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2012 candidates asked to sign religious freedom pledge

Adelle M. Banks Religion News Service | Dec. 1, 2011

An advocacy organization for persecuted Christians has asked the 2012 presidential candidates to sign a pledge stating they would make religious freedom a priority in the United States and overseas if they win the White House.

Open Doors USA joined with religious freedom activist Tom Farr of Georgetown University to draft the pledge, which was unveiled Monday. As of Wednesday, former U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., was the sole signatory among the candidates.

"The right of religious freedom must be applied equally to all religious communities in America, including Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and others," reads the pledge.

"At the same time, religious freedom does not mandate belief, but protects the right not to believe."

The pledge, endorsed by prominent conservative organizations and individuals, defends the right to use religious arguments when debating laws about abortion and traditional marriage. It also supports "religiously motivated" charitable work.

"Tens of millions of human beings are subject to violent persecution because of their beliefs or those of their tormentors," Farr said in a statement. "Whoever wins the presidency in 2012 should make religious freedom, at home and abroad, a high priority."

The pledge calls for the candidate, should he or she become president, to nominate federal judges who support religious liberty. It also asks candidates to make religious freedom promotion a foreign policy priority and urges the appointment of a religious freedom ambassador "who is a person of stature, experienced in matters of religious freedom and diplomacy."

The Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook, a former New York minister, became ambassador last spring. When she was nominated, Farr told Religion News Service he was troubled that the post would not be filled with "an expert in international religious freedom with experience in foreign affairs."

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