

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#1)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

If confirmed, what will your highest priorities be as Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom? How do you define the mission of your office? In general, do you believe that past policies of the office have been effective? How would you improve upon these policies? Please elaborate on any specific initiatives that you intend to implement.

Answer:

The Office of International Religious Freedom, under the mandate of the International Religious Freedom Act, has raised the profile of religious freedom issues abroad and within our foreign policy structure. If confirmed, I look forward to building on the work of my predecessors, consulting with Congress, and partnering with NGOs and religious leaders and groups to address violations of religious freedom around the globe.

Religious freedom is a human right and a pillar for a strong democratic society. As stated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." These core principles are important to me. If confirmed, my mission will be to help those around the world who have been denied religious freedom and to press governments to provide full religious freedom for their citizens.

If confirmed, I will work with others at the State Department to find an alternative to the problematic defamation of religion resolutions that the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council have under consideration. I will seek to address concerns of intolerance, stereotyping, and discrimination against individuals based on their religion, without undermining freedoms of religion and expression.

If confirmed, I will also work with the Interagency Working Group on Religion & Global Affairs to promote interfaith cooperation and freedom of religion as part of U.S. engagement with religious communities.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#2)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom is described as a “principal adviser to the President and the Secretary of State regarding religious freedom issues abroad.” What initial policy changes would you propose if you are confirmed? Some commentators in the media have suggested that the current administration has downgraded the issue of international religious freedom in general and the position of the Ambassador at Large in particular. How would you respond to such assertions? If confirmed, how would you ensure that your role as “principal adviser” is not diminished and IRF policy has a prominent role in U.S. foreign policy efforts?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will serve as the principal adviser to the President and Secretary of State on issues of international religious freedom, as mandated in the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). If confirmed, I will head the Office of International Religious Freedom and direct policymaking on matters of religious freedom. I am delighted that the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) will be engaged alongside me in these efforts to promote international religious freedom as an integral component in promoting human rights around the world. The IRF Office will support me directly in these efforts.

An important priority will be to promote religious freedom by supporting interfaith engagement that builds religious tolerance, and to encourage the work of NGOs in these efforts. As the President noted in his Cairo speech, "Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together," and "we must always examine the ways in which we protect it."

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#3)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

When the position of Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom was established under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the State Department chose not to place it under the Office of the Secretary of State, unlike the other Ambassador at Large positions that existed at that time. Instead, the position was housed within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. In discussions conducted at the time of the law's passage and subsequently, the Department made it clear, both to Congressional offices and within the Department itself, that the Ambassador at Large would not report to or fall under the authority of the Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and would have the authority to send memoranda directly to the Secretary. Has the authority structure regarding the Ambassador at Large position changed in any way, and will the Ambassador at Large continue to be able to send memos directly to the Secretary?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will continue to be a principal adviser to the President and Secretary of State, and will head the Office of International Religious Freedom, in keeping with the terms of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). The position of Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom continues to be housed within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. If confirmed as Ambassador at Large, I will continue to send memos directly to the Secretary in coordination with the Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#4)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom has always had authority over the entire staff of the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF Office), including “hire and fire” and supervisory authority, the authority to assign and direct duties, and the responsibility for performance evaluations. This authority is clearly mandated in Section 101(a) of the International Religious Freedom Act, which states that the IRF Office “shall be headed by the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.” Further, Section 101(d) states that, “The Secretary of State shall provide the Ambassador at Large with such funds as may be necessary for the hiring of staff for the Office, for the conduct of investigations by the Office, and for necessary travel to carry out the provisions of this section.” Except when the Ambassador at Large position has been vacant, this authority has never been assigned or delegated to any other person or position within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), including the Assistant Secretary or a Deputy Assistant Secretary. Additionally, the Ambassador at Large’s authority over the IRF Office staff has been recognized and confirmed by every previous Secretary of State, Director General, and Under Secretary for Management, including the Director General who was serving when the International Religious Freedom Act was passed into law. Has the Ambassador at Large’s authority over the IRF Office and its staff been in any way changed or diminished under the current administration, or are there any plans to change it?

Answer:

The Ambassador at Large's leadership of the IRF Office and the influence of the position of the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom is enhanced by a strong operational base within DRL. The International Religious Freedom Office will continue to fully support the Ambassador at Large, as has been the case previously. On a day-to-day basis, a DRL Deputy Assistant Secretary will work with the International Religious Freedom Office and will act as the chief operating officer. This will allow the Ambassador at Large to focus on policy leadership and guidance. Giving the Ambassador at Large a strong base in an established Department bureau will significantly strengthen diplomatic engagement in promoting international religious freedom.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#5)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

What are the plans for the Office of International Religious Freedom in terms of staffing and budget levels? Will figures be maintained from 2008 levels, raised, or reduced?

Answer:

The Office of International Religious Freedom in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor currently has almost 20 full-time and detailed positions. The only budget that is discretely allocated by office is travel and representation. There are no plans to reduce these budgets.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#6)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

Several years ago, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor wished to free up a number of its personnel from the duties of preparing annual reports. Specifically, the Bureau wished to disband its long-standing Office of Country Reports and reassign the personnel from that office to other tasks. The Office of International Religious Freedom was asked to assume full responsibility for all aspects of the preparation of the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, as well as additional responsibilities in the preparation of the Annual Human Rights Report. In return, the IRF Office was given six new permanent positions (FTEs) and was promised, in good faith, that six additional FTEs would be assigned to the office over the course of the following few years. This agreement was arrived at under the direction of the Deputy Secretary of State and with the agreement of the Under Secretary for Global Affairs. The intention was to prevent the IRF Office from being overburdened with its new responsibilities and to ensure that the Office would be able to carry out its duties, year-round, in addressing violations of religious freedom. Will the Department and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor honor this commitment?

Answer:

The Office of International Religious Freedom currently has almost 20 full-time and detailed positions. In addition to an experienced and dedicated permanent staff, designated funds are used to hire additional experienced personnel for the surge in the office's workload during the period in which the IRF Report is drafted.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#7)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

In 2008, the State Department's Bureau of Administration placed special hiring constraints upon the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) because DRL had hired eight people above and beyond their bureau allotment of personnel slots (FTEs). The IRF Office, however, had not exceeded its allotment and was not responsible for any of these "over-hires." Have any positions in the IRF Office been used to "pay down" this debt of extra hires by other offices in DRL? If so, when will the IRF Office have its full complement of staff positions restored? Has the IRF Office been allowed to fill any and all vacancies that have occurred in its positions? If not, when will the IRF Office be allowed to fill its positions?

Answer:

The IRF Office is allowed to fill all staffing vacancies. No positions have been eliminated. The IRF Office continues to fill vacancies as they arise.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#8)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

When Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, it mandated the establishment of the Office of International Religious Freedom as a dedicated office, focused only on addressing issues of religious freedom. Has the Office or its staff been tasked with any additional responsibilities? If so, what was the justification for these duties?

Answer:

The IRF Office works on issues relating to the promotion of international religious freedom. This includes the role of providing support to the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat anti-Semitism. Reporting on anti-Semitism and assisting the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat anti-Semitism are critical and integral components of the IRF Office's overall mission.

Under the Global Anti-Semitism Review Act of 2004, Congress mandated that the annual IRF Report incorporate incidents of anti-Semitism, indicating a strong linkage of the general mandate of religious freedom and the specific mandate of combating anti-Semitism. If confirmed, I will work closely with Special Envoy Hannah Rosenthal in fighting religious persecution, and in supporting interfaith collaboration to promote religious tolerance and religious freedom around the globe.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#9)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

How do you plan to work together with the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) to accomplish the mission of your office?

Answer:

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with DRL Assistant Secretary Michael Posner, to promote international religious freedom around the world. Religious freedom is an important component of DRL's overall mission, and Assistant Secretary Posner is committed to raising religious freedom concerns in every region of the globe.

DRL provides an important operational base to support diplomatic efforts aimed at promoting religious freedom. If confirmed, I will ensure that DRL has a strong voice on international religious freedom issues, and that it will continue to devote adequate resources to the issue. Assistant Secretary Posner is committed to working with me, if I am confirmed, to ensure that international religious freedom is a central part of the overall promotion of human rights in U.S. diplomacy.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador-Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#10)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

How can IRF policy be implemented to counter religious terrorism and extremism, especially in the Middle East? How will you work to foster cooperation between religious groups and encourage religious tolerance in this region?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will make it a priority to promote international religious freedom by supporting interfaith engagement that builds religious tolerance, especially in the Middle East.

If confirmed, I will work in close coordination with our Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat anti-Semitism and the Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, in their ongoing efforts to encourage religious freedom and cooperation between religious groups in the region.

If confirmed, I would lead the White House campaign to promote religious engagement on topics of shared concern to all religions, such as environment and education. This effort is forging significant cooperation – and understanding – between religious groups. Latvia recently hosted a historic interfaith roundtable on religious freedom and social action, and recent interfaith conferences in Dhaka and Jakarta also focused on encouraging representatives from religious communities to become civil society leaders.

And of course, the IRF Office and U.S. embassies and consulates work together to promote international religious freedom in countries around the world, including in the Middle East. This cooperation uses a range of diplomatic tools, including funding grants that directly address religious discrimination and oppression. If confirmed, I will press foreign governments to provide full religious freedom for their citizens, and to advance international religious freedom.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#11)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

When engaging in any foreign policy effort, it is important to have supportive allies. With regard to religious freedom, how will you foster support for U.S. IRF policy abroad, and how will you work to encourage allies to support U.S. efforts in this field?

Answer:

The Department of State has a number of strong international partners it works with to promote international religious freedom. For example, the Department has been working hard with our allies to combat the troubling "defamation of religions" resolutions currently under consideration at the UN. We seek to address concerns of intolerance, stereotyping, and discrimination of individuals based on their religion without undermining fundamental freedoms of religion and expression.

If confirmed, I will continue the important work of opposing any "defamation of religions" resolution that continues to undermine these freedoms, and will look to build coalitions to oppose "defamation of religions" resolutions, including, for example, by working to find an alternative that does not endorse the divisive defamation concept, that does not infringe on the freedoms of expression and religion, and that could command broad based support.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#12)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

How do you envision your role as the U.S. spokesman for religious freedom? What strategies will you employ as you conduct public outreach? How do you plan to increase the profile of your office domestically, including within the State Department, and abroad?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will clearly articulate the importance of international religious freedom. I will work to develop a vigorous outreach strategy that includes speeches, press outreach, public engagements, travel (both domestically and internationally), and the use of social media. I will make full use of opportunities afforded by the State Department's Public Affairs Bureau and will work with the bureaus of Educational and Cultural Affairs and International Information Programs to incorporate information about international religious freedom issues into their respective programming. I will make it a priority to vigorously engage with religious leaders and civil society groups, with the goal of promoting international religious freedom to as broad an audience as possible, should I be confirmed.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#13)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

Do you believe that religious freedom advocacy training for diplomats would help advance IRF's priorities worldwide? If training were to be implemented, what would the training process entail, and what would be the end goals of this orientation? How would this program be funded?

Answer:

Increased training for diplomats is desirable and useful, and increased training on religious freedom is a high priority. In addition to the current and on-going training for human rights officers and chiefs of mission, DRL is working closely with the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) on preparing an intensive three-day human rights course, which will be offered to a broad range of Foreign and Civil Service Officers, and Foreign Service National staff. The first course will be offered in fall 2010. Religious freedom will be a key component in the curriculum. At this point, we anticipate that the scheduled fall 2010 program will be funded under FSI's regular training budget.

In addition, DRL and FSI are jointly exploring the possibility of creating a new, stand-alone course focused exclusively on issues related to international religious engagement. This course would be intended to provide our diplomats with the practical skills necessary to operate effectively in environments where religion is a significant factor. The training would provide a range of tools to help our diplomats engage religious, civil society, and government leaders productively on a wide range of issues related to religion, including with regard to concerns over restrictions on religious freedom. The proposed training would also cover best practices for reporting, programming, and public diplomacy outreach on international religious freedom and related issues.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#14)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

In the past, you have served as a White House Fellow, Faith Advisor to President Clinton, Faith Advisor to President Obama, as well as Chaplain to the NYC Police Department and Senior Pastor at various churches. In what ways have your past experiences prepared you to serve the United States as Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom? How will you draw upon these experiences to recommend policy proposals, conduct public outreach, liaise with various organizations and institutions, and advise the President and Secretary of State? During your time at the White House, were you able to participate in any diplomatic missions?

Answer:

In over thirty years of working on issues of religious freedom, I have traveled to five continents and met with Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, and practitioners of several other spiritual traditions. While serving as a White House Fellow, I traveled to Zimbabwe and South Africa to meet with Zulu faith leaders to promote religious freedom and tolerance. I also have led interfaith delegations to Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, and to the Caribbean. As a young woman, I worked with Operation Crossroads Africa, and participated in a cross-cultural exchange with many spiritual groups in Ghana. As you have noted, I was an advisor on President Clinton's Domestic Policy Council and currently serve as Chaplain to the New York Police Department.

Each of these experiences has uniquely shaped my commitment to interfaith engagement. I am accustomed to traveling and promoting respect, tolerance, and dialogue between members of different faiths, and if confirmed, I will draw on the networks that I have cultivated over the past three decades to promote interfaith initiatives.

If confirmed, I will use the range of diplomatic tools to advance international religious freedom, and will emphasize press outreach, public engagement, and social media. I will also work tirelessly to raise public awareness on international religious freedom.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador-Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#15)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

A Pew Forum study from December 2009 indicated that approximately 70 percent of the world's population lives in areas where religious freedom is severely restricted. What interests do you believe the United States has with regard to promoting international religious freedom?

Answer:

Promoting religious freedom is a core objective of U.S. foreign policy because freedoms of thought, conscience, and religion are the birthright of all people and are universal values. Where there is freedom of religion, members of communities of faith are empowered to advance the common good. Promoting religious freedom is one important way to decrease the threat of radicalism, because it allows moderate voices to compete in the marketplace of ideas with extremist ones; this is an imperative for national security, and critical to international security.

If confirmed, I will look to build bridges to promote international religious freedom.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#16)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

How do you plan to engage religious communities and nongovernmental organizations to carry out the duties of your office? Specifically, how will you work with other religious leaders to promote human rights and conflict resolution? In what ways do you believe your past experiences as a religious leader will aid you in these endeavors?

Answer:

Opinion leaders, including religious leaders, play an important role and have a particular responsibility in promoting human rights and in helping to resolve conflict. In my personal experience, I have worked closely with a variety of religious communities, both my own and others, and I will draw on the strengths of these groups in advancing international religious freedom and other human rights.

If confirmed, I would be honored to lead the Office of International Religious Freedom in its ongoing outreach and engagement with religious communities. If confirmed, I will also work closely with my colleagues at the State Department, including the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, Hannah Rosenthal; the Special Representative to Muslim Communities, Farah Pandith; and the Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Rashad Hussein, to join in the good work they are doing to engage religious communities worldwide, and to promote mutual respect among people of all faiths.

If confirmed, I will reach out to NGOs working on international religious freedom and will stay in close contact with these organizations. They play an important role in bringing issues to our attention and are key allies in this important work.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#17)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

The Obama Administration's National Security Strategy released in May 2010 does not explicitly reference religious freedom. Instead, it discusses certain universal values such as "an individual's freedom...to worship as they please." In your opinion, what is the significance of the distinction between the phrases "freedom of worship" and "freedom of religion"? How would you define "freedom of religion"?

Answer:

International religious freedom remains a central component of our promotion of human rights around the world. "Freedom of worship" has been used by this and past Administrations, especially in speeches, as a phrase interchangeable with "freedom of religion." That use is appropriate and generally understood. More formally and legally, however, one could describe freedom of worship as a core component of freedom of religion. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides a clear definition of religious freedom in saying that: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Promoting all aspects of freedom of religious belief and expression remains a high priority in our diplomatic efforts, as reflected in President Obama's Cairo speech in June, where he emphasized that: "Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together." Secretary Clinton said when she released the 2009 International Religious Freedom Report that: "Religious freedom provides a cornerstone for every healthy society. It empowers faith-based service. It fosters tolerance and respect among different communities. And it allows nations that uphold it to become more stable, secure and prosperous. These facts underlie our commitment to the cause of religious freedom. That's why we make the issue of international religious freedom a priority in our diplomacy, and this annual report is the centerpiece of our efforts."

If confirmed I will make clear that the promotion of every aspect of "freedom of religion" is the mandate of the IRF Act and Office.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#18)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

As a result of the National Security Strategy's silence on IRF policy, what steps would you take to ensure that IRF policy assumes a more prominent role in U.S. foreign policy efforts?

Answer:

The Obama Administration's National Security Strategy deals at length with affirming and promoting basic human rights and democratic values, including pluralism and an "individual's freedom to...worship as they please." Both President Obama and Secretary Clinton have highlighted the critical importance of religious freedom on several occasions, and I know from personal conversations with each of them that they have a strong commitment to advancing the rights of all religious groups and individuals around the world as a core element of U.S. foreign policy. The President has said, "This is America, and our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakeable."

If confirmed, I will take full advantage of my role as the principal advisor to the President and Secretary on matters of international religious freedom. I will use the full range of diplomatic tools at my disposal, and I will look for opportunities to collaborate with officials in Washington and at our embassies to ensure that international religious freedom continues to be a priority.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador-Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#19)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2010 Annual Report, the flexibility of possible policy solutions that the Secretary of State could take under IRFA is "underutilized" and has not been able to bring about "real progress." For example, IRFA allows the Secretary to form a binding agreement with a CPC country to end its CPC designation following the completion of certain guidelines. Additionally the Secretary may determine whether pre-existing sanctions are appropriate in certain guidelines. Additionally, the Secretary may determine whether pre-existing sanctions are appropriate in certain cases. Of the eight countries currently designated as CPCs by the State Department, in what instances would you advise the Secretary to fully explore other policy options provided for in IRFA to advance religious freedom efforts in those countries?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will review all the CPCs and consider the full range of tools available to encourage reform. Each of the current CPCs represents unique and difficult challenges. We must press forcefully for reform and look for the most effective combination of tools to promote religious freedom in each designated country. If confirmed, I will hold countries to their commitments to universal human rights values. Religious freedom, as an important part of our overall human rights efforts, must continue to play a central and integrated role in U.S. policy objectives around the world. Before I am confirmed and fully briefed, it is premature for me to outline specific recommendations.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#20)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

When advocating religious freedom directly with CPCs, how would you distinguish between instances when sanctions would be more effective than behind-the-scenes diplomacy? What forms of sanctions would you design to advance religious freedom?

Answer:

The IRF Act is clear that sanctions are one of the options to impose on the most egregious violators of religious freedom. Diplomatic engagement, wherever possible, is an essential component to achieving lasting improvements in international religious freedom and can be used to convey the consequences – including the prospect of sanctions – if a government does not take steps to rectify its violations of religious freedom. Religious freedom issues in CPC countries should also be raised regularly not only by State Department officials, but by other U.S. Government departments and agencies, to underscore the importance the United States places on religious freedom.

Each country presents unique challenges and a different potential for change, and, if confirmed, I will work to ensure that we will employ the full range of tools available to us as we work to promote religious freedom around the world.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#21)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

The state of religious freedom in Burma, designated a CPC since 1999, continues to decline following the killing, arrest, and torture of monks participating in a non-violent protest in September, 2007. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has targeted monasteries, created “Muslim Free Zones,” and forcibly promoted Buddhism throughout the country. What is an appropriate strategy for the U.S. to address religious freedom challenges in Burma? How would you alter IRF policy with regard to Burma?

Answer:

The repressive military regime in Burma continues to engage in systematic violations of human rights and religious freedom against a large number of its citizens. The continued imprisonment of monks for involvement in the 2007 protests is contemptible and hardly consistent with the regime’s claim to be the protector of Buddhism. There is also particular concern over the scale of the repression against the Muslim Rohingya, their lack of citizenship, severe government restrictions on their travel, and discrimination in employment and educational opportunities. Christian and Muslim groups also have difficulties importing religious texts, propagating their faith, and obtaining permits to build, maintain, or modify places of worship in most regions.

The regime maintains a pervasive internal security apparatus that infiltrates -- or monitors the activities of -- religious groups. The government applies pressure on some students and underprivileged youth to convert to Buddhism and then seeks to control Buddhist organizations to ensure they do not again demand respect for human rights, as they did in 2007. Adherence or conversion to state-controlled Buddhism is generally a prerequisite for promotion to senior government and military ranks. The army’s attacks in ethnic minority regions, where there are higher concentrations of Christians and Muslims, have resulted in hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees.

We should continue to include raising religious freedom concerns regularly as part of wider U.S. policy toward Burma, especially with those countries that provide Burma commercial advantages and diplomatic support. We should continue to engage within the multilateral context on efforts toward reform in Burma, particularly with neighboring ASEAN nations, and also encourage the work of NGOs supporting human rights and religious freedom both inside and outside of the country.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#22)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

Over the past year in China, a CPC since 1999, many violations of religious freedom have occurred in the Tibetan Buddhist and Uighur Muslim areas, and Catholic priests and “house church” Protestants have been detained, arrested, or have disappeared. Although China has expanded its “zone of toleration” allowing citizens to worship freely, how would you work with the Chinese government to ease its restrictions on religious groups? What strategy would you employ to advance religious freedom in China?

Answer:

Restrictions on religious freedom in China are inconsistent, ranging from stringent controls on Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims to a degree of tolerance of Christian groups and Chinese Hui Muslims. While Christianity continues to grow, there is a marked difference in the treatment of official churches and unofficial churches.

The 2008 unrest in Tibet and the 2009 riots in Xinjiang reinforced the Communist Party’s resolve to adhere to its security-centered approach to ethnic and religious policy, and both Tibetans and Uighurs continue to suffer under harsh social, political, and religious repression. In Tibet, authorities maintain a tight grip on Tibetan Buddhism, strictly controlling the expansion of monasteries, forbidding the open veneration of the Dalai Lama, and forcing monks and nuns to attend regular political education sessions. In Xinjiang, the practice of Islam is also tightly controlled. Since the 2009 unrest, authorities have increased political education for Muslim imams, made hajj travel more difficult by confiscating passports, and restricted observance of Ramadan. During the past year, authorities have harassed and pressured house church congregations. Following the May 2008 Sichuan earthquake, faith-based organizations were allowed to play a significant role in disaster relief for the first time. However, many faith-based aid groups still are not able to register as NGOs with the government.

If confirmed, I will consistently press China to uphold its international obligations and commitments to protect religious freedom, and I will speak out when violations occur. I will also build on the work of my predecessors and the recent efforts of DRL Assistant Secretary Posner and our Ambassador to China, Jon Huntsman, to establish a regular channel of engagement on religion to maintain the momentum of our efforts to promote religious freedom during the periods between our bilateral human rights dialogues.

It is my hope that the institution of regular exchanges with China on issues of religious freedom will provide new opportunities to convey our message that it is in a country's own best interest to allow its citizens to exercise their faith in the manner they choose. Some of China's leaders have already begun to recognize that their religious citizens are a resource to help meet the challenges that accompany rapid socio-economic change and to maintain stability, and there is unprecedented public debate about the role of religion in society.

If confirmed, I will try to take advantage of this growing recognition to promote religious freedom for all religious adherents in China, while at the same time holding China accountable for the violations of religious freedom that led to its designation as a CPC. As I set my priorities, I look forward to consulting closely with Congress, NGO's, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, and with people of faith in China. I

would also hope to travel to China to hear from government officials at the national level, and at the provincial and local levels where policies are implemented.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#23)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

Despite its designation as a CPC in September 2004, the government of Eritrea continues to ban public religious activities by unofficial religious groups and to arrest others for peaceful religious activities. While commercial exports of defense items to Eritrea were banned in 2005 under the Arms Export Control Act, the USCIRF recommends that targeted sanctions should also be implemented. Do you support targeted sanctions to achieve IRF goals in Eritrea?

Answer:

I am deeply concerned about the conditions for religious freedom in Eritrea, particularly the government's ongoing restrictive bans on public religious activities and its treatment of individuals who are members of religious groups other than the four government-sanctioned ones. The government of Eritrea is responsible for violations of religious freedom in the country. Targeted sanctions remain an option. The goal of current sanctions against Eritrea as a CPC is to press the government for improved conditions for religious freedom in the country.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#24)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

Iran has been designated a CPC by the State Department since 1999. Nevertheless, the 2010 Annual Report by the USCIRF characterizes the state of religious freedom in Iran following the June 2009 election as at one of the lowest levels since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution. Today, Muslim dissidents can be sentenced to death for *moharebeh*, waging war against God, and religious minorities like Baha'is and Christians face constant discrimination, harassment, and imprisonment. Additionally, senior government officials continue to deny the occurrence of the Holocaust. How would you design IRF policy in concert with European allies to foster religious freedom in Iran?

Answer:

Iran continues to violate the human rights of its people, as it has for decades. If confirmed, I will continue to work through the United Nations and other international fora to press Iran to improve its respect for human rights and religious freedom. The U.S. urges its European allies to address human rights, including religious freedom, in their dialogues with Iran and coordinates joint messages with likeminded governments on these issues. We should continue to engage and support the people and civil society of Iran through assistance programs and public diplomacy. If confirmed, I will review the range of options and tools to encourage progress on religious freedom issues in Iran.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#25)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

What strategy would you propose to promote religious freedom in CPCs like Iran and North Korea with which we do not currently have established diplomatic relations?

Answer:

Countries such as Iran and North Korea present enormous challenges in promoting religious freedom. Multilateral efforts and consistent diplomatic pressure on the CPC countries, as well as on those that provide them commercial exchange or diplomatic support, are essential. If confirmed, I will work closely with our international partners to speak with a united voice and maintain pressure on these governments to improve on religious freedom. If confirmed, I will welcome the input of NGOs that seek to advance religious freedom in these countries.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#26)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

In addition to ongoing tensions between Shi'a and Sunni Iraqis, violence and discrimination against religious minorities has continued throughout Iraq. While Iraq is not currently a State Department CPC, the USCIRF has requested that Iraq be designated a CPC since 2008. The Iraqi government has publicly condemned these discriminatory acts toward minorities, but it has failed to adequately investigate and adjudicate these violations of religious freedom. In what ways can the U.S. government encourage the Iraqi government to ensure protection for religious minorities? What strategy would you employ to prioritize religious freedom in Iraq?

Answer:

Each religious and ethnic group in Iraq has experienced devastating levels of violence, targeting, and even killings. Religious minorities have suffered disproportionately greater violence, as societal elements have targeted them. Despite overall positive security trends in Iraq, its minority communities remain vulnerable.

With our shift from a combat mission in Iraq, our remaining military presence in Iraq will advise and assist Iraq's security forces to increase their capability to defend all Iraqis, including its religious and ethnic minorities. We will also maintain a civilian presence in places such as Ninewa, and other areas of instability.

In response to attacks against the Christian minority community this past February, the Department was pleased to see the government of Iraq establish a "Committee for Expedited Investigation and Follow-up on the Targeting of Christians in Ninewa." This Committee authorized additional security measures to protect Christians, their property, and their religious establishments. If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary's Coordinator on Iraq's Minority Communities, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Deputy Assistant Secretary Michael Corbin, and Embassy Baghdad, to encourage and support these types of efforts by the government of Iraq.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#27)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

The State Department's 2009 International Religious Freedom Report described increased hostility and violence among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria. Local political leaders, in particular, were charged with provoking sectarian violence, and the Nigerian government's toleration of these actions has led to a culture of impunity. How would you urge the Nigerian government to end its culture of impunity? In what ways would you encourage the Nigerian government to oppose religious extremism? How would you approach easing these political and socio-economic tensions without inciting more religious conflict?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will reinforce the strong message that Secretary Clinton and other U.S. government officials have been sending, because I share the U.S. government's deep concern about increased sectarian violence in Nigeria and the role of local political leaders in perpetuating this trend. I will urge the Nigerian government to respond proactively to warning signs of sectarian violence, especially in regions with multi-religious populations, such as the Middle Belt region, and act quickly to protect vulnerable populations in the event of an outbreak of violence. Stronger steps are necessary to improve the police and justice sectors' response to, and prevention of, sectarian violence, including capacity-building on human rights and riot control.

I would encourage the Nigerian government to address religious polarization and extremism by promoting interfaith partnerships and government accountability, so that political disenfranchisement, lack of resources, and land disputes do not unnecessarily contribute to communal tensions.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#28)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

Reports have indicated that dozens of Christians were recently deported from Morocco without due process. Moroccan law prohibits interference with an individual's or group's religious practices, and it elaborates that shelters or orphanages that seek to convert individuals are illegal. While many of the expelled Christians were affiliated with orphanages, they claimed they were not proselytizing. Has the U.S. investigated the legality of these deportations with regard to due process? If not, what steps would you take to ensure this occurs? More broadly, what can your office do to encourage greater religious tolerance in Morocco?

Answer:

The ordered expulsion of more than 100 foreign nationals in March 2010, including seven American citizens, is troubling. Many of them had legal residency in Morocco for many years. I agree with the Department's call for the government of Morocco to allow those it expelled to return to defend themselves against any charges; to provide official deportation notices (in French) to individuals it intends to deport; and to extend the 48-hour grace period it pledged to allow for deportees to put their affairs in order before implementation of the deportation.

The U.S. government raises religious freedom concerns regularly with the Moroccan government as part of our efforts to promote human rights, and if confirmed, I would certainly assist those efforts. I would also urge the Government of Morocco to respect its international human rights obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, including religious freedom and freedom of expression.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#29)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

Despite the end of the country's five-year war in 2003, continued violence and instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has led to an abandonment of traditional values as exhibited in epidemics of rape conducted by both government security forces and civilians. Do you view the empowerment of religious communities as a viable method to bring the return of key societal values and to promote reconciliation in the country? What role, if any, would your office play in the reconciliation process?

Answer:

If confirmed, I will encourage the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) government to engage with religious communities to raise awareness about the rights of vulnerable communities and to encourage citizens and government officials to take steps to address these concerns. I will also urge it to focus on the demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, especially youth, who constitute more than half the population, as they have been more prone to participate in gender related crimes against women. In the DRC, where over 90 percent of citizens engage in weekly religious services, the role of religious entities is vital to the cessation of gender-related crimes.

If confirmed, I will work toward building stronger relationships with religious actors and nongovernmental organizations to help address human rights concerns in the country.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#30)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

North Korea, designated a CPC in 2001, continues to engage in egregious religious freedom violations with regard to what the government deems as “clandestine religious activity.” The North Korean government has established a number of government-approved “house churches” where religious activity is authorized to occur. Any instances of religious activity outside of a “house church” or a government-approved “federation” could result in consequences ranging from imprisonment to torture to public execution. What steps would you take to advocate for the full implementation of the North Korea Human Rights Act of 2008? What policies changes would you pursue with regard to North Korea?

Answer:

North Korea is one of the world’s most egregious violators of religious freedom and human rights. If confirmed, I will draw attention to these abuses and will meet regularly with North Korean defectors and activists who assist the defector community.

I will also work with colleagues in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), the Office of North Korea Policy, the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs, and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, to continue to implement the North Korean Human Rights Act Reauthorization of 2008. The Department of State currently supports a program that focuses on documenting human rights abuses inside the DPRK, building the capacity of defector-led organizations based in the Republic of Korea, and increasing the flow of independent information into, within, and out of the DPRK. The IRF office coordinates closely with other offices in DRL to provide feedback and recommendations regarding program proposals to ensure that our North Korea program is balanced and incorporates religious freedom elements. If confirmed, I will ensure that religious freedom continues to be a priority component of our programming efforts.

I am also deeply concerned by reports that North Koreans who have had contact with missionaries in China face particularly harsh punishment when forcibly returned to the DPRK. If confirmed, I will coordinate closely with my colleagues in other bureaus to raise this issue at every opportunity with Chinese officials.

If confirmed, I will seek to raise the profile of North Korean religious freedom issues in multilateral fora and will seek to encourage like-minded countries to regularly raise religious freedom issues directly with the DPRK. I will also seek the ideas and insights of NGOs that follow human rights in North Korea.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#31)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

Although the USCIRF has recommended that Pakistan be designated as a CPC since 2002, the State Department has yet to follow through on this recommendation. President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani have taken steps to combat religious extremism in the country, but concerns still exist concerning the curricula of *madrassas*, enforcement of discriminatory laws towards women and religious minorities, and instances of religious-based violence. In light of the sectarian violence and religious discrimination in Pakistan, would you recommend to the State Department that Pakistan receive a CPC designation? If it were to receive this designation, how would you work to promote religious freedom in the country?

Answer:

If confirmed, I intend to address the situation in Pakistan as a priority. Serious religious freedom problems exist in the country, including the use of discriminatory and repressive legislation to abuse and harass religious minorities and vulnerable members of the Muslim community. I am also concerned by ongoing inter- and intra-religious violence, and the security threats posed by religious extremists.

I understand that the Government of Pakistan has taken some steps to address some of these concerns. For example, on August 11, in commemorating Minorities Day, President Zardari again pledged to "review laws that discriminate against minorities," and reiterated the need to "integrate people of all faiths in the national mainstream." The Federal Minister for Minorities, a Roman Catholic, in his role as a Cabinet member, has partnered with NGOs and religious leaders to promote religious freedom and tolerance. Minister Shahbaz Bhatti has organized interfaith efforts and urged religious scholars to take a stand against terrorism and hatred in the name of religion. The government also allocated a five percent quota for religious minorities in all federal jobs and directed provincial governments to implement the same system at the provincial level.

If confirmed, I will work to strengthen civil society efforts in Pakistan in order to build momentum within the country to amend discriminatory legislation that negatively affects religious minorities and violates human rights norms. In addition, it is incredibly important that we work to promote inter-religious dialogue in educational institutions, which would serve to counteract messages of intolerance. Also, I will support efforts to promote religious sensitivity and human rights training programs for Pakistani law enforcement and correctional officers.

Finally, I will pay special attention to the conditions in Pakistan when considering CPC recommendations to the Secretary.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#32)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

Your predecessor worked extensively with Saudi Arabia to address issues of intolerance. This culminated in the presentation of a number of stated policies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including policies to remove all intolerance from educational materials and to protect the right of religious minorities to hold private religious meetings? How do you assess Saudi Arabia's current efforts toward the fulfillment of these stated policies, and how do you plan to further this work?

Answer:

King Abdullah has taken a leading role in some international conferences that focused on interfaith dialogue and tolerance, and Saudi Arabia has also made progress in curbing excesses of the religious police within Saudi Arabia. However, significant challenges remain. Saudi Arabia does not allow any public religious expression other than Islam. Shi'a and other Muslims face significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination. There are still intolerant references to religious groups in government-published materials. Saudi Arabia has been designated a Country of Particular Concern since 2004.

Some progress has been made in eliminating intolerant statements from school curricula, and the Saudis tell us that students are spending less time on religious instruction. Recent U.S. government reviews, however, confirm that the textbooks – in particular the religious and Arabic language textbooks -- still teach intolerance against Jews and Christians, as well as Muslims who do not adhere to the government's interpretation of Sunni Islam.

If confirmed, I intend to press for improvements on religious freedom issues in Saudi Arabia. I would also continue to push for the removal of intolerant materials in educational materials. I would also review all options for encouraging more significant progress on religious freedom, including through working with our international partners and in multilateral fora.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#33)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

While violence between Christians and Muslims has occurred in the North and South of Sudan, the Darfur region has experienced conflicts predominantly within the Muslim community, including between the government and Darfur rebels. Nevertheless, key Muslim organizations like the Islamic Conference have failed to speak out forcefully or actively engage to resolve these violent episodes and to seek justice for the hundreds of thousands of victims. In your opinion, how can the US encourage effective engagement by Muslim organizations to counter violence and foster cooperation in the region?

Answer:

The situation in Darfur remains a source of grave concern. The ongoing conflict in Darfur does not center primarily on religious differences. Rather it is based on political, economic, and ethnic issues, as well as on insecurity. Muslim organizations, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), play a crucial role in reducing intra-religious violence in Darfur, as the majority of the people of Darfur are Muslim. In March of this year, Egypt and Turkey co-chaired an OIC conference on Darfur at which members pledged \$850 million to fund reconstruction projects. If confirmed, I will explore further opportunities to enhance effective engagement with Muslim organizations, and I will collaborate with colleagues in the Department of State -- including the Special Envoy to Sudan and the Special Envoy to the OIC -- to find ways to reach out to leaders of these groups and encourage their effective participation on conflict resolution initiatives in Sudan.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador-Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#34)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

While the USCIRF has recommended that Turkmenistan become a CPC since 2000, the State Department has never followed through on that recommendation despite police raids on unregistered groups and laws restricting the legal functioning of religious groups. Do you believe the violations of religious freedom in Turkmenistan warrant its distinction as a CPC? How will you work to strengthen the diplomatic relationship with Turkmenistan and prioritize human rights in that country? Do you have any additional recommendations with regard to that issue?

Answer:

I am aware of the religious freedom problems in Turkmenistan and have reviewed and appreciate USCIRF's recommendations. There are significant on-going concerns in Turkmenistan, as noted in the annual IRF Report. If confirmed, I hope to work closely with USCIRF to advance religious freedom around the globe.

It is my understanding that during the first Annual Bilateral Consultations with Turkmenistan in June, Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister, Rashit Meredov, requested U.S. assistance in crafting a bilateral action plan to make human rights improvements in Turkmenistan. A strategy for such a plan is currently in development, and I view that as a step in the right direction. If confirmed, I will work hard to advance religious freedom in Turkmenistan and will make engagement on this plan with Turkmenistan a priority.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#35)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

In Uzbekistan, restrictive religious laws have led to the closures of many non-compliant mosques and have led, in 2009 specifically, to the arrests of at least 4,500 non-conforming Muslims. Although it has been designated a CPC since 2006, Uzbek police continue to harass and arrest members of unregistered religious groups. How would you work with the Uzbek government to limit religious repression in the country? Would you call for sanctions in this situation, and if so, what sanctions would you deem appropriate?

Answer:

I am concerned about the Uzbekistan government's restrictions and abuses of religious freedom. Security forces have raided religious services of minority religious groups, often detaining and sometimes beating participants. Authorities have arrested and incarcerated religious leaders, deregistered some congregations, and deported the leaders of others. Individuals continue to be charged with religious extremist activity based on inadequate evidence and coerced testimony, and are frequently subject to torture. The current religion law imposes unreasonable requirements for a religious group to register. Often, even groups that appear to meet registration requirements are not registered. The Uzbek government has not interfered with worshippers at sanctioned mosques and permitted the regular operation of religious groups traditionally practicing in Uzbekistan, including the Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and Russian Orthodox communities.

Uzbekistan has been designated a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) since 2006. Since the CPC designation, State Department officials have met numerous times with Uzbek officials, both in Uzbekistan and in Washington. Most recently, discussions were held between Uzbek officials and Assistant Secretary Michael Posner during his trip to Tashkent in June 2010, and during the Annual Bilateral Consultations in Washington in December 2009.

If confirmed, I intend to continue this important work and press the government of Uzbekistan to take specific actions to improve religious freedom. I would consult with other U.S. officials, key international partners, USCIRF, and NGOs to determine the most effective course of action and develop my recommendations to help Uzbekistan improve its practices and legislation. If confirmed, I will press hard for the Uzbek government to simplify the registration process and reduce the requirements for registration, and will also urge the Uzbeks to reduce or eliminate the civil and criminal penalties for unregistered religious activity. I would work to ensure that religious freedom issues continue to be an integral part of future Annual Bilateral Consultations and work with my colleagues to utilize all bilateral and multilateral tools to motivate the Uzbek government to make improvements.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#36)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

What impact have U.S. policies had, to date, on the promotion of religious freedom in the former Soviet Union? What are the limitations on this impact?

Answer:

The state of religious freedom in the former Soviet Union varies widely. In the Baltics—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – Moldova, and Ukraine, the government generally respects religious freedom in practice. In Armenia and Georgia, the picture has been mixed, but there has generally been respect for religious freedom. In Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – we continue to have concerns about restrictions on religious freedom.

Throughout the former Soviet Union, the State Department has engaged in an on-going dialogue with government officials. In one example, of positive engagement, the Department, along with the international community, successfully persuaded the government of Kazakhstan to reject more restrictive religious registration laws in 2009. In other countries, however, it is clear that the United States needs to continue to raise these issues and to do so at a very high level. If confirmed as Ambassador at Large, I will press these countries to meet internationally recognized human rights standards, including religious freedom, for all their citizens.

In much of the former Soviet Union, laws requiring the registration of religious groups are used to restrict minority religious groups that are seen as nontraditional. It is often difficult for such minority groups to meet the registration requirements. Legal obstacles in Russia to registration under the Law on Religions disadvantage some religious groups considered nontraditional. In many countries, particularly in Central Asia and Belarus, unregistered religious groups can face severe civil or even criminal penalties.

In some countries, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Russia, particular religious groups receive special recognition or special status. Other religious groups face numerous legal and administrative barriers.

In Russia and Central Asia, minority and nontraditional religious groups – such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, evangelical Protestants, and various minority or unofficial Muslim groups – have been branded as cults, sects, or extremists. Members of these groups often face harsh criminal or civil penalties for religious activity.

If confirmed, I will continue to advance the efforts the IRF office is making in monitoring and seeking to improve the status of religious freedom in the countries of the former Soviet Union.

**Pre-Hearing Questions for the Record Submitted to
Ambassador - Designate Suzan Johnson Cook by
Senator Richard Lugar (#37)
Senate Foreign Relations Committee**

Question:

It has been several years since the Government of Vietnam signed an agreement with your predecessor on problems of religious freedom, made significant progress toward addressing those problems, and was subsequently removed from the State Department's list of Countries of Particular Concern. What is your assessment of Vietnam's current record on religious freedom, and how do you plan to follow up on these efforts?

Answer:

After being designated a CPC in 2004, Vietnam addressed the type of "egregious, systematic, and ongoing" violations -- the arrest of individuals based on their religious faith or practice, church closings, and forced renunciations -- that formed the basis of the designation, and instituted policies and practices to improve protection of religious freedoms.

Significant problems remain. While registration of religious groups and congregations has continued to move forward nationwide, progress in the Northwest Highlands remains slow. Procedures for implementing the legal framework on religion remain inconsistent between local and provincial authorities. Some Protestant congregations have reported cases of beatings and forced renunciations at the hands of local officials in some rural areas. Four years after an application was submitted, the central government has not yet approved a translation of the Bible into H'mong.

Buddhist monks and nuns of the Plum Village order were violently evicted from Bat Nha pagoda in September 2009. Government officials clearly contributed to intra-Buddhist tensions and were involved in this violence. The unrecognized Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) continues to report government monitoring and restrictions. There are continuing and complicated land disputes between the government and some members of the Catholic Church, which have resulted in violent clashes with police, arrest and detention of some protesting parishioners, and reports of harsh treatment in detention, including claims that the death of one of the protesters was the result of police interrogations. Accounts of the origins of these clashes and the cause of the parishioner's death differ widely, even among Catholics involved directly in land dispute negotiations. The U.S. has expressed its serious concern over the use of force in any of these cases, and has urged all parties to resolve these disputes peacefully.

That said, since its removal from the CPC list in 2006, Vietnam has continued to make progress, granting national recognition and registration to 15 new religions, including 8 Protestant denominations, and allowing numerous congregations to reopen. The government has permitted the expansion of charitable activities by religious organizations. President Nguyen Minh Triet met with Pope Benedict XVI at the Holy See in December 2009, and Vietnam and the Holy See have agreed to the appointment of a non-resident Representative to Vietnam as a first step toward relations. The government also permitted the Buddhist, Catholic, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Protestant faiths to hold several large-scale religious services throughout the country, some with over 100,000 participants, and permitted construction of new churches and pagodas in the Central Highlands and Mekong Delta, some with government financial assistance.

If confirmed, I will urge the government of Vietnam to provide full religious freedom for all citizens. I will urge Vietnam to meet its commitments to register all remaining congregations in the Northwest Highlands by the end of this year, and to provide additional training for local officials to ensure consistent implementation of the legal framework regarding religion. Peaceful resolution of

property disputes that respects historic religious ties must be a priority. Buddhist sanghas, including Plum Village and Khmer Krom communities, must be permitted to practice their faith, and their communities must be respected and left intact.

The U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue is one important channel for raising these issues directly with high-level officials, and I intend to be a full participant in the Dialogue. The Dialogue also provides an opportunity to publicly reinforce these priorities.