

State Department to keep anti-Semitism envoy but scrap many others

Several offices that handle religious freedom issues will be consolidated.

by [Mark A. Kellner](#) in the [September 27, 2017](#) issue

The State Department will retain its special envoy on anti-Semitism, a position some Jewish groups feared the Trump administration would eliminate. The envoy handling HIV/AIDS issues will also be retained.

But the department plans to scrap 30 of the 66 current special envoy positions, including one that handles climate change issues.

Several offices that handle religious freedom issues will be consolidated, a department spokeswoman wrote in an email.

The at-large ambassador for international religious freedom, a position for which Kansas governor Sam Brownback has been nominated, will assume the responsibilities and staff of several other offices. Those include the special representative for religion and global affairs, the special representative to Muslim communities, the envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the special adviser for religious minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia.

The reorganization is designed to “eliminate redundancies that dilute the ability of a bureau to deliver on its primary functions,” the spokeswoman wrote.

Jonathan A. Greenblatt, CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, applauded the State Department for keeping the anti-Semitism envoy.

“At a time when there is a growing prominence to anti-Jewish movements and actions, the special envoy to combat anti-Semitism continues to be essential,” Greenblatt said. “We urge the State Department to refrain from eliminating other special envoy roles which are vital to promoting American values of democracy, tolerance, and religious freedom across the globe.”

Faith McDonnell, religious liberty director for the Institute on Religion and Democracy, a conservative-leaning evangelical organization in Washington, D.C., said she appreciated the reorganization: “That is a good move, because religious freedom is one of the parts of State Department policy that hasn’t been given the emphasis it deserves.”

But she said she is worried about the elimination of special envoy positions for Sudan and South Sudan, where religious freedom is under serious threat.

News of the State Department reorganization came two weeks after it published its 2016 report on international religious freedom.

“Almost 80 percent of the global population live with restrictions on or hostilities to limit their freedom of religion,” Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said when the report was released. “Where religious freedom is not protected, we know that instability, human rights abuses, and violent extremism have a greater opportunity to take root.” —Religion News Service

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