

The Authoritarian Threat to Religious Liberty

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I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the Conference of Hope.

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People in all nations deserve to be free. They should be able to choose their political leaders. And they should be left alone to follow God as they desire.

Indeed, religious liberty is properly called the first freedom. There is nothing more important than allowing people to freely seek the transcendent. No government that violates this basic freedom of conscience is likely to tolerate any criticism, let alone opposition, from the people it supposedly represents.

The victims of persecution are many. Jews are tragic "go-to" targets of hatred and violence. The most oppressed faith today is Christianity. Muslims often are victimized by Muslims as well as other religions.

For instance, the Japanese Communist Party is perversely using the tragic assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to attack the Unification Church for its work against communism.

Americans and others of good will should do what they can to support believers. Democratic governments should include religious liberty in their efforts to advance human rights. There is no more important freedom than seeking to understand one's role in the grand pageant of life and relationship to the world beyond.