

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

October 27th, 2023

COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
ARMED SERVICES
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

I appreciate the opportunity to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act. Gayle, my wife and former Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), and I are undeniably committed to advancing religious freedom for people in the United States and throughout the world

Freedom of religion is a bedrock principle of our democracy and the foundation of a free and prosperous society. The Founding Fathers understood religious freedom to be a universal human right for everyone.

Often times we can take our right to practice religion freely for granted. As you know, there have been several acts of violence committed against religious communities here in the U.S. and across the world in the wake of the ongoing conflict between Israel and terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip. Antisemitism is fundamental to the principles of Hamas whose heinous attacks led to the single-worst mass killing of Jews since the Holocaust. We must come together and do everything in our power to reject antisemitism and hatred in all its forms.

For 25 years, the IRFA has made important steps toward advancing religious freedom through the Office of International Religious Freedom at the State Department, the position of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, and the USCIRF. IRFA is focused on advancing religious freedom as recognized by international law, allowing every individual the right to believe or to not believe, and to live out one's beliefs honestly and without fear. In 2019, my colleagues and I successfully came together to reauthorize the USCIRF and renew its mandate to advance international religious freedom.

While we have taken these important steps, now more than ever, we must work every day to defend and support religious freedom at home and abroad. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I am committed to ensuring the USCIRF and the Office of International Religious Freedom at the State Department have the resources they need to defend this sacred right around the globe.