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+Wuerl, Other Religious Leaders Send Letter to Obama

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

Below is the text of a letter sent to President Obama, signed by a host of religious leaders, praising him for "lifting up" the issue of international religious liberty during his remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast. As you will see, the letter also invites President Obama to reflect upon the issue of domestic religious liberty, not in a hostile way, but in an encouraging way. This non-culture warrior approach is, I believe, more likely to yield the results we want on the issue of religious liberty than some of the over-the-top claims one finds put forward at, for example, EWTN.

I am delighted to see that my ordinary, Cardinal Donald Wuerl signed this letter. I am curious that the Chairman of the USCCB ad hoc Committee on Religious Liberty did not. Here is the text:

Dear Mr. President,

As religious leaders we write to express our appreciation to you for lifting up the issue of international religious liberty in your recent address at the National Prayer Breakfast. We stand in solidarity with you in advancing this cause.

We applaud your words in support of Pastor Saeed Abedini and Kenneth Bae. We join you in calling for robust recognition of religious liberty by all in Syria, Sudan, Egypt, Burma, Pakistan, Nigeria, China, Iran, North Korea, the Holy Land, and everywhere where believers are threatened.

Untold numbers of believers today are imprisoned, tortured, and killed for practicing their faith. Religions are under threat globally in the face of mounting prejudice, majoritarian discrimination, sectarian violence, and governmental action and inaction. We join with you in your prayer for every prisoner of conscience and for the millions around the globe who are oppressed for reasons of faith.

We applaud your pledge to name a new Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom in the very near future. We urge you to appoint a proven leader with the stature to engage world leaders and to

give this person your full support as he or she represents and promotes our government's commitment to religious freedom.

America has been a beacon and defender of religious liberty. Religious liberty and freedom of conscience were universally acclaimed by America's Founders and Framers to be foundational for all further human rights and liberties. It is worthy and inspiring that you have called upon all Americans to stand up for the free exercise of religion at this critical hour.

As you promote religious freedom abroad, please also give attention to preserving the First Amendment freedoms of all Americans here at home. Some Americans are concerned that your administration's domestic policies do not fully protect the religious convictions of all our citizens. Your leadership abroad will be strongest as you point to the robust religious freedom protection that is provided even to those who may be critics of your administration.

We join in asking God that His wisdom will give us the capacity to do right and to seek justice, and defend the oppressed wherever they may dwell. As always, Mr. President, we pray also for you, for your

family, and for the nation we all love.

Signatures:

*Leith Anderson
President, National Association of Evangelicals*

*Cardinal Donald Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington*

*Russell D. Moore
President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention*

*Joel C. Hunter,
Senior Pastor, Northland, A Church Distributed*

*Samuel Rodriguez
President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference*

*Dwayne Leslie
Director of Legislative Affairs, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*

*Brent McBurney
President & CEO, Advocates International*

*John K. Jenkins, Sr.
Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church of Glenarden*

*William ?Bill? P. Robinson
Interim President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities*

*Stephen F. Schneck
Director of the Institute for Policy Research & Catholic Studies, The Catholic University of America*

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