

## Impact Report

Working to Secure Religious Freedom For Everyone, Everywhere



2023

www.rfi.org

## Letter from the President

**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT**, and a source of flourishing for individuals, families, and entire societies.

Human beings are innately religious. The desire for ultimate meaning is woven into our very nature and an essential aspect of our God-given dignity. We must be free to search for religious truth and live according to our deepest convictions.

Unfortunately, our world today is plagued by unprecedented threats to religious freedom. Extreme anti-faith, anti-reality ideologies are driving religion to the margins of American society, and violent religious persecution and repression are wreaking havoc abroad. People of faith are being silenced, harassed, or in the worst cases, violently threatened and attacked.

There is much at stake, and we cannot afford to be passive. That's why we are working proactively to advance religious freedom in law *and* culture, in America and around the world. A society without religious freedom isn't truly free.

At RFI, we defend religious freedom through education and advocacy. Our goals are to achieve the full cultural and legal recognition of this fundamental human right, and to equip religious communities to exercise it. Throughout our work, RFI aims to be *the voice of religious freedom*.



David K. Trimble

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## Working to Secure Religious Freedom for Everyone, Everywhere.



Starting at Home.

## Mission

**RFI IS COMMITTED TO ACHIEVING** broad acceptance of religious liberty as a fundamental human right, a source of individual and social flourishing, the cornerstone of a successful society, and a driver of national and international security.

## What We Do

As RFI President Emeritus Tom Farr wrote in October 2023, "The fundamental right of religious freedom for every human being is as fragile as ever outside the West, and is under increasing pressure in Western Europe and the United States." These threats come from government restrictions and social hostilities – i.e., from law and culture. RFI is taking action by:

- Equipping students, parents, policymakers, faithbased organization leaders, scholars, and religious leaders through programs and resources that communicate the true meaning and value of religious freedom, and apply that understanding to contemporary challenges and opportunities.
- Convening key partners in our field to form coalitions to take on the growing cultural and legal threats to religious freedom in the United States and the spiraling religious persecution abroad.
- ◆ Inspiring broad audiences particularly in the United States, as well as key countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Southeast Asia, and Europe to understand and appreciate religious freedom through engagement in the realms of media, higher education, K-12 schools, professional training, conferences and events, legislative hearings, and other public forums.

We are working to defend and advance religious freedom in the *long-term*, recognizing that securing this fundamental human right for future generations *begins right now*.







## RFI by the Numbers

#### **EDUCATING FUTURE LEADERS**

2020-2023

143 colleges and universities sent students to RFI programs



**5,500** students attended RFI programs

40 states and 16 foreign countries



sent students to attend RFI programs

IN 2023

I 2 students educated through intensive RFI programs

**800+** students attended RFI-led education sessions

#### INFLUENCING DEBATE





- 74 published articles
- 49 speaking engagements
- 29 media appearances

(TV, radio, podcast)

- **IO** RFI-hosted events
- 26 print/digital quotations
- 6 religious freedom training sessions for journalists, religious leaders, and government officials

#### **EQUIPPING LEADERS**

### **United States**



2020-2023

# **5 states** enacted medical conscience protections

IN 2023

**220** religious institutions acquired RFI Toolkits

**5** RFI toolkit training sessions delivered to hundreds of organizational leaders



#### **Key Resources**

18 amicus briefs



3 curricula

Factsheet on anti-Semitism

**Security Toolkit** 

### International



IN 2023

250 students and government, religious, and civil society leaders trained

6 million people viewed RFI videos on social media



60 journalists and religious leaders trained

#### **Key Resources**

2 country overview reports

Tunisia delegation report

Diplomat's Toolkit

Factsheet on anti-Semitism (UK and France)

## Defending Religious Freedom in America

IN THE UNITED STATES, we educate tomorrow's thought-leaders, shape law and policy, and equip religious individuals and institutions to exercise their religious freedom. RFI aims to make America more hospitable to our society's many religious communities, while also strengthening the ability of faithful Americans to navigate a cultural and legal landscape that is increasingly pushing them to the margins of society. We believe "America's First Freedom" must be restored to its proper place in our country, as the American Founders intended.

#### SNAPSHOTS OF OUR WORK

#### Empowering Students

**EDUCATION IS THE INCUBATOR** of culture. Through it, we can begin to restore the ideals of human dignity, ordered liberty, and religious freedom for all.

RFI's <u>National Center for Religious Freedom Education</u> empowers today's students to become future thought-leaders ready to advance religious freedom.

Through our <u>internship program</u>, we offer undergraduate, graduate, and law students the opportunity to learn core principles, and contribute to RFI's research, programs, and advocacy.

Our <u>Statesmanship and Religious Freedom Seminar</u> offers a unique, immersive student experience, exploring the critical role religious freedom plays in a free and flourishing society and how key historical figures have protected it. Each seminar includes intensive classroom instruction from leading scholars and experts, and presentations from human rights advocates, government officials, diplomats, and more. Held in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and the United Kingdom during the past few years, we also launched a <u>Statesmanship Seminar</u>

<u>in Erbil, Iraq</u> in 2023. We are looking to expand the program to Buenos Aires, Argentina; Vienna, Austria; and select cities in the western United States.

America's First Freedom Curriculum (AFFC) provides religious freedom instruction for private, homeschool, and public school settings. Consisting of five lessons, this curriculum is anchored in the genius of America's Founding Fathers, who understood that religious freedom is rooted in human nature and meant for everyone. Initially developed for upper level high school students, in 2023 we released a middle school edition.



#### » Equipping Religious Communities

ANTI-FAITH, ANTI-REALITY FORCES SEEK TO remake American society. Through government coercion and cultural intimidation, they are pushing vital religious institutions out of public life for holding convictions about life, marriage, sexuality, and the natural distinctions between male and female that clash with progressive orthodoxy.

Those who dare to dissent are subjected to social, legal, and professional penalties. That's why defending religious freedom in America today requires equipping faithful religious organizations with tools to withstand these threats.

In the fall of 2022, we released the *RFI Crisis Toolkit for Religious Institutions* to offer a roadmap to Jewish universities, Islamic community centers, Catholic adoption agencies, and countless other organizations that want to put their convictions fully into practice amid these rising challenges.

Offering guidance on mission statements, HR policies, healthcare benefits, crisis communications, stakeholder engagement, and more, our *Crisis Toolkit* equips religious institutions to navigate an increasingly hostile cultur-

al and legal environment while remaining faithful to their core convictions and mission.

Criminal attacks against religious organizations are also on the rise in the United States, and yet many are ill-prepared for these threats. In July 2023, we released the *RFI Security Toolkit for Religious Institutions* to respond.

The *RFI Security Toolkit* helps religious congregations, pro-life pregnancy centers, K-12 schools, and other religious institutions improve their security and mitigate their risk across the security spectrum. It reflects consultations with security experts and the vast knowledge and experience of lead co-author, John Wyman, who served as an FBI special agent for more than 23 years.

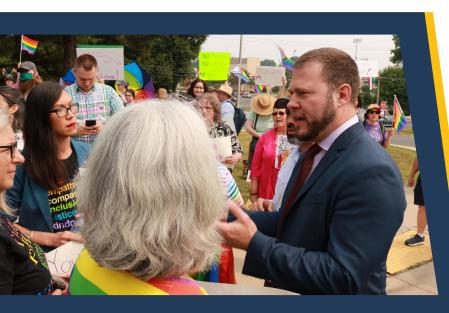
In 2023, 220 religious institutions from multiple faith traditions acquired one or both Toolkits – including parishes and congregations, ministries and apostolates, K-12 schools, colleges and universities, pregnancy resource centers, law firms, media outlets, and others. RFI held training sessions for leaders of religious institutions throughout the year.





#### Defending Religious Parents

**NUMEROUS THREATS HAVE ARISEN IN** the United States at the intersection of parental rights and religious freedom. This has been especially true in public schools in the context of "LGBTQ" instruction that contradicts the religious convictions of Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others. Throughout 2023 and into 2024, RFI's Ismail Royer has led our efforts to support parents facing these challenges – including in Montgomery County, Maryland and St. Louis Park, Minnesota – through advocacy, training, and filing amicus briefs.





#### **Above**

RFI's Ismail Royer discusses the Muslim parents' position with Montgomery County Councilmember Kristen Mink (top) and speaks at a parental rights rally outside a Montgomery County, Maryland's school board meeting.

In Montgomery County, the school board revoked the right of parents to opt their children out of instruction on sexuality and "gender" that contradicts their core religious beliefs. When hundreds of Muslim and Christian parents banded together in the summer and fall of 2023 to fight this unjust imposition, RFI worked closely with organizers on the ground to prepare them to testify at public hearings and join media interviews, and build strategic partnerships across religious communities. We also organized and supported rallies outside of key school board meetings, spoke out directly in the media, and filed amicus briefs in critical cases. Our primary goal has been to defend the right of these parents to protect their children and exercise their First Amendment freedoms - to speak, to assemble, to petition their leaders, and to exercise their faith

- RFI directly intervened on behalf of religious parents in two school districts: Montgomery County, Maryland and St. Louis Park, Minnesota.
- RFI also trained and equipped religious parents and community leaders in Burnsville, Minnesota; Hilliard, Ohio; and Los Angeles, California.







#### Engaging Policymakers

**RFI EDUCATES POLICYMAKERS ON THE** importance of protecting religious freedom in law and policy, and equips them through testimony, advocacy, training, and resources. In particular, we inform state legislators and other leaders in higher education, healthcare, and religious institutions about medical conscience rights and the urgency of defending them in state law.

Religious healthcare professionals, clinics, and hospitals are increasingly being forced to perform procedures that violate their convictions on matters such as abortion, physician assisted suicide, and "gender transition." So in 2020, RFI launched the Medical Conscience Rights Initiative (MCRI) in partnership with Alliance Defending Freedom and Christ Medicus Foundation to ensure state leaders understand what is at stake. Through MCRI, we inform state leaders in various fields as to why safeguarding religious freedom in healthcare is so critical, and what they can do about it.

Five states have enacted laws protecting medical conscience rights – Arkansas, Ohio, South Carolina, Montana, and Florida – since MCRI began. Montana and Florida passed their bills in 2023. In 2024, we are engaging leaders in four more states: Oklahoma, Kentucky, Iowa, and Idaho.

RFI also engages key legislative and executive branch offices in Washington, D.C. on an array of domestic political issues. For example, we offered principled arguments against the Equality Act, reintroduced in the Senate in 2023, through conversations with several Senate offices on the major religious freedom threats the bill posed. We also convened numerous private meetings with executive branch officials on regulatory threats and periodically engaged them publicly, including sending a <u>letter</u> to the U.S. Secretary of Education defending the freedom of university student groups to appoint their own leadership based on religious criteria.

RFI strategically addresses matters in the courts as well, filing or joining amicus briefs to raise the broader religious freedom context of the cases before them. Last year, RFI joined or filed 18 amicus briefs. In the case of *Groff v. DeJoy* – a consequential case that dealt with religious accommodation requirements in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act – the U.S. Supreme Court <u>cited RFI's brief</u>.



## Advancing Religious Freedom Abroad

**RFI REGULARLY PARTNERS WITH** religious freedom proponents in the United States and across the world. Working with government and civil society leaders in Algeria, Hungary, Iraq, Malaysia, Nigeria, Poland, Sri Lanka, UK, and elsewhere, we are able to multiply our efforts to combat violent religious persecution and repression. RFI aims to inform high-level policy while being active on the ground to address the global crisis of religious freedom.

#### SNAPSHOTS OF OUR WORK

#### Strategic Initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa

**RFI'S MIDDLE EAST TEAM ENGAGES** elites and shapes opinion on the ground in countries throughout the region. 2023 was a pivotal year for RFI's efforts to reach current and future leaders in this tumultuous area.

We hosted our inaugural Statesmanship and Religious Freedom <u>Seminar in Iraq</u> in April of 2023. Gathering Iraqi students from across the country, the program elaborated the foundational connection between human dignity and religious freedom, and the role of religious freedom in peacebuilding and mitigating conflict.

RFI also grew our Flourishing Together program, which empowers young people to lead in a diverse society through training, mentorship, and multi-faith engagement to address religious freedom



challenges in their communities. In 2023, the program supported five projects across four governorates, engaging more than 220 people. Of the participants, more than 85% indicated they were eager to put what they learned into practice. Moreover, millions of youth in the Middle East and North Africa encountered RFI's grassroots social media campaigns like our "We are United" initiative, which promotes religious freedom in messaging tailored to key populations across the region.



Throughout the year, RFI trained civil society, religious, and government leaders in the region. For example, we taught religious leaders, lawyers, and human rights advocates about our <u>International Protocol on Documenting Violations of Religious Freedom</u>. Working with partners, RFI gathered nearly 30 participants from 8 countries to equip them to document religious freedom violations and seek reform in local, national, and international venues.

RFI additionally conducts research on the religious freedom landscape in select countries to highlight relevant cultural, economic, and political developments. In 2023, we produced overview reports on Algeria and Iraq based on these efforts. We also connect local and international advocacy efforts. RFI led the launch of the UK Parliament's North Africa Working Group on religious freedom and facilitated a parliamentary delegation to North Africa to meet with religious, civil society, and government leaders there. This platform enabled us to highlight persistent religious freedom restrictions in places like Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, as well as opportunities for making positive change.





#### On-the-Ground Efforts: Mayflower Church

WHEN A GROUP OF CHINESE CHRISTIANS sought refuge from dire persecution in China, RFI played a pivotal role in their escape to freedom. RFI's David Trimble, in coordination with other religious freedom advocates, engaged key congressional leaders and U.S. diplomats to secure a pathway for these 63 Chinese Christians to come safely to the United States. This was their last shot at freedom after South Korea and Thailand denied them asylum. After a perilous journey from China to South Korea and then to Thailand – including arrest and imprisonment by Thai authorities in March 2023 – the members of the "Mayflower Church" arrived in Dallas on Good Friday, April 13, 2023. As Trimble said at the time:

"What a privilege it was to welcome the Mayflower Church to the United States and to Texas on Good Friday. Never again will these Christians need to wake up in fear of being imprisoned for gathering to worship. Never again will they wake in fear of being separated from their children or spouse. Never again will they wake in fear of being persecuted for proclaiming their faith in Jesus Christ."



## Convening Partners at the International Religious Freedom Summit

RFI CO-SPONSORED AND LED EVENTS at the 2023 International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit in Washington, D.C., the largest annual religious freedom conference held anywhere in the world. Among our many contributions, RFI's National Center for Religious Freedom Education led the IRF Summit University Program, which offered high-impact training sessions for undergraduate and graduate students.

## Congressional Testimony on International Religious Freedom

ON JULY 18, 2023, THEN-RFI PRESIDENT Eric Patterson testified before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations on "The Dire State of Religious Freedom Around the World." Patterson spoke with urgency about worsening religious persecution in India, Vietnam, and Nigeria, while also commenting more broadly on the sources of today's global crisis of religious freedom.

In his testimony, Patterson objected to the current administration's aggressive efforts to "promote novel ideologies overseas instead of internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms." He pointed to demands that foreign governments support abortion-on-demand, redefine marriage, and enable "transgender" procedures to receive U.S. humanitarian aid, an approach he characterized as "a form of Western cultural imperialism" that is "detrimental to U.S. national security."

On October 25, 2023, Patterson <u>testified</u> before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Oversight and Accountability, Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs. During the hearing on "Faith Under Fire: An Examination of Global Religious Persecution," Patterson outlined persistent forms of persecution in Russia, China, Nigeria, India, and Iran, making it clear that "understanding the religious freedom dynamics of key countries and regions helps inform some of our most difficult national security challenges." He also specified immediate actions that Congress and the current administration should take.

#### Collaborating with the UK Government

IN FEBRUARY 2023, RFI WELCOMED a delegation led by Fiona Bruce MP, UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), to our Capitol Hill office. As Special Envoy, Bruce leads the UK government's efforts to promote religious freedom globally. She also chairs the International Alliance for Freedom of Religion or Belief, a coalition of 42 countries committed to advancing religious freedom globally.

RFI has collaborated with Bruce's office and other UK government partners on several efforts. We provided a quick-turnaround report on the religious freedom environment in Eritrea for the British embassy there, containing expert assessment and policy recommendations from our Middle East team. In December 2023, we also launched a joint report following a UK Parliamentary delegation to Tunisia that RFI helped organize. The report explored the country's religious freedom dynamics and reflects ongoing dialogue between RFI, a pertinent UK parliamentary group, and British and Tunisian government officials.







Bruce also sat down for an <u>interview</u> with RFI's David Trimble to discuss her work as UK Prime Minister's FoRB Special Envoy and her participation in RFI's Statesmanship and Religious Freedom Seminar.

#### Wigh-Level Policy Collaboration: Taiwanese Delegation

**RFI CONVENED A MEETING BETWEEN** Rep. Michael T. McCaul (TX-10), Chairman of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, and high-level members of a delegation from the Republic of China (Taiwan) to discuss ways to

advance democracy, stability, and religious freedom. These deliberations were especially urgent given China's increasing pressure on Taiwan and its allies to conform to its repressive approach to religion.

Building coalitions of influential leaders, within and beyond governments, is at the core of RFI's work to confront pressing religious freedom problems around the globe.



## Defender of Religious Freedom Award

2023 RECIPIENT:

ROBERT P. GEORGE

McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University

THE DEFENDER OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM Award is given on the occasion of the RFI Award Ceremony to a person who defends religious freedom for everyone, everywhere from within his or her faith tradition. The evening is a celebration of religious freedom, and gathers many friends, partners, and fellow advocates.





## Religious Freedom Impact Award

2023 RECIPIENT: Howard Slugh

**ESTABLISHED IN 2022**, the Religious Freedom Impact Award is given on the occasion of RFI's <u>Award Ceremony</u> to an individual who has demonstrated "consistent, effective, and innovative leadership in advancing religious freedom."



## Our Team and Partners

#### >> Leadership

- ♦ David Trimble, President
- ◆ Tom Farr, President Emeritus
- Jeremy Barker, Associate
   Vice President, International
   Strategies
- Nathan Berkeley, Associate Vice President, U.S. Strategies and Communications
- ◆ Jim Bennett, Director, National Center for Religious Freedom Education

#### >> Staff

- Miles Windsor, Director of Strategic Campaigns, International Strategies
- Paul Marshall, Senior Fellow and Director, South and Southeast Asia
- ◆ Ismail Royer, Director, Islam and Religious Freedom
- Andrew Kubick, Deputy
   Director, National Center for
   Religious Freedom Education
- Katie Lehmann, Deputy Communications Director
- Reghan Buie, Assistant to the President & Events Coordinator
- Graham Glover,
   Chaplain Fellow

#### Associated Fellows

- Byron Johnson, Senior Fellow and RFI Co-Founder
- Kent Hill, Senior Fellow for Eurasia, Middle East, and Islam and and RFI Co-Founder
- ◆ Salah Ali, Fellow, Middle East
- Fr. Atta Barkindo, Senior Fellow, International Religious Freedom Policy
- Andrew Bennett, Senior
   Fellow, International Religious
   Freedom Policy and North
   America
- Brian Bird, Research Fellow, North America
- Robert A. Destro, Senior Fellow, International Religious Freedom Policy and North America
- Fr. Justine Dyikuk, Senior Fellow, International Religious Freedom Policy

- Andrew Graham, Senior Fellow, Religious Freedom Education
- ◆ Robert Hefner, Senior Fellow, South and Southeast Asia
- ◆ Todd Huizinga, Senior Fellow, Europe
- Farahnaz Ispahani, Senior Fellow, South and Southeast Asia and Middle East
- Fr. Salar Kajo, Senior Fellow, International Religious Freedom Policy
- Mike Kuckel, Senior Business Fellow, North America
- Yusuf Lenifest, Research Fellow, Islam and Religious Freedom
- Kathryn Jean Lopez, Senior Media Fellow, North America
- Daniel Mark, Senior Fellow, North America

- Michael Nazir-Ali, Senior Fellow, International Religious Freedom Policy
- Andrew J. "A.J." Nolte,
   Research Fellow, Middle East
- Mónika Palotai, Senior Fellow, International Religious Freedom Policy
- Lidia Papp, Research Fellow, Middle East
- Daniel Philpott, Senior Associate Scholar
- Simon Polinder, Research Fellow, Europe
- Charles M. Ramsey, Senior Fellow, South and Southeast Asia and Middle East
- Stephen M. Rasche, Senior Fellow, International Religious Freedom in Conflict Regions
- Yamini Ravindran, Fellow, South and Southeast Asia

- John Scott Redd, Senior Fellow, North America
- Nilay Saiya, Senior Fellow, Middle East
- William Saunders, Senior Fellow, International Religious Freedom Policy
- ◆ Ian Speir, Senior Legal Fellow, North America
- ◆ Eugene Yapp, Senior Fellow, South and Southeast Asia

#### Board of Directors

- Michael Ortner, Chairman of the Board of Directors. He co-founded Capterra in 1999, a technology and online media company recognized as one of the fastest growing companies in the United States.
- ◆ Mary Rice Hasson, Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors. She is the Kate O'Beirne Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., where she also directs the Catholic Women's Forum.
- ◆ Douglas Bech, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Raintree Resorts International, a company that owns and operates vacation ownership resorts throughout North America.

- ◆ Tom Farr, President Emeritus of the Religious Freedom Institute.
- ◆ Scott Hamberger, Vice Chairman of Zwiesel Fortessa Group, and President Emeritus and Co-Founder of Fortessa Tableware Solutions, LLC.
- Patrick Kearns, Senior
   Vice President and Financial
   Advisor at Morgan Stanley.
- ◆ Governor Frank Keating served as President and CEO of the American Bankers Association until December 2015. From 1995 to 2003 he served as the 25th governor of Oklahoma.
- Anthony Lauinger, Vice President of National Right to Life, a position he has held for more than 20 years.

- Hannah Smith, Associate Director of the International Center for Law & Religion Studies at BYU Law School.
- Sealy Yates, Senior Partner at Yates & Yates, LLP, a law firm based in Orange County, California that represents some of the most well-known Christian authors in the United States.
- ◆ Mark Winter was the founding chairman of the Board of Directors of RFI (2017-2020) and is now board member emeritus. Winter was the Executive Vice President of Public Policy for the Washington, D.C. office of Stewart Title, one of the world's largest real estate title companies.

#### Advisory Board

- Kit Bigelow, Former Director of External Affairs, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the U.S.
- Anuttama Dasa, International Director of Communications, International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)
- ◆ Pastor Cheryl Gaines, Senior Pastor, ReGeneration House of Praise, "The Church in the Field"

- Sheikh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, Co-Founder and President, Zaytuna College
- Michael Maibach, Managing Director, James Wilson Institute
- Rabbi David Novak, J. Richard and Dorothy Shiff Chair of Jewish Studies and Professor of the Study of Religion and Professor of Philosophy, University of Toronto
- ◆ Jacqueline Rivers, Executive Director, Seymour Institute on Black Church and Policy Studies
- Brett Scharffs, Director, International Center for Law and Religion Studies, Brigham Young University, and the Francis R. Kirkham Professor of Law, BYU Law School
- Johann H. Huleatt, Director, Bruderhof Communities



## Join Us in Our Work

Help us fight the growing hostility to religious freedom in the United States and around the world. Your partnership enables us to defend this fundamental human right so people of faith can exercise it. Join us in this sacred work through your support and your prayers.

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