

# Interfaith Leaders Call on President and Congress to Reject Biased Religious Liberty Report

WASHINGTON—Archbishop William E. Lori, Chairman of the USCCB's Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, and Bishop Gregory J. Mansour of the Eparchy of Saint Maron of Brooklyn, joined leaders from diverse faiths in writing to President Barack Obama, Senate President Pro Tempore Orrin Hatch, and House Speaker Paul Ryan concerning a report released last month by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The letter calls upon these political leaders "to renounce publicly the [report's] claim that 'religious freedom' and 'religious liberty' are 'code words' or a 'pretext' for various forms of discrimination." The President, Sen. Hatch, and Rep. Ryan each appoint members of the Commission.

The interfaith leaders' letter states, in part: "We wish to express our deep concern that the Commission has issued a report, *Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Non-Discrimination Principles with Civil Liberties*, that stigmatizes tens of millions of religious Americans, their communities, and their faith-based institutions, and threatens the religious freedom of all our citizens."

The letter continues: "We understand that people of good faith can disagree about the relationship between religious liberty and antidiscrimination laws in our country, and how that relationship should best be structured. ... At the same time, we are one in demanding that no American citizen or institution be labeled by their government as bigoted because of their religious views, and dismissed from the political life of our nation for holding those views. And yet that is precisely what the Civil Rights Commission report does."

The signatories went on to state that "[e]ach of us opposes hateful rhetoric and actions. We believe in the equality of all Americans before the law, regardless of creed or community. But we are both determined and unafraid to speak the truth about beliefs we have held for millennia. A robust and respectful debate over ideas is not something harmful to be demonized. Rather, debate is good for our democracy,

and should be encouraged. Slandering ideas and arguments with which one disagrees as 'racism' or 'phobia'...only cheapens the meaning of those words."

Signatories of the letter include Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Baha'i, Mormon, African Methodist Episcopal, Southern Baptist, and Evangelical leaders as well as leaders of non-religious organizations.

The full text of the letter is available at: [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/upload/Letter-to-President-Senator-Hatch-Speaker-Ryan-FINAL-dated-October-7.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/upload/Letter-to-President-Senator-Hatch-Speaker-Ryan-FINAL-dated-October-7.pdf)

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