Promoting Religious Freedom During the Campaign Against Terrorism": The Hon. Robert Seiple Prepared Testimony

November 27, 2001 MR. SEIPLE: Please tell me when it's 8 minutes, I have one to go.Let me begin by succinctly stating the impact of the events of 11 September on the human rights establishment in general, and more specifically, religious freedom. On the 11th of September security jumped to the top of our nation's hierarchy of values. The implications for the human rights establishment are obvious. Any organization that seeks to be relevant, to have a seat at the table, public or private, needs to be conversant in national and global security. For the foreseeable future everything else will pale in comparison. Now this should provide a great opportunity for those of us who work in the area of religious freedom. Unfortunately, to date, that opportunity has not been seized. Indeed, there is a "home alone" mentality evolving, an indictment of all those who have championed this cause in times past, but have been less clear in terms of how this issue is implemented within the realities of our world. To be clear, this is a time that demonstrates the irrelevance of single-issue advocates who are high on principles, yet have absolutely no idea how to implement those principles in a real world.The events following 11 September, seen through the new lens of national and global security that is now being emphasized, has left the human rights establishment very much exposed. At the very least it is time to take stock of the issue of religious freedom, see this issue in its new context, and to use a biblical metaphor, being the process of pouring new wine into new wineskins. This is our opportunity.The following suggests a new approach, utilizing new tools for this new day that is upon us all. First we need to position the rationale for religious freedom within the context of national and global security. This is easier than one might imagine. Listen to the words of the International Crises Group in its March 2001 Report on Central Asia. "Treat religious freedom as a security issue, not just a human rights issue. And advocate unequivocally that regional security can only be assured if religious freedom is guaranteed and the legitimate activities of groups and individuals are not suppressed." This prophetic statement of last March suggests that the soft issue of religious freedom and the hard issue of security have come together at last.Another obvious nexus point between religious freedom and security is the necessity to know one's enemy. In our present conflict our enemy claims to be working from a religious base. We need to know the values of that enemy in order to defeat him, to understand his motivation for what he has done and most importantly, what he might be planning to do next.Additionally, I think we can all agree that religious freedom has to be present in order to create a values-based civil society. We can literally locate and track a country on a continuum of human dignity and compassion by how that country deals with religious freedom. When this freedom is at risk, many of the other freedoms like speech, association, press, and certainly belief, are also at risk. Jefferson was right to call this the first freedom. The Institute for Global Engagement calls it the cornerstone freedom, the foundational building block of all civil society. This freedom will tell us much about how a country treats its people, especially how it deals with minority faiths, and by extension, how secure the country really is.On an individual level, nothing enhances security more than knowing one's own faith at its richest and deepest best, and at the same time knowing enough about our neighbors in order to show it respect. Osama bin Laden is the extreme example to make this point. His faith is a perversion of Islam and he has absolutely no respect for anybody else's beliefs. This is a misunderstood faith, an inappropriately applied faith, a truncated faith, which in the hands of a zealot becomes very scary indeed. Our global security is put at risk.Finally in this regard what we know for sure in the world today is that there are people who are willing to die for their faith, and unfortunately, there are other people who are equally willing to kill for their religion. We neglect this issue of religious freedom and the geopolitical dynamic of security at our considerable peril.In sum, we need to begin to see our issue in terms of long-term stability and security of a nation. Religious freedom is the sustainable solution for those of us who look at life through the lens of the moral imperative, but it is also the only credible end game for the hardline security-conscious realist. Consciously and intentionally, the human rights folks and the real politickers should find themselves closer together for all the right reasons, not the least of which is relevance.Repositioning our issue is only one diplomatic initiative that must be taken. The creation of coalitions of the willing is a second for all kinds of reasons, hopefully too obvious to mention. America cannot do it alone. There is strength in numbers in a multilateral approach. Consider, for example, the recent abuses that have been highlighted in Southeast Asia, coming to us through the State Department Report on International Religious Freedom. Historically this has not been an easy part of the world for us to influence. This is a regional area that has been considerable emphasis by countries such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, Germany and Sweden. We need to use the obvious resources available through effective coalitions. More positive changes can be effected in this region by leveraging a multilateral approach. As we know, coalition building takes time, intentionality and perseverance. But while it is fine to go it alone when we must, there is exponentially much more strength when we can build a coalition of like-minded folk. It is time we do this.Third. We need a mindset dedicated to creating win/win strategies in host countries. In the past I fear we have been too quick, far too quick to play the power card, to find ways to punish rather than to promote on the basis of religious freedom issues. Punishments may appease advocates, but they don't take us any closer to sustainable solutions, and by extension, those people who we have been called upon to serve. We need to appeal to a country's enlightened self interest. We can listen without compromising our principles. We can build trust while keeping an eye on the religious freedom agenda. This necessitates a mindset and a methodology of give and take. But unless the host government sees how a positive resolution of this issue will enhance their stature, there will be no way to create momentum for positive change.Fourth. We also need to recognize that enduring solutions take time. In this regard let me comment on the annual report coming from the State Department. These reports are necessary, and I think they're extremely well done. Someone has said that the beginning of wisdom is calling something by its proper name. The report does just that. It is an accountability tool, a series of markers, a standard that has been used to measure freedom,

religious freedom in 194 countries. It is certainly appropriate to have these common standards.At point of implementation, however, there are a number of variables. It would be well to look at a country's history, its culture, its system of government, the direction it is moving in its human rights, the potential timing of new initiatives. Many of the countries with the worst human rights records are countries that also have difficult internal dynamics, extreme poverty, for example, high illiteracy rates, messy border squabbles and the like. Well, an annual report, by definition, will constantly raise issues on a timely basis. Enduring solutions will only be possible through a commitment on our part to the long haul.CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Ambassador Seiple, you have one minute.MR. SEIPLE: In this regard, we need a mindset that applauds small steps. We also need to cultivate humility and patience. At the very least we need always to remember that it has taken us 225 years to reach our present level of imperfection. Again, enduring solutions take time.I've made a point about the preoccupation with CPC lists. It's in the testimony. I'll pass by that in the interest of time.Finally, we need to invest much more heavily in reconciliation initiatives, preemptively before conflicts begin, as well as the more difficult task after conflicts have been resolved. More specifically, we need to create much interfaith and intrafaith dialog among the religious leaders of countries and of regions. It will be impossible to reconcile the appropriate parties or institutions without having a better understanding and a more honest communication of one another's faith-based positions.Let me sum up. We need to properly position the rationale for religious freedom as a national and global security issue. We need to create coalitions of the willing. We need a methodology that is driven by win/win strategies.We need a mindset for long-term perseverance, patience and humility. We need a greater investment in the exercise of reconciliation.The events of 11 September have not tabled our issue of religious freedom. It is time to rethink, to adjust, to change an emphasis, to refocus a methodology. At the same time we need to remember that nothing has changed for the over 600 million people around the world who this day are being persecuted because of how they believe and in whom they believe. They are counting on us now more than ever.Thank you, Mr. Chairman.