

## Testimony of Tony Perkins, President of Family Research Council

### Hearing: “The Troubling Case of Meriam Ibrahim”

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International  
Organizations  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-6128

Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ), Chairman

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### **The Handling of International Religious Freedom Issues by the United States Government: The Case of Meriam Ibrahim and Other Recent Issues**

#### **I. Meriam Ibrahim’s Situation**

##### **a. Background**

Meriam Ibrahim is a Sudanese woman who was born to an Ethiopian Christian mother and a Muslim father. Her father abandoned the family early in her life, and she was raised as a Christian by her mother. Meriam, who has always considered herself to be a Christian, is married to Daniel Wani, a Christian man from South Sudan who is a U.S. citizen. Earlier this year, upon complaints by individuals alleged to be her relatives, Meriam was charged and subsequently convicted of apostasy under Sudanese law after she refused to renounce her Christian faith. For this she was sentenced to death. Because Sudanese law considers her a Muslim and does not recognize her marriage to a Christian, she was also convicted of adultery. For this she was sentenced to 100 lashes.

When she was convicted, Meriam was eight months’ pregnant. She subsequently gave birth to a baby girl while imprisoned at Omdurman Federal Women’s Prison, where she had been detained with Martin, her 20-month-old son, since January 17, 2014. Both of her children are eligible for U.S. citizenship. It must be noted that while all necessary paperwork has been completed for their citizenship status, according to advocates working with Meriam’s legal team, the State Department has delayed granting them citizenship, despite the urgent realities of their case.

On May 31, 2014, under pressure primarily from various activist groups, a Sudanese foreign ministry official said that Meriam would be released soon. But many, including Meriam’s attorneys, were skeptical of this statement, and believed it was just an attempt to silence the international media outcry. On June 1, 2014, Sudan government officials clarified that they did

not indicate she would be released, but merely stated that she would be if her appeal was successful.

On June 23, 2014, it was reported that a Sudanese appeals court overturned Meriam's conviction. According to Sudan's official SUNA news agency, "The appeal court ordered the release of Mariam Yahya and the cancellation of the (previous) court ruling."<sup>1</sup>

Yet soon after, Meriam and her family were detained at the airport as they tried to leave Sudan, purportedly based on allegations of travel documentation fraud. Meriam and her family were held at a police station for several days, but were then released and taken to a safe location.

Since then, a new case has been filed in family court attacking the validity of Meriam's marriage. There is a hearing set for August 2014 in this case. This case prevents her from leaving the country.

It also appears her "family" has appealed the dismissal of her original conviction for apostasy and adultery. Initially, it seemed Meriam would not be able to travel until at least 15 days from the date the family appealed—June 26, 2014—so the earliest she could travel would have been July 10th or 11th. However, this date has come and gone, and she is still not free to leave. While no future hearing date is set in this particular case, if a hearing is held, her safety must be ensured if she is to leave her present safe location. This case also prevents her from leaving the country.

In addition to this appeal of her original conviction, it appears the fraud charges are still pending. No hearing date is set for them either. While this case does not directly prevent her from leaving the country, the individual who helped her obtain bail would suffer financially if she left Sudan at this point.

There are thus three ongoing legal proceedings in which Meriam is involved, all of which prevent her from leaving Sudan. By now, observers have begun to grow suspicious of any assertion that Meriam is free to leave, due to new obstacles constantly appearing in her path.

## **b. Response and Reflection**

While activists and other governments have spoken out on Meriam's situation, the U.S. government has largely been silent, despite the fact that her husband is a U.S. citizen and her children will become citizens pending State Department processing. This is flatly inadequate. The virtual silence of the U.S. Secretary of State is especially embarrassing in light of other governments' proclamations. The British government spoke out forcefully before the United States said a word, and even the European Parliament has passed a resolution condemning Meriam's conviction. Yet the U.S. government has barely commented on Meriam's plight.

The fact that this matter involves a U.S. citizen, his wife, and his two children who await their own U.S. citizenship makes the U.S. government's silence simply indefensible. There was a time when being an American citizen meant that no matter where you might find yourself in the

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<sup>1</sup> Sudan court frees woman sentenced to death for changing faith, Reuters, June 24, 2014, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/06/24/uk-sudan-ruling-idUKKBN0EY2GW20140624>.

world, you were not alone. Today, we have reached a new low point where the family of an American is denied their freedom by a despotic government and the U.S. barely comments.

Historically the United States has been a leader when it came to protecting the international right of religious freedom and defending the individual right of conscience vigorously on the world stage. From asylum for Soviet dissidents, to calls for protection of Burmese democracy activists, the United States has led the way in protecting the individual conscience rights as a core value of our foreign policy adding to our security and strengthening our vital interests. Where is that United States now?

While not unique or limited to America, religious freedom is a primary American ideal. America's standing in the world rises or falls in part based on its promotion of this right. The persecuted around the world look to America as the beacon of liberty; standing with them says to friend and foe alike that to the United States, human dignity matters. This is a warning to some and a profound encouragement to others.

Sadly, the United States rarely comments on many religious freedom violations occurring worldwide. Religious freedom is being neglected in the world today, and the failure of the United States to maintain its own moral voice on this right has contributed significantly to this decline.

Of the other voices who have spoken internationally against Meriam's treatment, one group must not go unmentioned: the voices *within* Sudan who have made it known that they want justice for Meriam too. Most significantly, the Sudanese attorneys representing Meriam and her husband, led by Mohaned Mustafa Elnour of the Justice Center in Sudan, are Muslims who are defending a non-Muslim's right to choose her own religion. Her attorneys strongly believe in her case, and despite receiving death threats for defending a Christian, they intend to fight to the end and exhaust all appeals. These attorneys and other supporters of Meriam in Sudan must be supported. Here, Muslim men are defending a Christian woman in her quest for justice.

In addition, other Muslims in Sudan have been demonstrating on Meriam's behalf. According to the international religious freedom organization Hardwired (which has closely monitored the situation in Sudan), Sudanese Muslims had protested Meriam's sentence and conducted demonstrations against her conviction. They are acting openly and in public, in view of the Sudanese authorities.<sup>2</sup> This is a significant development, especially in Sudan, a Muslim-majority country with a version of Sharia law. In other nations with similar versions of Sharia, such as Pakistan, the accused cannot even make it to the courthouse, much less have fellow citizens demonstrating in public view on their behalf.

Meriam's attorneys and the Sudanese protesting her conviction are expressing their desire for Sudan to take ownership of this issue and to be ready to handle religious freedom challenges when they inevitably arise in the future. Indeed, additional challenges to the religious freedom rights of individuals have arisen since Meriam's initial imprisonment.

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<sup>2</sup> Sudanese Muslims Risking Their Lives For A Christian Woman Sentenced to Death: Hardwired Helps Fight Religious Oppression in Sudan, Hardwired, June 4, 2014, <http://us7.campaign-archive1.com/?u=61aea03a5b7c951e46ab4fb3b&id=ecc14fb213>.

In a recent matter similar to Meriam's case, Sudanese police arrested another woman, near Sudan's eastern border. Though details are scarce, it appears that the woman, whose parents converted to evangelical Christianity before her birth and raised her in the same faith, was arrested because she has a Muslim name yet professed Christianity. Her Catholic husband fled Sudan two years ago because of persecution. As in the case of Meriam Ibrahim, Sudanese officials voided her marriage and accused her of apostasy when she refused to deny Christianity.

Though Sudan is certainly not the worst current offender of religious freedom worldwide, the country historically has not had a stellar record on religious toleration. Indeed, the law under which Meriam was convicted has existed since 1991. Troubling news for religious groups such as Christians continues to emerge from Sudan. On July 12, 2014, the Sudanese Minister for Guidance and Religious Endowments, Shalil Abdullah, reaffirmed that the government will not issue building permits for new churches in Sudan.<sup>3</sup> Christians have been detained by the National Intelligence Security Services (NISS), and church buildings have been demolished and vandalized.<sup>4</sup>

In the face of these developments, Sudanese advocates like Meriam's attorneys and those demonstrating on her behalf must be supported all the more intentionally by the U.S. and our State Department. Even in a country like Afghanistan, which received a significant investment of Western blood, sweat, and treasure (and attention to developing human rights standards), sufficient local support for conversion from Islam could not be inculcated. Yet that local support is appearing in Sudan. In so many places where human rights are threatened, the ultimate solution is still to remove (through a grant of asylum or refugee status) the individual from the country with the hostile culture or legal regime. Yet this is not sustainable if the long term cultivation of human rights standards is desired. Meriam's attorneys and the protesting crowds are expressing their support for a domestic human rights framework that will be able to handle religious freedom challenges when they inevitably arise in the future. This is sustainable; it simply needs U.S. support. Despite this opportunity in Sudan, the U.S. government and its State Department appears to ignore these natural allies.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) states that "[i]t shall be the policy of the United States . . . [t]o condemn violations of religious freedom, and to promote, and to assist other governments in the promotion of, the fundamental right to freedom of religion."<sup>5</sup> Yet the United States has failed to adequately condemn the violation which is the subject of this hearing. The U.S. government could also promote religious freedom in Sudan by assisting its local advocates like Meriam's attorneys and other supporters, which to our knowledge has not occurred. Indeed, reports have indicated that staff at the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum, initially approached by Meriam's husband Daniel Wani almost a year ago for help, has repeatedly shown indifference in their handling of a serious human rights violation in which U.S. citizens are impacted. U.S. Embassy staff does not appear to have even engaged Meriam's attorneys and

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<sup>3</sup> Sudanese Minister reaffirms government policy to deny new permits to build churches, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, July 16, 2014, <http://dynamic.csw.org.uk/article.asp?t=news&id=2102>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> 23 U.S.C. § 6401(b)(1).

supporters until much later in this case. In doing so, they have done a disservice to the U.S. citizens involved in this matter, whom they are specifically stationed in Sudan to serve.

Compounding this error, the U.S. Embassy missed a strategic opportunity to underscore a U.S. commitment to religious freedom and human rights by failing to engage other religious freedom advocates in Sudan. Their indifference in this regard ultimately fails all U.S. citizens, who are represented by the actions of U.S. Embassy staff in Sudan, and who have an interest in seeing IRFA followed and religious freedom promoted in Sudan.

The fact that a law still exists in Sudan which permitted Meriam's conviction in the first place is understandably horrific from an international human rights perspective. The Sudanese legal system did achieve a just result by overturning Meriam's conviction. But her current plight is unacceptable. The United States should work with Sudan to the greatest extent possible in order to ensure the remaining judicial proceedings are concluded quickly and Meriam Ibrahim is free to leave the country.

We call upon the House of Representatives to pass H.Res. 601, which underscores Congress' belief that the State Department must indeed do more on Meriam's behalf. H. Res. 601 not only urges the State Department to work towards Meriam's safe departure from Sudan, but also calls upon Sudan to honor their legal obligations to protect Meriam's religious freedom.

## **II. International Religious Freedom in Law**

Religious freedom is a fundamental, inherent, and international human right. It is not merely an American right—though religious freedom was foundational to the very existence of the United States. Religious freedom is enshrined in international human rights law, a body of law which the United States was instrumental in bringing into being.

Yet the individual right of religious freedom is not merely a creature of modern-era positive law. For centuries, theologians and philosophers recognized that people could not be forced to adopt religious beliefs against their own will. The founding assertion of our Republic is that our rights come from our Creator, and that government's duty is to protect them. Alexander Hamilton referred to "the sacred rights of mankind . . . [which] are written . . . by the Hand of Divinity itself." These rights informed the very basis of the American Revolution.

The United States was founded by individuals who left their nations due to religious intolerance and persecution, seeking a place in which to freely live out their faith. For these settlers who experienced religious persecution in Europe, religious freedom was important enough that they were willing to risk hardship and death to live freely elsewhere. These persecuted Christians did not just accept the fact that their government suppressed their rights. They did not accept a regime engaged in religious persecution, but fled to the New World. As they settled into life in the New World, many worked to ensure that religious freedom was protected in law.

Explicit legal protections for religious liberty remained mainly domestic until 1948, when the nations of the world, appalled by the horror of the Holocaust, came together to form the United

Nations (UN) and adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) to address and lay the groundwork to prevent such fundamental human rights violations in the future.

In its preamble, the UDHR recognizes humankind's "inherent dignity" and proclaims that the "disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind," and therefore, "if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, human rights should be protected by the rule of law."<sup>6</sup> UN Member States pledged to secure the "universal and effective recognition and observance" of these rights, "both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction."<sup>7</sup> Later, the UDHR specifically states that "[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."<sup>8</sup>

Almost twenty years later, the fundamental right to freedom of religion was again recognized as an inherent human right that applied across national boundaries in the text of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which explicitly "[r]ecogniz[es] that" religious freedom and other "rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person."<sup>9</sup>

While the UDHR recognizes these rights, it does not legally bind nations as a matter of positive law. The ICCPR is legally binding, however. In language tracking that of the UDHR, it states: "[e]veryone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."<sup>10</sup> The ICCPR goes further, noting that "[n]o one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice."<sup>11</sup> Seventy-four nations have signed and committed themselves to recognizing and upholding these inherent rights, including Sudan and the United States.<sup>12</sup>

The recognition of religious freedom in international law is also manifested in various regional international organizations. The European Convention on Human Rights expresses recognition of freedom of religion within the context of the Council of Europe, which includes the freedom to manifest one's religion and change one's religion.<sup>13</sup> The American Convention on Human Rights contains similar language in proclaiming the right within the Organization of American

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<sup>6</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217A, pmbl., U.N. GAOR, 3d Sess., 1st plen. mtg., U.N. Doc. A/810 (Dec. 12, 1948) [hereinafter UDHR].

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* art. 18.

<sup>9</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, G.A. res. 2200A (XXI), pmbl., 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, *entered into force* Mar. 23, 1976 [hereinafter ICCPR].

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* art. 18.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Status of ICCPR, UN Treaty Collection,

[https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-4&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&lang=en).

<sup>13</sup> Council of Europe, European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as amended by Protocols Nos. 11 and 14, art. 9, Nov. 4, 1950, ETS 5, 213 U.N.T.S. 222, *entered into force* Sept. 3, 1953 (hereinafter "European Convention on Human Rights").

States.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights includes protection for the freedom of religion, stating that "[f]reedom of conscience, the profession and free practice of religion shall be guaranteed. No one may, subject to law and order, be submitted to measures restricting the exercise of these freedoms."<sup>15</sup>

I join with the Founders of our country in believing, as noted earlier, that human rights and the human dignity attendant to them are gifts of God, regardless of the approval of any international body. However, it is important to recognize that for more than half a century, the nations of the world – including Sudan – have agreed to abide by covenants of behavior respecting their citizens. That Sudan so egregiously has failed to do so is of particular note.

Meriam's conviction and the Sudanese laws under which she was convicted violate Sudan's commitments under both the ICCPR and the African Charter. In addition, they violate Sudan's 2005 Interim Constitution, which states that the government "shall respect the religious rights to . . . worship or assemble in connection with any religion or belief and to establish and maintain places for these purposes."<sup>16</sup>

Various international legal instruments all express a fundamental right to religious freedom—the same right which the United States played a significant role in bringing to worldwide recognition.<sup>17</sup> The United States must be prepared to defend them in the face of injustices like Meriam's conviction. If the United States can't condemn this conviction and Sudan's draconian 1991 apostasy law in the face of Sudan's multiple legal obligations, one wonders what the United States can condemn.

### **III. International Religious Freedom in Practice: Other Recent Issues and U.S. Responses**

Religious freedom, properly defined as the ability to freely choose one's religion according to the human rights standards just discussed, is under serious and increasing attack in the world today. Whether at the hands of Muslim extremists, or under the watchful eye of the Chinese government, more people are finding it difficult to practice their faith freely. According to the Pew Research Center, as of 2012, Christians continued to be harassed in more countries (110) than those of any other faith. (Muslims are harassed in 109 countries in 2012).<sup>18</sup> Over the course

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<sup>14</sup> Organization of American States, American Convention on Human Rights, art. 12, Nov. 22, 1969, O.A.S.T.S. No. 36, 1144 U.N.T.S. 123.

<sup>15</sup> Organization for African Unity, African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, art. 8, June 27, 1981, CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5, 21 I.L.M. 58 (1982).

<sup>16</sup> 2005 Interim National Constitution of the Republic of Sudan, art. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Other authorities express support for religious freedom, albeit in slightly different forms. For instance, the international legal framework includes the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which protects religious liberty by criminalizing acts taken to destroy a religious group. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 9 December 1948, 78 U.N.T.S. 277, art. 2, entered into force 12 January 1951, (hereinafter "Genocide Convention").

<sup>18</sup> Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High, Pew Research, Religion & Public Life Project, Jan. 14, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/01/14/religious-hostilities-reach-six-year-high/>.

of the past six years to date, Christians have been harassed in the most countries (151). Muslims are harassed in the second largest number of countries, at 135.<sup>19</sup>

It is troubling that two other countries in which the United States has invested significant resources in recent years, and in which the United States has a legitimate interest and stake in seeing its values perpetuated—Iraq and Afghanistan—continue to experience religious freedom violations to this day. Indeed, Afghanistan was recently found to be second only to Pakistan as the location where the most social hostility is exhibited toward religion.<sup>20</sup> Iraq has recently seen a significant deterioration in religious freedom, again primarily with regard to Christians. The Islamic State of Iraq has declared that all Christians are legitimate targets in its campaign of terror.<sup>21</sup> Christian homes have been raided, and stores have been bombed.<sup>22</sup> In Mosul, Christians have been shot and their homes have been bombed. Christian villages, churches and businesses are attacked, and Christians are forced to stay indoors because it is too dangerous in the streets.<sup>23</sup> As the United States loses its voice on religious freedom and other moral issues, its credibility in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere wanes, only making it easier for terrorists groups to flourish in the absence of U.S. presence or influence. Religious intolerance also stifles economic growth in countries where it occurs. Yet economic growth is necessary and valuable for multiple reasons, including promoting stability and security.<sup>24</sup>

U.S. inaction overseas is all the more troubling when U.S. citizens are involved, such as those detained in Iran and North Korea. Inaction is not excusable on the theory that the individual detained is herself not a U.S. citizen, as is the case with Mrs. Ibrahim. The U.S. government is obligated to assist her husband and children, and should be further assisting her.

U.S. indifference and inaction in the face of this religious hostility is not limited by political party. The George W. Bush administration is rightly criticized for permitting a constitution to be birthed in Afghanistan which still permitted blasphemy prosecutions, even after the United States expended blood, sweat, and toil to “liberate” that country. Notably, Abdul Rahman, a Muslim convert to Christianity, was convicted of blasphemy under the new Afghani legal regime, and only narrowly escaped death after being offered asylum in Italy.

U.S. foreign policy under the Obama Administration demonstrates an even greater disregard for the principle of religious freedom. The position of U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom remains vacant, despite being mandated by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998—an act which also created the United States Commission on International

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<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> Taylor Barnes, Al Qaeda Ally in Iraq Says All Christians “Legitimate Targets,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Nov. 3, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2010/1103/Al-Qaeda-ally-in-Iraq-says-all-Christians-legitimate-targets>.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. State Dep’t, Int’l Religious Freedom Report, 2012, Iraq, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dld=208194#wrapper>.

<sup>23</sup> World Watch Top 10 Violence list, Open Doors, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/downloads/pdf-downloads/violence-top-10-countries-2014.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Remarks by Brian Grim, President, Religious Freedom and Business Foundation, “The Social and Economic Impact of Religious Intolerance,” March 14, 2014, <http://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/2/post/2014/03/the-social-and-economic-impact-of-religious-intolerance.html>.



Religious Freedom to advise the president on international religious freedom policy. In the years since, however, the U.S. State Department has minimized the purpose and weakened the effect of this legislation by isolating the Ambassador post, refusing to comply with reporting requirements, and leaving the post of Ambassador unfilled for months at a time.

As a result of Administration inaction, Congress has drafted legislation providing for the establishment of the Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia. This bill, which Family Research Council supported, passed overwhelmingly in the House almost a year ago (H.R. 301). Just this month, the Senate passed the Senate version of this legislation (S. 653) despite opposition voiced by the Obama Administration.

Meanwhile, as the Obama Administration fails to fulfil responsibilities under current law and refuses to support new religious freedom legislation, other nations have devoted attention to this matter and created entities to address it. Why is it that others have been speaking up while the United States remains relatively quiet? It could be, as The Hudson Institute's Paul Marshall has noted, "American officials seem so scared of being accused of selectively defending Christians that they consistently overcompensate and minimize what is happening."<sup>25</sup> It is unacceptable that fears over public perception are trumping the defense of clearly established international human rights violations. It is likewise unacceptable that a fear of being perceived as selectively supportive of religious freedom would result in a near total silence on the subject overall.

Religious freedom violations involving U.S. citizens detained overseas are compounded when U.S. citizens do not receive proper assistance from their own government. U.S. citizens Saeed Abedini, Kenneth Bae, and others remain languishing in foreign jails. While Meriam Ibrahim is not a U.S. citizen, her husband is, and her two small children will become citizens whenever the State Department finally chooses to process their applications.

Though the United States boldly defended the need for core human rights protections after World War II, it is not currently leading in the defense of the international human right of religious freedom. Though standards are now expressed in positive law, countries still fail to meet such standards, and often quite dreadfully. Sometimes governmental authorities engage directly in religious persecution. At other times private citizens or groups of citizens persecute their fellow citizens. Though such "social hostility" may occur under a well-intentioned but inept local government, it often is permitted to occur because of government acquiescence. The U.S. has defaulted under the current Administration to a role of inaction, becoming complicit in allowing social hostility towards religion to continue even when the United States has a platform to speak on behalf of religious freedom.

This growing indifference of our government to religious persecution abroad may be attributable to the unilateral reinterpretation of religious freedom domestically. The Obama Administration's interpretation of religious freedom includes protection of one's ability to hold a religious belief, but not necessarily protection for the ability to express that belief. Practically, such a view means that religious practice should be relegated to private worship and any related religious activities

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Marshall, *The War on Christians*, The Weekly Standard, Vol. 19, No. 39, June 23, 2014, available at [http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/war-christians\\_794945.html?page=1](http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/war-christians_794945.html?page=1).

or expression should not enter the public square but should be confined to the privacy of a church or home. In theory, according to the Administration, religion has no role in public debate.

The Obama Administration's truncated view of religious freedom domestically is matched by its failure to address growing threats to religious freedom internationally. Indeed, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry only commented on Meriam Ibrahim's case when the international outcry made silence no longer an option. These actions, individually and in sum, reveal this Administration's marginalization of religious freedom. The United States can only begin to recover its moral voice on religious freedom by forcefully advocating for Meriam and others subject to religious persecution worldwide.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The international legal framework meant to address situations like Meriam's is firmly in place. Yet governments and other non-state actors continue to delay in ensuring that these rights are protected in practice. The United States has historically held a pivotal position on the world stage in ensuring civil liberties and democratic rights, including the right to freedom of religion, continue to be protected worldwide. Yet our moral voice, and actions backing up that voice, have been increasingly and noticeably absent with regard to the human right to freedom of religion. We must once again find that voice. The world will be better for it.

The U.S. government should immediately and fully intervene in Meriam's situation to ensure that she is protected. Though Meriam's life no longer appears to be immediately threatened by the Sudanese government, it is threatened by some of her fellow citizens and the potential for further court actions on appealed apostasy charges. The U.S. government must also demonstrate a commitment to U.S. citizens imperiled overseas by their connection to these violations—in this instance, Meriam's husband Daniel, and her two children (who are citizens pending verification). To protect Meriam and her family, the U.S. government must:

- Specifically ensure Meriam's children are immediately granted U.S. citizenship, as all the proper documents have been submitted.
- Ensure that Meriam and her family have the proper documentation in order permitting them to leave when the court proceedings are concluded.
- Provide Meriam and her family physical protection while in Sudan.
- Provide Meriam and her family proper advice and counsel on their situation.
- Provide Meriam and her family proper medical care.
- Pressure the Sudanese government to ensure the legal proceedings conclude quickly.

We also urge that Congress pass H. Res. 601 to pressure the Administration to act in accordance with the United States' responsibility to be a strong advocate for religious freedom generally and Meriam specifically. Our own values are at stake. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address you all, and thank you for holding this hearing.