

For Your Information

09/22/2012| By [Leonard A. Leo](#) and [Don Argue](#)

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(Sept. 22) -- President Barack Obama will be delivering an address on Thursday to the U.N. General Assembly and, as in previous years, it is almost certain that he will have to share the podium with a rogue's gallery of the world's most oppressive human rights and religious freedom abusers.

President Obama has the ability and the standing abroad to leverage this opportunity by speaking forcefully and eloquently on behalf of the cause for universal human rights.

Worst Violators of Religious Freedom

- China
- Iran
- Saudi Arabia
- Eritrea
- Nigeria
- North Korea
- Sudan
- Vietnam
- Burma
- Pakistan
- Uzbekistan

- Turkmenistan
- Somalia

Source: The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

He should make clear that the world's democracies, including the United States, stand unequivocally for those core rights, among which is freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

Placing an accent on freedom of religion, here and now, is especially crucial, because we have been witnessing an accelerated erosion of this core human right in far too many countries around the world.

State-sponsored repression of people of faith on account of their religion has been acute these past several months in a number of countries.

For example, when Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad takes the podium at the General Assembly, we should try to imagine the horrific conditions that seven Baha'i leaders are suffering at Gohardasht Prison, after being sentenced this past summer on bogus charges of propaganda against the regime and espionage.

In a similar vein, the presence of Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov at the General Assembly should remind us of the thousands of Muslims who have been imprisoned, denied due process and subjected to torture for peaceable exercise of their religious faith without posing any credible security threats.

And while Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah recently has undertaken limited reforms and promoted inter-religious dialogue internationally, we should not forget that his government continues to produce textbooks that teach children hatred and intolerance. And the kingdom's religious police, known as the Commission to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice, regularly commits abuses and uses strong-arm tactics to enforce the state's version of Sunni Islam.

Buddhists, Catholics and Protestants in China, Burma and Vietnam; Copts in Egypt; Ahmadis in Pakistan; Orthodox Christians in Turkey and Eritrea; and other religious minorities from many other countries will be suffering under the yolk of oppression and discrimination as their leaders take the General Assembly podium in New York in an effort to gain favor and credibility.

And, of course, the fate of the people of Sudan should especially weigh heavily on the minds of all the U.N. delegates, as we move ever closer to the deadline of the North-South peace agreement, which, if not fully and fairly implemented, could very likely end in another bloody civil

war where religion will almost certainly, yet again, become the proxy for killing millions of innocents.

This must be remembered, and President Obama as well as other leaders should engage the world community on the need to find solutions for improving conditions for their freedom of religion and belief.

Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right that no government has the authority to deny, and that our government and other democracies around the world have the moral authority and duty to promote.

Hopefully, during this session of the General Assembly, all U.N. members will live up to this aspiration and so many others embodied in the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights.

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USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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