

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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October 14, 2019

**SENT VIA FAX AND U.S. MAIL:
(202)647-1579**

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Re: Unconstitutional use of government position to advance personal religion

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation to object to your abuse of a government office to advance personal religious beliefs during a recent formal speech as Secretary of State. FFRF is a national nonprofit with more than 30,000 members across the country. We are dedicated to protecting the constitutional separation between state and church, and educating the public about nonreligion.

We have taken complaints from our membership and the public over the content of your speech, entitled “Being a Christian leader,” delivered before the 2019 American Association of Christian Counselors World Conference on October 11, 2019. At the event and in the speech, it appears that you used the event to promote your personal religious beliefs while speaking in an official government capacity, thereby lending the prestige and imprimatur of the State Department for a sectarian purpose. The speech’s title alone misrepresents the secular office of Secretary of State. That office is not “Christian” nor reserved for a “Christian leader.” The Secretary of State has no business using that office, title and taxpayer resources to instruct other citizens on how to be Christian leaders.

Compounding this violation of the spirit of the Establishment Clause is the utilization of the official U.S. Department of State website to further promote your sectarian religious views, including the placement of a photograph of you speaking at this event with the words, “Being a Christian Leader”¹ on the homepage. Again, this is misusing government resources to promote personal religious beliefs. This is precisely what our Constitution forbids.

Imagine the fury from your supporters if a Muslim running a branch of the federal or state government gave an official speech entitled “Being a Muslim Leader,” during which he suggested that everyone should read the Quran and follow its teachings—and then used the resources of that branch to further promote the message. You would be sounding the alarm and asserting that a secular government should not openly endorse Islam. And rightly so.

¹ See enclosure.

The speech itself is also problematic. It began by encouraging daily study of the bible in order to fulfill the bible's command to be "transformed by the renewing of [our] minds."² This is an outright promotion of your personal holy book and its teachings. It is highly ironic to assert that this exercise teaches you humility, while arrogantly instructing which "holy" book everyone else should read.

You went on to say that "we are imperfect servants serving a perfect God." It is outrageous and improper for you to suggest that your non-Christian employees are "servants" of your personal deity. You claim to work to "serve America," but in the same breath you say that you are serving your god. You took an oath of office to uphold our godless and entirely secular Constitution and to serve *all* Americans, not just Christians. That means that your obligation as Secretary of State is to serve America, full stop. Your public position cannot be used to promote religion.

You touted America's unique history of religious freedom, which we "want jealously to guard." Yet it appears you do not understand that liberty. As you're condemning non-Christian governments in other parts of the world for oppressing Christians, you're using the office of Secretary of State to marginalize non-Christians and non-believers, suggesting that they are not true Americans. American religious liberty is not just for the Christian majority. There can be no true religious liberty if there is religion in government, and if government takes sides over religion.

You seem to understand the importance of minority religious rights when that minority happens to be Christians, but in a Christian-majority country—even one with a secular constitution—you apparently see no problem using that position to suggest that good American leaders must be Christian.

This is not the first time you have abused a position of public trust to advance your personal religion. As a member of Congress, you bemoaned that some Americans worship "other gods," stating that politics was a "never-ending struggle . . . until the rapture."³ To our knowledge, you have never disavowed these Christian Nationalist claims. To the contrary, you regularly use your office to promote Christianity and belittle non-Christians, while complaining that Christians are being ill-treated elsewhere in the world.

We ask that you reflect on this hypocritical stance and strive to do better in the future.

Very truly,



Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-Presidents
DB:ALG:rdj

Enclosure

² Mike Pompeo, *Being a Christian Leader* (Oct. 11, 2019), 2019 American Association of Christian Counselors World Conference, available at www.state.gov/being-a-christian-leader/.

³ Michelle Goldberg, "This Evil Is All Around Us," *Trump's pick for the CIA, Mike Pompeo, sees foreign policy as a vehicle for holy war* (Jan. 12, 2017), Slate, available at slate.com/news-and-politics/2017/01/mike-pompeo-trumps-pick-for-the-cia-wants-a-holy-war.html.



OCTOBER 11, 2019

Being a Christian Leader



SECRETARY POMPEO'S SPEECH AT THE 2019 AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS WORLD CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 11, 2019
Briefing by Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook

OCTOBER 9, 2019
U.S.-Colombia High-Level Dialogue



OCTOBER 5, 2019
The United States and Greece: Showing the Way Forward

