

## Ottawa Journal ? promoting religious freedom on the world stage

Every day, Canadians of many ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds live and work peacefully side-by-side, contributing to Canada's legacy of peaceful pluralism. Though diversity is celebrated in Canada, religious freedom is a basic human right that is under threat in our global community. Freedom of religion and belief is a foreign policy focus for our Government. Under Prime Minister Stephen Harper's leadership, Canada is leading on the world stage. We are protecting and promoting Canadian values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law at home and abroad. We created the Office of Religious Freedom which is helping lead our efforts to promote religious tolerance and pluralism throughout the world.

Through the Office of Religious Freedom, our Government is taking steps to advocate on behalf of religious minorities that are being persecuted. We are working with like-minded partners to raise awareness and develop policies and programs to protect religious minorities, oppose religious hatred and intolerance, and promote Canadian values on the world stage.

The Religious Freedom Fund, operating under the Office of Religious Freedom, is helping our mandate of promoting freedom of religion and belief. This Fund supports projects that help religious communities facing intolerance or persecution abroad. These projects include awareness activities that provide education of religious freedom, research that provides global decision-makers with sources of information and analysis regarding freedom of religion and belief, interreligious dialogues events, and specialized services for persecuted groups and individuals.

Among other projects, we are supporting a project that promotes international standards on religious freedom with a focus on recognition of religious communities in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus. We are also supporting a project in Nigeria to promote dialogue and conflict mediation to help their government respond to the violent clashes between Muslim and Christian communities in Jos and other parts of the country.

Our Government is also partnering with global efforts to promote religious tolerance. In 2014, we participated in the launch of the International Coalition of Parliamentarians Committed to Religious Freedoms, signing the Charter for Freedom of Religion or Belief. Our combined efforts with other coalition members are helping combat rising religious persecution and encourage religious freedom globally.

Canada's Office of Religious Freedom is contributing to the promotion of tolerance and peaceful pluralism globally. Religious freedom is a fundamental right and our Government is committed to promoting this Canadian value around the world. As Canada's global leadership continues to grow, we will continue to stand up for freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

**By David Tilson, MP**