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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) deeply mourns the loss of Rep. Donald Payne (D-NJ), a longtime advocate of human rights, including the right to freedom of religion, who passed away this morning in Livingston, New Jersey.

“For more than a generation, Donald Payne was a committed champion in Congress for oppressed people, especially those in Africa, whose fundamental rights, including religious freedom, were being trampled upon,” said USCIRF Chair [Leonard Leo](#). “From Sudan to Eritrea, Ethiopia to the Ivory Coast and elsewhere, Representative Payne spoke truth to power, working with USCIRF and like-minded advocates to hold the abusers of human freedom and dignity accountable. My colleagues and I offer our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends. Representative Payne will be sorely missed.”

Elected to Congress in 1988, Representative Payne was the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights. In 2001, he was arrested for chaining himself to the gates of the Sudanese Embassy to protest the regime’s brutal treatment of civilians in Darfur. Representative Payne also helped highlight the plight of Christians, animists, and non-conforming Muslims victimized by the efforts of the Sudanese regime in Khartoum to impose its extremist ideology on the nation.

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