ways to advocate for religious liberty for all. BJC Fellows Sofi Hersher and Kyle Tubbs share how they exercise their commitment on pages 9 and 11, and you can read the Rev. Brent Bowden's prayer on page 14.

Here are a few ideas to mobilize your commitment into action.

1. **Come to the BJC's Center for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C.** Meet with our staff and learn more about our work! Head to BJCOnline.org/Visit for more information.
2. **Embrace interfaith opportunities.** Inspired by the stories from the Baptist-Muslim Dialogue on pages 6-8? Check out the Know your Neighbor Campaign for ideas and resources on how to engage in dialogue and work within your community. The BJC is a founding partner of the campaign, which is housed on the website of Islamic Networks Group. Visit ING.org/KYN for resources and information, and hear from the founder of ING, Maha Elgenaidi, on page 10.
3. **Speak out:** Your voice among friends can change perceptions. Talk with those you know about religious liberty issues. Enter into faithful conversation and share your perspective. Find more resources for many religious liberty topics on our website at BJCOnline.org/Resources.

What other ways have you been raising your voice for religious liberty for all?
Email bjc@BJCOnline.org to share your story!

Connect with the BJC at these summer events

June 17:

BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler preaches at Agape Baptist Church in **Fort Worth, Texas**.

June 20:

BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman speaks on a panel titled "How can religion contribute to the common good?" at the 2018 Religious Freedom Annual Review at Brigham Young University in **Provo, Utah**.

June 26:

BJC Associate Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. conducts a workshop during the American Baptist Young Clergy Network's Connect 2018 gathering in **Evanston, Illinois**.

July 13:

BJC Associate General Counsel Jennifer Hawks leads a session at the Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute's Summer Bootcamp Intensive at the Newseum in **Washington, D.C.**

July 29-31:

BJC Associate Director of Mobilization Katie Murray participates in the Texas Baptists Family Gathering in **Arlington, Texas**.

For additional BJC events this summer and throughout the year, visit BJCOnline.org/Calendar

New Executive Order undercuts key protections

By Amanda Tyler, BJC Executive Director



Same event, same location, same song, new verse. For the second year in a row, President Donald Trump used the National Day of Prayer and a Rose Garden ceremony to unveil an Executive Order purporting to protect religious liberty that threatens to do the opposite.

In establishing the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative, Trump follows in the footsteps of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, both of whom had White House offices tasked with strengthening partnerships with faith-based and other community organizations working to meet the needs of Americans. We know from our experience, as well as advocacy efforts with the prior two administrations, that government and religious organizations can partner in constitutional ways to deliver social services. Getting it right, however, takes hard work and consultation with a wide array of stakeholders knowledgeable about religious liberty and social services.

The BJC, along with many other church-state groups, worked with the prior administrations to find ways to protect the religious liberty of program beneficiaries. An Executive Order issued by President Obama and federal regulations promulgated by the Obama administration included important safeguards, such as the right of an individual seeking services to a referral to an alternative service provider if he objects to the religious nature of the original agency, as well as written notice of his rights.

Referrals and notices exist to ensure that everyone seeking government services is served on a non-discriminatory basis, and that receipt of government-funded benefits is never conditioned upon one's religion or participation in religious activities. These basic principles protect the free exercise rights of all Americans and unite groups that may disagree on other details.

But, in this Order, President Trump strikes notice requirements and eliminates any apparent concern for protecting the religious freedom of those seeking government services. Instead, the Trump administration has signaled a commitment to the faith-based providers of services, promising to identify and reduce burdens on their free exercise rights and barriers to

providing government-funded services. This shift from tending to the needs of the people served toward making sure the needs of the providers are met is a dramatic change in focus from prior administrations.

Perhaps even more telling were the remarks of Vice President Mike Pence at the ceremony, when he said, "Today, President Trump will take another strong step to protect and promote Americans of faith." He couldn't have been referring to protecting the unknown number of Americans of all faiths (and none) who now may be forced to violate their own consciences in order to receive needed government-funded services. While prior administrations have worked to ensure "equal footing" for all those seeking to provide services, whether motivated by their faith or not, this administration is transparent in its objective to promote faith-based providers.

Government officials professing to promote faith should make all Americans, particularly those of us who are Baptist, very nervous. Virginia Baptist preacher John Leland perhaps said it best more than 200 years ago: "The fondness of magistrates to foster Christianity has done it more harm than all the persecutions ever did." Standing up for religious freedom requires both protecting the free exercise rights of all Americans and ensuring that government neither promotes any one faith tradition nor favors religion over irreligion.

I agree with Melissa Rogers, the former director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and former general counsel of the BJC. In her excellent commentary for the *Washington Post*, she wrote, "Removing religious liberty protections in the name of religious freedom taints the cause. Honoring freedom for faith-based providers, while taking it away from people receiving services, is wrong. ... One way or another, those who value religious liberty and social service partnerships must fix these mistakes."

You can count on the BJC to work with others who are concerned about the stripping of these important religious liberty protections. We must restore safeguards that will ensure that no American is forced to choose between having her needs met and practicing (or choosing not to practice) her faith.

Religious liberty and the travel ban

By Holly Hollman, BJC General Counsel



Many news accounts following oral arguments in *Trump v. Hawaii* suggested the U.S. Supreme Court is likely to uphold the Trump administration's policy known as the "travel ban." Based on our observations, I can't argue otherwise. Regardless of the Court's decision on the policy in its current form, the case has and should continue to influence the national conversation about religious liberty.

The Baptist Joint Committee stands firmly against stereotyping or targeting individuals or groups based on religion in ways that would deny them equal rights under the law. While religious liberty is protected differently in different contexts, the First Amendment protects against official government acts based on religious prejudice. In short, the government cannot enact laws designed to harm a religious group. We've often spoken out against statements by candidates and government officials, as well as enactments of law that tend to denigrate certain religions — or religion in general — in violation of this principle.

Broadly speaking, *Trump v. Hawaii* is about whether President Donald Trump's proclamation on immigration, otherwise known as the third version of the "travel ban" (the first one was issued in January 2017 and immediately challenged in the courts) exceeds his presidential authority. One question the Court is reviewing is whether the proclamation should be struck as a violation of the First Amendment because the policy's development and implementation can be traced to anti-Muslim sentiment.

I joined with more than 30 other constitutional law scholars in an *amicus* brief that argues that the proclamation adheres to the president's animus-laden campaign promises rather than constitutionally legitimate reasons and rests on a rotten foundation that the president hasn't cured. Here are a few excerpts from that brief:

"The Establishment Clause forbids officials from exercising governmental power on the basis of a desire to suppress, harm, or denigrate any particular religious sect or denomination. This limit, though narrow, is vital to religious liberty."

"The First Amendment protects speech, but it does not allow candidates or politicians to evade accountability if their words reveal that an unconstitutional purpose motivated their official actions."

"[H]ere, the President has repeatedly rejected, criticized, and departed from the various policy rationales presented to the courts by his unelected subordinates. It would disrespect the Office of the Presidency—and destroy lines of political and electoral accountability—for this Court to treat the President as insignificant in the issuance of his own Proclamation. His statements about its purpose must be considered authoritative."

As evident at oral arguments, the application of the First Amendment in this context was one of many novel legal questions before the Court. In general, both Congress and the president have authority to shape immigration policy. Congress has enacted a comprehensive scheme that provides the criteria for determining who gets to come into the country as an immigrant and explicitly leaves room for presidential action that may supplement specific conditions. National security is one basis for such action.

With immigration and national security concerns at the forefront, some justices seemed dismissive of the idea that President Trump's campaign rhetoric or other statements should weigh against a policy that on its face does not mention Muslims and in practice does not cover many Muslim countries. But, interest in the case, as reflected by the number and content of *amicus* briefs filed, indicates a high level of concern about the dangers of making immigration policy based on religion. The concerns were voiced from across a broad political and religious spectrum, and the attorney challenging the Trump administration made them clearly and forcefully.

The Court is expected to issue its ruling in June. Regardless of the outcome, the "travel ban" experience will continue to have an impact. The president's embrace of anti-Muslim sentiments unified interest groups filing *amicus* briefs in opposition to the policy. The harshness of the political rhetoric may have served to change some views about Muslims among non-Muslims, particularly those who recognize the religious diversity of American immigrants. And, in response to public pressure and court decisions, the administration repeatedly amended its policy. Those changes demonstrate the importance of the First Amendment and the courts, as well as the power of moral outrage by the public, as bulwarks against religious discrimination.

SCENES FROM THE SUPREME COURT: 4.25.18



48% of Muslim Americans have experienced discrimination in the past year

18% of Muslim Americans have seen anti-Muslim graffiti in their local community

Source: Pew Research Center, 2017



Voices for religious liberty

Rev. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush, American Baptist Minister, Senior Vice President, Auburn Seminary:

"Even if the Supreme Court votes that the Muslim Ban is constitutional, that does not mean it is morally or ethically acceptable. All kinds of American horror was deemed 'constitutional.'"



After being in the courtroom for oral arguments, BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler (right) talks with leaders from the Anti-Defamation League and Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Catherine Orsborn, Director, Shoulder-to-Shoulder Campaign:

"Proud to stand alongside friends & colleagues this morning at #SCOTUS to say #NoMuslimBanEver. America, we are better than this."

Tweets shown here are published with permission



Baptists and Muslims change the conversation at national dialogue

Baptists and Muslims from across the country met in the middle to build bridges and foster new understanding.

On April 16-19, congregational leaders, chaplains and other religious leaders from Baptist and Muslim faith traditions participated in the Third National Baptist-Muslim Dialogue in Green Lake, Wisconsin, organized by American Baptist Churches USA.

The goal of the dialogue was to create ongoing relationships, partnering a Baptist congregational leader with a Muslim counterpart in their communities, according to a news release from American Baptist Churches USA.

The 65 participants hailed from 19 different states and provinces across the United States and Canada. Leaders 50 years of age and younger attended in hopes of building long-term connections, fostering mutual understanding and participating in a joint project to enhance the welfare of their communities.

"Baptists and Muslims demonstrated how to mutually respect religious diversity while uniting behind a common conviction for peace," said the Rev. Mitch Randall, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics and EthicsDaily.com. "Living in a world torn apart by divisiveness and war, this conference provided a positive example how loving God and loving others can drive away hate and open

the door for eternal peace."

Randall, who recently served as pastor of NorthHaven Church in Norman, Oklahoma, spoke at a session alongside Imam Imad Enchassi of the Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City. For several years, both supported each other as they served their respective congregations in Oklahoma, bearing burdens together, such as facing discrimination and death threats.

"We found that beyond the titles of 'Pastor' and 'Imam,' we are two humans that are more alike than different," Randall said.

The conference extended participants the opportunity to build relationships with one another; examine social and political barriers to interfaith work; explore the underpinnings of religious liberty in each tradition; and create a provisional plan to apply the learnings upon returning home.

"The Baptist-Muslim dialogue offered a tiny glimpse of what the world could be – a place of mutual respect, a gathering full of curiosity and learning, a celebration of our shared humanity," said the Rev. Susan Sparks, pastor of the Madison Avenue Baptist Church in New York City, who preached at one of the worship sessions.

"Prejudice is unavoidable," observed the Rev. Doug Avilesbernal, executive minister for the Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches USA. "This



“The Baptist-Muslim dialogue offered a tiny glimpse of what the world could be – a place of mutual respect ... a celebration of our shared humanity.”

SUSAN SPARKS



Imad Enchassi (L) and Mitch Randall (R)



week I learned what happens when we challenge it within and without.”

“It’s also worth noting that we pastors have, quite often, just as much work to do as any of our parishioners,” said the Rev. Jonathan Davis, pastor of Beale Memorial Baptist Church in Tappahannock, Virginia. “This dialogue helps me confront my own embedded prejudices and stereotypical ideas. It would not be right to begin leading interfaith dialogue in my own community without working through whatever baggage, both culturally and from my own fundamentalist theological upbringing, I carry with me.”

Amid the serious conversations, there was ample time for laughter and bonding, including a group performance of the children’s song “Father Abraham” (with the motions included).

“[T]he laughs that echoed in the halls of Green Lake Conference Center should be heard from Jerusalem, Mecca and Wash-



“Baptists and Muslims demonstrated how to mutually respect religious diversity while uniting behind a common conviction for peace.”

MITCH RANDALL

ington, D.C.,” Randall said. “Genuine, authentic laughter communicates the bond of joy in any language.”

The conference was planned in large part by Roy Medley, General Secretary Emeritus of American Baptist Churches USA; Colin Christopher, Director of the Islamic Society of North America’s (ISNA) Office for Interfaith and Community Alliances in Washington, D.C.; and Robert Sellers, Chair of the Board of the Parliament of the World’s Religions.

In addition to American Baptist Churches USA, sponsoring bodies included the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship; Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society; Islamic Relief USA; Islamic Society of North America; Progressive National Baptist Convention; National Baptist Convention of America International; Alliance of Baptists; and Canadian Baptist Ministries.

The First National Baptist-Muslim Dialogue met in 2009, with the second gathering in 2012.

Sparks said she is hopeful about what comes next. “I pray that the dialogue continues, for Baptists and Muslims, and for all faith traditions, so that one day soon this model of friendship becomes a global reality and not just a fleeting glimmer of possibility.”

“I am seeing that this work takes energy and focus, and a

sense of call,” Davis said. “How is God calling you and your faith community to engage in meaningful dialogue with other faiths?”

Reports from BJC staff, American Baptist Churches USA, EthicsDaily.com and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Read BJC Fellow Kyle Tubbs’ column about the experience on page 9.

EthicsDaily.com has a variety of resources and reflections on the event:

Visit the EthicsDaily.com website at bit.ly/Baptist-MuslimDialogue2018 to read more reflections from participants, and see a collection of videos at bit.ly/Baptist-MuslimInterviews2018



The 65 participants gathered from across the United States and Canada

Religious freedom, privilege and interfaith dialogue

By 2015 BJC Fellow Kyle Tubbs

I'm privileged. Over the last couple of years, my eyes have been opened to the numerous advantages I experience that I did not earn. As a Caucasian, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied male, society treats me differently than many of my friends.

On April 16-19, my privilege came into sharper focus as I attended the Third National Baptist-Muslim Dialogue in Green Lake, Wisconsin. There, I joined Baptist and Muslim leaders from across the country to discuss issues related to peacemaking, religious liberty and partnerships.

Through the personal stories my Muslim friends shared during this experience, I felt the weight of another privilege I possess: religion. The dominant cultural religion of my city, state and country provides me with a level of religious privilege. I travel quite a bit, and I've never been eyed with suspicion as I go through security. My entire life, my school calendars have Christian days off. I receive invitations to pray at civic events in our city. As a Christian pastor, I am gifted privilege in our culture, which I did not earn.

My church in Round Rock, Texas, hosts regular interfaith gatherings for the community in public spaces. While we are the sponsor group, we host the conversations in neutral spaces so people of all faiths feel welcome to attend and participate.

One of the topics which regularly comes up in these interfaith gatherings is privilege. What I hear from my Buddhist/Hindu/Jewish/Baha'i/Muslim friends is a plea to utilize privilege for the common good. They ask those of us who are Christian to not be complacent, but instead work alongside our sisters and brothers from other religions for justice.

Similarly, my new Muslim friends I met at the National Baptist-Muslim Dialogue had a request for those of us who are Baptist: Speak up for justice. Speak up in our churches, in our schools, in our neighborhoods, in public shared spaces, in businesses and in the local market. Silence doesn't help move justice forward.

I had the opportunity to present on religious liberty during the dialogue. I reminded participants that Baptists started as a small religious minority in both England and America. Early Baptists experienced persecution and knew what it was like to



Kyle Tubbs speaks at the Baptist-Muslim Dialogue on citizenship rights and religious liberty alongside Azhar Azeez, president of the board of the Islamic Society of North America.

live life in fear of government interference in their religious practice. This spirit played an important role in Baptists advocating for religious freedom in the First Amendment. Baptists have been ardent advocates of religious liberty not only for themselves, but for everyone.

Interfaith dialogue presents practical opportunity to discuss issues related to religious liberty. In Wisconsin, I heard the stories of my Muslim brothers and sisters and felt the weight of the persecution they experience regularly. I was humbly reminded that,

as a privileged religious person, I am not a savior; rather, I can be an advocate on their behalf based on what they need. The key is listening. If I'm not in dialogue with my interreligious neighbors, how can I know what they need and how I can act?

So, what should I do from here based on this experience with Baptists and Muslims dialoguing?

One, I will continue to listen. I'm waking up to my privilege largely because I'm listening before speaking and trying to learn from others' experiences, which may be different from my own.

Two, I will continue to commit to interfaith dialogue. The answers I received by asking my Muslim friends this basic question, "What is it like to practice Islam in the United States?" was enlightening.

Three, I will continue to support religious liberty causes, which is a primary reason I support the work of the BJC. I know the brilliant staff is working hard to educate and advocate for religious freedom.

Finally, I believe if I am listening, talking to people of other faiths and supporting religious freedom in their lives, then I am loving my neighbor. When Jesus said to love neighbor as self, I believe the interreligious neighbor is implied, too. Everyone is our neighbor. And if I am going to love my neighbors well and treat them as I want to be treated, then I will advocate for religious liberty not only for myself, but for everyone.

The Rev. Kyle Tubbs is a 2015 BJC Fellow. This summer, he is transitioning from Lead Pastor of Peace of Christ Church in Round Rock, Texas, to Decatur, Georgia, where he will serve as New Church Starts Manager for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Christian acceptance of Muslim Americans guarantees religious freedom – for all

By Maha Elgenaidi

Civil liberties are indivisible. Denying the freedom of one group threatens the freedom of others. That's the situation we face now with the escalating attacks on the religious freedom of Muslims.

The root of the problem lies, as it always does, with bigotry in beliefs and attitudes.

When Americans were asked to rate their feelings of warmth or coldness towards people of different religions, they rated their feelings toward Muslims as the "coldest" of all religious groups: 48 out of 100, with the latter representing the "warmest" feeling. Asked whether American values comport with Islamic values, 56 percent of the general public — and 73 percent of white evangelical Christians — said they do not.

These beliefs and attitudes lead to foreign policies that threaten war and to domestic policies and campaigns that violate Muslims' religious freedom, as shown by the proliferation of anti-Sharia bills, resistance to mosque construction, and the rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents.

The travel ban, heard recently by the U.S. Supreme Court, exemplifies this threat. It not only blocks Muslim immigrants, but it also disrupts lives and livelihoods. It interferes with Muslim businesses. It tears families apart, preventing many from seeing their children and grandchildren who live in the United States. During oral arguments, Justice Elena Kagan aptly compared it to a hypothetical ban on travelers from Israel by a future anti-Semitic president.

But policies that deny anyone's religious freedom should also concern others, because when we deny religious freedom and civil liberties to one group it sets a dangerous precedent for the rest. Imagine if future presidential administrations were openly hostile toward Christians overseas, municipal governments opted to reject new church plants, and non-theists pursued policies restricting the practice of Christianity in public places. When it comes to religious liberty, more is better — for everyone.

Countering Islamophobia and repairing the damage that's already been done to Muslim Americans under the current political environment must begin with education and much



more interreligious engagement.

We have more in common than we have differences.

Islam shares many beliefs with Christianity, such as the oneness of God, revelation through prophets and sacred texts, the resurrection of the dead and final judgment, and a deep reverence for Jesus and belief in his virgin birth, his miracles, and his second coming to battle the Antichrist.

Islam also embraces religious freedom and respect for minority rights, as affirmed in the Marrakesh Declaration. It invites Christians to interfaith dialogue in the document called "A Common Word Be-

tween Us and You." And hundreds of leading Muslim scholars have repeatedly and vigorously denounced terrorism, Shaykh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi and Shaykh Abdullah Bin Biyyah being among the most prominent. These statements are drafted not by some progressive fringe but by traditional Muslim scholars, reflecting majorities of mosques.

Also, Muslim Americans are like many Christian Americans, as a 2007 Pew survey revealed. We are mostly mainstream and middle class. The most recent Pew study finds Muslims concerned about rising Islamophobia but still mostly satisfied with their lives.

So let's build upon our shared beliefs and values and common concerns for religious freedom to join forces institutionally and more intentionally to combat threats to religious liberty for all of us. My religion teaches me that diversity is the will of God (Qur'an 49:13). It's a value that I put into practice daily in the work I do at Islamic Networks Group because I recognize that the alternative is religious freedom for none.

Maha Elgenaidi is the founder and Executive Director of the Islamic Networks Group, a nonprofit organization with affiliates and partners around the country that are pursuing peace and countering all forms of bigotry through education and interfaith engagement, working within the framework of the First Amendment's protection of religious freedom and pluralism.

Visit ing.org to view programs and resources.

Why We Give: The BJC brings the Baptist voice to the table, ensuring collaboration and respect

I have been a monthly supporter of the Baptist Joint Committee since August of 2017, when I completed my BJC Fellows Seminar in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. I became aware of the BJC earlier that year through a series of interfaith events that brought together different parts of the faith community in the Washington, D.C., area.

I think the BJC has an interesting and unique role to play in American society. Religious literacy in this country is astoundingly low — we don't know or understand each other. Religious freedom is paramount — but is it achievable without literacy? Can we truly protect each other if we do not know one another? The BJC does a great job at bringing the



Baptist voice to the table and engaging with other faith bodies to ensure there is both collaboration and respect.

I became a monthly donor because I believe in the vision and staff of the BJC. As a Jew, I was honored to become the first non-Christian BJC Fellow. As a BJC Fellows alumna, I am honored to support the important work of building a nationwide network of religious liberty advocates working together for the common good. I believe we are all stronger when we work together.

I would encourage others to consider monthly giving because it is easy and convenient. I set my gift up online with a credit card, and I receive monthly notices when I've made my contribution without having to remember to send a check

each month. It's a great option for ongoing philanthropy.

By Sofi Hersher
Washington, D.C.

Make a lasting investment
in religious liberty
by becoming
a monthly donor today.

Visit
BJCOnline.org/Give-Monthly
to set up your gift,
or contact Taryn Deaton,
senior director
of development and strategy,
at tdeaton@BJCOnline.org
or 202-544-4226
for assistance.

BJC in action

Follow the Baptist Joint Committee on social media to see more photos of our staff.

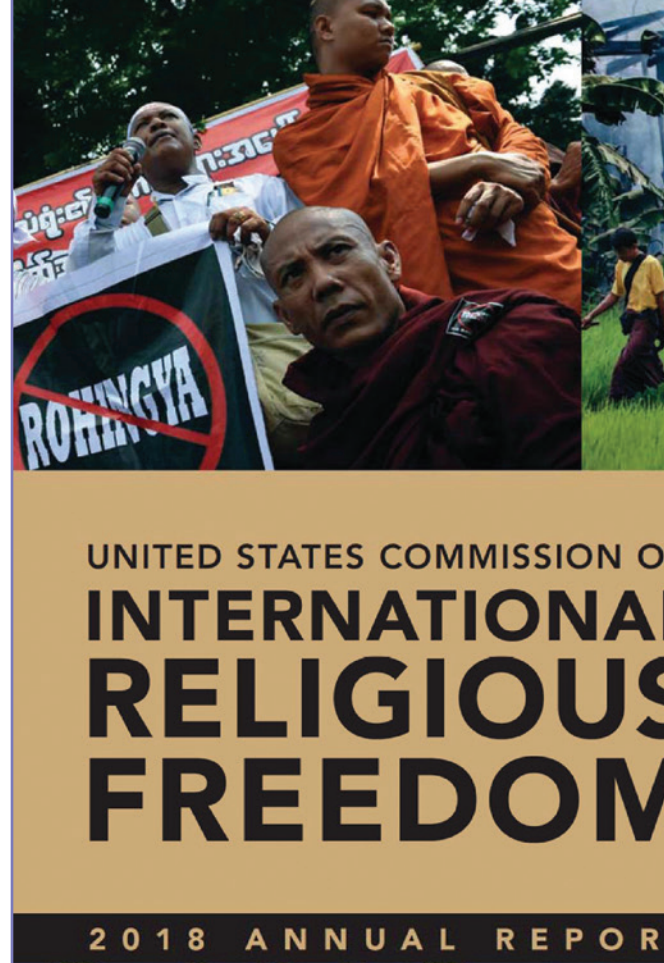
RIGHT: BJC Executive Director Amanda Tyler speaks on a religious liberty panel at the Anti-Defamation League's National Leadership Summit in May alongside leaders from Muslim Advocates and Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

BELOW: BJC Associate Director of Education Charles Watson Jr. (left) appeared on "Interfaith-ish," a radio program in Maryland, to discuss the importance of religious literacy. His co-panelist was Benjamin Marcus (center) from the Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute. Jack Gordon, the show host, is on the right.



Rachel Laser, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State; David Barkey, religious freedom counsel at the Anti-Defamation League; Johnathan Smith, legal director at Muslim Advocates; and Amanda Tyler.

Global religious freedom commission cites 28 nations for ‘ongoing downward trend’



The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) cited more than two dozen countries as main contributors to an “ongoing downward trend” in religious liberty worldwide and called on the Trump administration to prioritize the release of religious prisoners and assist in resettling refugees fleeing persecution.

“Sadly, religious freedom conditions deteriorated in many countries in 2017, often due to increasing authoritarianism or under the guise of countering terrorism,” said USCIRF Chairman Daniel Mark as the independent watchdog issued its 2018 report April 25.

“Yet there is also reason for optimism 20 years after the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act. The importance of this foundational right is appreciated more now than ever, and egregious violations are less likely to go unnoticed.”

The report noted the range of severe abuses in 28 countries, from what the U.S. and U.N. have labeled “ethnic cleansing” of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (also known as Burma) to persecution of Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims and Falun Gong practitioners in China. It cited the so-called Islamic State’s continuing “genocidal campaign” against Christians, Yazidis and Shiite Muslims; Russia’s harsh treatment of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Muslims and Scientologists; and “the continued unjust detention” of U.S. pastor Andrew Brunson in Turkey.

As it did in 2017, the commission asks the State Department to redesignate 10 nations as “countries of particular concern,” or CPCs, for egregious religious freedom violations: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea,

Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

It also reiterated its request that the department add six countries to that list: Central African Republic, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Syria and Vietnam.

Mark told reporters in a conference call that the repeated requests should not be viewed as a “status quo move” but rather the result of continuing monitoring of each country. He pointed to the example of Russia, which was added to the list of suggested CPCs last year.

“All the news has only confirmed that move and suggested that the State Department should take a very serious look, for example, at Russia and the others as well,” said Mark, an assistant professor of political science at Villanova University.

The commission also recommended the State Department designate as “entities of particular concern” organizations its members consider severe religious freedom violators: the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS; the Taliban in Afghanistan; and al-Shabab in Somalia.

Commissioners traveled to a dozen countries in 2017 and early 2018 to assess religious freedom conditions, prioritizing religious prisoners of conscience, blasphemy laws and the connections between women’s equality and freedom of belief. Two commission members visited Brunson in late 2017, becoming the first Americans to visit him outside family and consular staff, Mark said.

“This is a man who had just gone about his business peacefully for more two decades and with no warning



Photos: Cover of 2018 USCIRF report

whatsoever was swept up in this horrible thing, accused of aiding terrorists and extremism and so on and facing a life sentence,” he said. “So the chilling effect is incalculable.”

In their report, commissioners requested that the Trump administration provide sufficient funding for the office of the international religious freedom ambassador, a post recently filled by former U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback. They also called for prioritizing the release of people “imprisoned for their religious beliefs, activity, identity, or religious freedom advocacy” and the resettlement of refugees fleeing religious persecution.

The report noted the commission’s ongoing concerns about the administration’s expansion of “expedited removal” procedures in which Department of Homeland Security officials deport some noncitizens.

“We find that those in charge are not sufficiently sensitive to concerns of religious persecution at home,” Mark told reporters. “It’s important that when people come with credible fear of persecution if they return home, that that be acknowledged and treated appropriately under the law.”

In addition to the CPCs, the report also cited 12 “Tier 2” countries that are considered to be less problematic but still violators of religious freedom: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malaysia and Turkey.

By Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service

USCIRF recommendations

The following should be designated “countries of particular concern”

Countries in italics are already on the State Department’s current CPC list

<i>Burma</i>	Russia
Central African Republic	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>
<i>China</i>	<i>Sudan</i>
<i>Eritrea</i>	Syria
<i>Iran</i>	<i>Tajikistan</i>
Nigeria	<i>Turkmenistan</i>
<i>North Korea</i>	<i>Uzbekistan</i>
Pakistan	Vietnam

The following should be designated “entities of particular concern”

ISIS	Taliban	al-Shabab
(in Iraq and Syria)	(in Afghanistan)	(in Somalia)

A prayer for religious liberty

By Rev. Brent Bowden

God of Liberty and Justice for all,

We have set this day as a day of celebration for a gift you have given us through the hard-won wisdom of those who have gone before in this land, indeed for a founding idea within this land.

We celebrate our freedom to stand before you on our own footing uncompelled and uncoerced, freely chosen, freely choosing the mode, content and object of our worship.

We give you thanks for religious liberty.

Our prayers this day are for those who know not this most basic form of human dignity — to be their own arbiter of belief and practice.

We know there are powers still which have not discovered the beauty of diversity and — out of fear — compel those under their influence by threat or by overbearing culture to a single, static religious experience.

We pray for a change of heart and for a change of policy among those.

While the slow arch of redemption is still in work, though, we pray for those suffering such oppression to be able to find a sort of reformation within, a recognition of your magnitude and presence beyond the structures they've been given, which will light the inner places of their hearts and thereby the world around them.

We pray, too, for those parts of the world that have established religious liberty, which finds threat of one kind or another.

For those who would try to force unanimity of spirit or consistency of expression, we pray you would alleviate the fear that drives them and replace it with the peace that comes from tolerant and cooperative diversity.

For those whose consideration isn't for faithfulness at all, but find in religious liberty a convenient, powerful tool with which to manipulate and gain more power, we pray you remind them of the ground we've already covered — the mistakes of human history — and may the weight of those days gone by inspire in them a vision of a better world before us and the will to lead in that direction.

In gratitude and with great joy we raise our voices on this day of celebration.

Amen.



The Rev. Brent Bowden is pastor of First Baptist Church of Rochester, New York. He gave this prayer on a Sunday his church designated to celebrate and focus on religious liberty.

Special thanks to First Baptist Church of Rochester for financially supporting the BJC and for inviting Executive Director Amanda Tyler to speak in April as part of their religious liberty celebration. If your church would like to start supporting the BJC, please contact Taryn Deaton, senior director of development and strategy, at tdeaton@BJCOnline.org. To request a speaker from the BJC, contact Charles Watson Jr., associate director of education, at cwatson@BJCOnline.org.

Hollman honored with national religious liberty award

In recognition of her contributions on behalf of religious freedom, BJC General Counsel Holly Hollman received the National Award at an annual dinner in Washington, D.C., hosted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Lincoln Steed, the editor of *Liberty* magazine, presented Hollman with the award on May 22. The annual event, held this year at the Organization of American States, brings together diplomats, United States government officials, religious leaders and religious liberty advocates.

Melissa Rogers, former director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, gave a tribute to Hollman at the event. A former general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee, Rogers praised Hollman's work as a top-notch lawyer, consensus-builder and Baptist.

"She truly believes religious liberty is a gift from God," Rogers said, noting how Hollman's perspective informs her exceptional work, particularly in *amicus* briefs filed at the Supreme Court that are useful and engaging.

"Ms. Hollman has long been at the forefront of promoting a balanced understanding of religious freedom in the United States," said Dwayne Leslie, Deputy Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association, one of the event's sponsoring organizations. "Her influence has been far-reaching, not just through her work in crafting legal responses to religious freedom challenges, but also in the public arena, through her extensive writing, speaking, and media appearances."

"I have seen how our shared religious liberty values can bridge deep differences," Hollman said as she accepted the award. "I am honored to continue the legacy of those Baptists that have long fought for religious freedom for others."

In addition to her duties as general counsel, Hollman also serves as the BJC's associate executive director. She is an adjunct professor of law at the Georgetown University Law Center, where she co-teaches the Church-State Law Seminar.

"As a constitutional lawyer, I am fortunate to work in an area of law that is important to people from different religious and po-



Melissa Rogers and *Liberty* magazine editor Lincoln Steed present Holly Hollman with the Religious Liberty Dinner National Award.

litical perspectives," Hollman said. "By protecting individual religious freedom and protecting against government advancement of religion, we honor our history and the important place of religion in our society."

Abid Q. Raja, the deputy speaker of the Parliament of Norway, received the International Award at the dinner. In 2014, Raja was one of a small group of elected officials from different countries who together founded the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB). Since then, the organization has grown to an informal network of 130 parliamentarians and legislators from around the world committed to combating religious persecution and advancing freedom of religion or belief, as defined by Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Aykan Erdemir, a former member of the Turkish Parliament, gave the keynote address. He is also a founding member of the IPPFoRB and a signatory legislator to the London Declaration on Combating Antisemitism. During his address, he spoke of the importance of bridge-building, reminding the crowd that reaching out does not mean compromising core principles. He also discussed the plight of Andrew Brunson, a pastor from the United States who is currently imprisoned in Turkey. "This is why our work matters," he said.

The annual Religious Liberty Dinner is co-sponsored by the North American Religious Liberty Association, the International Religious Liberty Association, the Seventh-day Adventist world church and *Liberty* magazine.

From the Seventh-day Adventist Church and BJC staff reports



Former BJC Executive Director Brent Walker, Holly Hollman and Amanda Tyler



International Award recipient Abid Q. Raja, keynote speaker Aykan Erdemir and Holly Hollman



Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Riverdale, MD
Permit No. 5061

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002-5797

Phone: (202) 544-4226
Fax: (202) 544-2094
Email: bjc@BJCOnline.org
Website: www.BJCOnline.org

BJCOnline.org/blog [@BJContheHill](https://twitter.com/BJContheHill)
 Facebook.com/ReligiousLiberty
 [@baptistjointcommittee](https://www.instagram.com/baptistjointcommittee)

The Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty defends religious liberty for all people and protects the institutional separation of church and state in the historic Baptist tradition. Based in Washington, D.C., we work through education, litigation, legislation and mobilization, often combining our efforts with a wide range of groups to provide education about and advocacy for religious liberty.

SUPPORTING BODIES of the BJC

Alliance of Baptists
American Baptist Churches USA
Baptist General Association of Virginia
Baptist General Convention of Missouri (Churchnet)
Baptist General Convention of Texas
Converge
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina
National Baptist Convention of America
National Baptist Convention USA Inc.
National Missionary Baptist Convention
North American Baptists Inc.
Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.
Religious Liberty Council
Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

Amanda Tyler EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Cherilyn Crowe EDITOR
Ilana Ostrin ASSOCIATE EDITOR



Report From The Capital (ISSN-0346-0661) is published 6 times each year by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.
For subscription information, please contact the Baptist Joint Committee at bjc@BJCOnline.org.



Find out what it's like to visit the BJC!

Go to BJCOnline.org/Visit to view new videos that highlight the power of educational sessions at the BJC's Center for Religious Liberty in Washington, D.C.



Stay on our mailing list!

If you have a change in your mailing address or if you want to make sure you keep receiving our magazine, email bjc@BJCOnline.org.