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FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

Transcript

SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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(Applause.)

JESSICA MATHEWS: Thank you very much. It's – I'm Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment. And it's an enormous pleasure for me to welcome my friend and the secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, to the Carnegie Endowment.

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For the last three-and-a-half years, Secretary Clinton has traveled the globe relentlessly, covering more ground and visiting more countries and, I'm fairly certain, talking to more nongovernmental people than any previous secretary of state. Under her watch, the United States has ended one war in Iraq and is winding down another in Afghanistan; has reset relations with Russia, though that remains a difficult work in progress; and has deftly handled relations with a rising China; and as we'll hear today, has rapidly evolved a sound American response to the historic and utterly unexpected wave of change in the Middle East.

Her leadership could not have come at a more critical time. The U.S. has deep political, economic and moral interests in the outcome of the Arab awakening. And the fact that the awakening has produced free elections in countries like Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt and Libya, while it's enormously challenging, at the same time, as we all know, raises new challenges of its own. How will Islamist parties govern? What steps will they take to protect individual rights, including those of women and religious minorities? And what, if anything, can be done to reduce sectarian violence? The State Department's latest report on religious freedom – and we have Ambassador Cook with us today, who oversees that portfolio – that report, which was released today, examines many of these issues and is the theme of the secretary's remarks.

No one who has followed her career over decades can doubt that Secretary Clinton's personal commitment to freedom of expression and human rights runs deep and strong in her veins. Her intelligence, grit and willingness to speak, loudly and clearly, often very uncomfortable truths have made her a widely respected and extraordinarily effective secretary of state. So we are delighted to have her here today, eager to hear her remarks. Please join me, again, in welcoming Secretary Clinton. (Applause.)

SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON: Jessica, thank you very, very much. I really appreciate it.

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Well, thank you very much. And it's indeed a pleasure to join you here today to talk about an issue that shapes the lives of people worldwide as much as any other: religious freedom. And I want to thank Jessica Mathews, not just for that introduction but more importantly for her service of many years, but in particular her leadership as the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

You know, 15 years ago Jessica was writing about trends that were just then beginning to get people's attention, like the rise of information technologies and the creation

of global networks that existed outside governments. She said then that those changes would shape global events in ways both good and bad and that governments would have to adapt if they wanted to stay on top of global change. Well, she was certainly right about that.

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And indeed, I've worked to make the integration of new technologies and outreach to civil society groups and the private sector, diaspora communities and other nongovernmental organizations a hallmark of my time as secretary of state so that it's not an afterthought, it's not an add-on, but it is integrated into the work we do – because clearly the work we do will be influenced and affected by all of those nonstate actors.

I want to acknowledge two people: Michael Posner, our assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, someone with whom I've had just the great privilege and honor of working so closely with over the last several years; and Suzan Johnson Cook, the U.S. ambassador at large for international religious freedom, someone who I've also had not only the privilege of working with in the State Department but in one of my previous incarnations as a senator from New York. Chris Seiple and Bill Vendley, two of my top advisers from civil society on this issue – I'm grateful for their efforts. And all the representatives from Congress, from embassies, members of the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group, and others who recognize and are committed to the importance of this issue and what it represents.

Now, earlier today the State Department released its latest International Religious Freedom Report. It opens with the words that guide our work and the work of governments and individuals devoted to freedom of religion around the world. They are the words of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And listen to those words again, because much of what I will say today is, of course, rooted in our Constitution, in our belief about the importance of the free exercise of religion. But it's important to remember that these words were adopted by the international community, not just by the United States.

Here they are: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." Now, these are clear and straightforward principles that bring people together in both heartfelt unity and furious disagreement. For the United States, of course, religious freedom is a cherished constitutional value, a strategic national interest and a foreign policy priority.

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It's particularly urgent that we highlight religious freedom, because when we consider the global picture and ask whether religious freedom is expanding or shrinking, the answer is sobering. More than a billion people live under governments that systematically suppress religious freedom. New technologies have given repressive governments additional tools for cracking down on religious expression. Members of faith communities that have long been under pressure report that the pressure is rising. Even some countries that are making

progress on expanding political freedom are frozen in place when it comes to religious freedom. So when it comes to this human right, this key feature of stable, secure, peaceful societies, the world is sliding backwards.

Meanwhile, several countries with diverse faith communities are now in the process of navigating transitions toward democracy. They are wrestling with questions of whether and how to protect religious freedom for their citizens. This goes from Tunisia to Burma and many places in between. But take for example Egypt, which I visited two weeks ago. I had a very emotional, very personal conversation with Christians who are deeply anxious about what the future holds for them and their country. What Egypt and other countries decide will have a major impact on the lives of their people and will go a long way toward determining whether these countries are able to achieve true democracy.

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So this is an issue that transcends religious divides. All faiths everywhere have a stake in defending and expanding religious freedom. I personally feel very strongly about this, because I have seen firsthand how religious freedom is both an essential element of human dignity and of secure, thriving societies. It's been statistically linked with economic development and democratic stability. And it creates a climate in which people from different religions can move beyond distrust and work together to solve their shared problems.

I've also seen how the opposite operates. The absence of religious freedom can create a climate of fear and suspicion that weakens social cohesion and alienates citizens from their leaders. And that, of course, can make it more difficult to achieve national progress. And because the impact of religious freedom extends beyond the realm of religion, and has ramifications for a country's security and its economic and political progress, more students and practitioners of foreign policy need to focus more time and attention on it. Today I want to make the case for religious freedom and why all people and all governments should support it. And I want to address directly the arguments that people who stand in the way of religious freedom use to try to justify their actions.

Let me start with what life is like for many who live without this freedom. In the harshest places, certain religions are banned completely and a believer can be sentenced to death. Strict laws ban blasphemy and defamation of religion. And when your words are interpreted as violations of those laws, you can be sentenced to death. Violence toward religious minorities often goes unpunished by authorities who look the other way. So the message is clear: If your beliefs don't have government approval, beware.

The same message is delivered by governments that seek the illusion of freedom by creating official state-sanctioned religious associations. They say, look, our people can practice whichever of these preapproved faiths they choose. But if people are caught going outside these associations to form their own communities, or receive instruction from their own religious leaders, they can be imprisoned.

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Religious freedom is not just about religion. It's not just about the right of Roman Catholics to organize a mass or Muslims to hold a religious funeral or Baha'is to meet in each other's homes for prayer, or Jews to celebrate high holy days together. As important as those rituals are, religious freedom is also about the right of people to think what they want, say what they think and come together in fellowship without the state looking over their shoulder.

That's why the free exercise of religion is the first freedom enshrined in our First Amendment, along with the freedoms to speak and associate, because where religious freedom exists, so do the others. It's also why the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion – all three together, because they all speak to the same capacity within each and every human being to follow our conscience, to make moral choices for ourselves, our families, our communities.

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These rights give our lives meaning and dignity, whatever religion we belong to or if we belong to no religion at all. And like all human beings, and all human rights, they are our birthright by the mere fact of us being who we are – thinking, acting, human beings, men and women alike. They are not granted to us by any government, rather it is the responsibility of government to protect them.

Now this, of course, is not the view held by regimes that block religious freedom. They choose to see things differently. In particular, there are two arguments they make to justify their actions. Both are worth examining. The first is that only some people should be allowed to practice their faith, those who belong to the right faith. They define religion in such a way that if you do you believe what they want you to believe, then what you are doing is not practicing religion, because there is only one definition of religion.

They, and only they and the religious leaders with whom they work, are in possession of the ultimate truth. Everyone else, including people of the same faith who diverge on some interpretation of religious law or tradition, are wrong, heretical, infidels, and they don't deserve the protection of the law – they may not even deserve to live. Because this is an issue that inflames emotions, it can be hard to talk about it constructively. You can't debate someone who believes that anyone who disagrees with him, by definition, disagrees with God.

So let me simply say this: People can believe that they, and only those like them, possess the one and only truth, that's their right, though they do not have the right to harm those they those they think harbor incorrect views. But their societies pay a cost when they choose to look at others with hate or disgust. Human rights become real not only in interactions between citizens and their governments, but also in those millions of ordinary moments among neighbors and classmates, co-workers, even strangers on the street.

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Every time people choose tolerance and respect over fear and animosity, they strengthen human rights for themselves as well as everyone else, because they affirm their

shared humanity. That's how religious freedom – (coughs) – excuse me – inscribe in law becomes religious harmony, flourishing throughout a society. Now, religious leaders have a critical role to play in this process. And we need them to encourage their followers – excuse me – to embrace the principles of peace and respect, which are not only tenets of nearly every religion, but also at the heart of religious freedom.

And then, most importantly, we need leaders to affirm that respecting the religious freedom of others is in keeping with, not in opposition to, one's own rights. When people of all religions can practice freely, it creates an environment in which everyone's freedom is more secure. Leaders and governments, meanwhile, have their own responsibilities. People can think what they want, but governments have to act in favor of protecting the rights of all.

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The world should and must hold governments to a different standard than individuals. Whether they are secular or religious, Muslim or Christian or Hindu or officially atheistic or anything else, governments have solemn obligations to protect the human rights of all citizens, no matter what religions they believe or don't believe.

Now, some leaders try to excuse treating some citizens differently than others by say, but that's what the people want. They say they personally believe in religious freedom, but if a majority of citizens want to see a group locked up or thrown out of schools or fired from their jobs, well, doesn't democracy mean following the will of the people? Well, the answer to that is there's a big difference between democracy and the tyranny of the majority. The liberty that democracy provides does not include the freedom to do violence to the equality of all citizens before the law. That's why universal rights are often embedded in constitutions – they provide guardrails against laws that deprive members of minority groups of their rights.

When popular opinion supports restricting the rights of a minority, leaders should remember that they owe their people both their loyalty and their judgment. Leaders should lead and remind citizens that when rights apply only to some citizens and not to others, that is when principles are subverted to power, that sows the seeds for legitimate grievances and instability. Genuine democracies use principles to guide power and to protect the rights of citizens equally.

The second argument leaders who oppose religious freedom make is that freedom is a luxury they just can't afford – not yet, anyway. If laws restricting religious practice and expression were lifted, they argue, the result would be instability, a rise in anti-government sentiment, the fraying of social ties, more acts of vandalism, harassment and violence.

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Now this, by the way, is the same argument that leaders invoke to justify clamping down on political expression, press freedom or civil society groups, or any activities that question the status quo and reflect their citizens' democratic aspirations. But in fact, long

practice and even academic studies show that it is the absence of religious freedom that is correlated with religious conflict and violent extremism.

There is also evidence that conflict is more likely when states have official religions and persecute religious minorities. That makes sense, if you think about it. When people are treated as equal under the law, hostilities among neighbors subside, and social unity has a change to grow – and so does trust in the democratic process, because people are confident that their rights will be protected, no matter who is in power.

In other words, religious freedom is one of those safety valves. It lets people have a say over important aspects of their lives, join their societies fully and channel their frustrations into constructive outlets. When governments clamp down on religious freedom, they close those safety valves. The result can be humiliation, discontent, despair that has nowhere to go – a recipe for conflict and extremism.

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Now, some governments are coming to realize this. For example, in Libya, since the overthrow of Gadhafi, the new government has chosen not to enforce some of his laws that restricted religious activity, and they've enshrined the free practice of religion in their interim constitution and outlawed discrimination on the basis of religion or sect. And earlier this year, the Libyan Supreme Court overturned a law that criminalized insults against Islam because they have come to believe that the best way to deal with offensive speech is not to ban it, but to counter it with more speech that reveals the emptiness of the insults and the lies.

Now meanwhile, Egypt is grappling with these challenges as it navigates its unprecedented democratic transition. And during my recent visit, I met with members of the new government, including President Morsi, and representatives from Egypt's Christian communities. Religious freedom was very present behind closed doors and out in the streets. President Morsi has said clearly and repeatedly in public and private that he intends to be the president of all the Egyptian people. He has pledged to appoint an inclusive government and put women and Christians in high leadership positions.

The Egyptian people and the international community are looking to him to follow through on those commitments. But I heard from Christians who want to know that they will be accorded the same rights and respect as all Egyptians in a new government led by an Islamist party. They wonder, understandably, will a government looking explicitly to greater reliance on Islamic principles stand up for non-Muslims and Muslims equally? Since this is the first time that Egypt has ever been in this situation, it's a fair question. Egyptians are building a brand-new democracy. What it will look like, how it will work, how it will handle religious pluralism: Egyptians will be writing the answers to those and many other questions for years to come.

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As I told the Christians with whom I met, the United States does not take the side of one political party over another. What we do is stand firmly on the side of principles. Yes, we do support democracy – real democracy – where every citizen has the right to live, work and worship how they choose, whether they be Muslim or Christian or from any other

background, where no group or faction can impose their authority or their ideology or their religion on anyone else; where there is healthy competition and what we call checks and balances so no one institution or leader gets too powerful and the rights of all citizens are respected and protected.

The Egyptian people will look to their elected leaders to protect the rights of all citizens and to govern in a fair and inclusive manner, and so will we. And if voters make different choices in future elections, then they and we will expect their leaders to respond to the will of the people and give up power. We are prepared to work with the leaders that the Egyptian people choose. But our engagement with those leaders will be based on their commitment to universal human rights and universal democratic principles.

Another important aspect of Egypt's transition is whether citizens themselves respect each other's differences. Now we saw that capacity vividly in Tahrir Square, when Christians formed a circle around Muslims in prayer, and Muslims clasped hands to protect Christians celebrating a Mass. I think that spirit of unity and fellowship was a very moving part of how Egyptians and all the rest of us responded to what happened in those days in that square. And if in the years ahead if Egyptians continue to protect that precious recognition of what every single Egyptian can contribute to the future of their country, where people of different faiths will be standing together in fellowship, then they can bring hope and healing to many communities in Egypt who need that message.

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As we look to the future not only in Egypt, not only in the newly free and democratically-seeking states of North Africa and the Middle East but far beyond, we will continue to advocate strongly for religious freedom. This is a bedrock priority of our foreign policy, one that we carry out in a number of ways. Earlier today, the United States did release our annual international religious freedom report. This is the fourth time I've had the honor of presenting it. It comprehensively catalogues the official and societal restrictions people around the world face as they try to practice their faith, and it designates countries of particular concern that have engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

This report sends a signal to the worst offenders that the world is watching. But it also provides information to help us and others target our advocacy, to make sure we reach the people who most need our help. In the Obama administration, we've elevated religious freedom as a diplomatic priority. Together with governments, international organizations and civil society, we have worked to shape and implement United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 1618, which seeks to protect people under attack or discriminated against because of their faith.

We raised these issues at the highest levels in international settings. I personally have discussed religious freedom in every region of the world, sometimes over and over again. We've appointed our first envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We've launched a strategic dialogue with civil society in which we collaborate with religious leaders and their communities to promote religious freedom, conflict prevention and mitigation, development and inter-religious dialogue. It includes a religion and foreign policy working

group that has provided concrete recommendations on how we can strengthen our approach to religious freedom and engagement with religious communities.

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Beyond diplomacy, we expanded our assistance to individuals under attack because of their religious beliefs, and to human rights activists working in hostile environments to promote religious freedom. These men and women are doing vital, often dangerous work with great courage. And we are proud to stand with them.

As part of our human rights dialogue with China, for example, we've taken Chinese officials on site visits to see how religious originations in our country provide valuable social services. We organized a visit to a Catholic charity that provides help to people with intellectual disabilities, an organization that fights discrimination against Arab-Americans and more.

We're also taking the message of tolerance and inclusion to young people. A few years ago, Hannah Rosenthal, our special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism, and Farah Pandith, our special representative to Muslim communities, attended an OSCE tolerance summit together, and they came away with an idea. They began asking young people to pledge to spend just one hour working with people who don't look like them or pray like them. Jews were encouraged to volunteer to clean a mosque, Muslims to volunteer to help elderly Christians get to church, and many other examples. The campaign, now called 2012 Hours Against Hate, has elicited commitments from young people around the world to spend tens of thousands of hours walking in someone else's shoes. It's even become one of the London Olympics' official initiatives.

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And, you know, that's something we all have a responsibility to do. Seven years ago, when I was a senator, I spoke at a dinner on religious liberty. And I challenged everyone there to think of ways that we could personally further religious freedom, including, in the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, in those small places close to home. I said it was up to each of us to ensure that our nation, which has always been an exemplar of religious freedom, continues to be.

Our mission is as important today as it has ever been. The United States was founded, amongst others, by people fleeing religious persecution who dreamed of a place where they could live according to their beliefs, without fear, without shame, without the need to hide. And today, we are that place. With all of our challenges, there is no doubting the importance of religion to the vast majority of Americans or to the fact that people of all faiths and people of no faith live in America openly and at peace with each other. The religious life of our nation is vibrant and alive, and that has been possible because of our citizens' capacity over time for tolerance and respect, but also because of the work of our government, all three branches, to uphold our constitution, to take extraordinary care not to favor one religion over another and to protect equally the rights of all.

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This has required perpetual vigilance and effort. And we all know there have been clashes and stumbles and vigorous, impassioned debate along the way. We are still searching for and moving toward that more perfect union. Of course, we, like any non-divine entity, are not perfect. But we should be proud and grateful for the wisdom of our founders and for the diligence of those who came after to protect this essential freedom. It is rare in this world, but it shouldn't be, because people aren't asking for much. They just want to worship their god and raise their children and make their homes and honor their ancestors and mourn their loved ones in a way that speaks to their hearts and reflects their beliefs. What could be more fundamental to human dignity than that?

That is what religious freedom makes possible, and that is why the United States will always stand for the value, the principle, that religious freedom represents, not only for us, but for people everywhere. It is not only a value that we enshrined in our constitution, but we know from long experience it goes right to the heart of the stability and security of so many countries in the world. And in this interconnected world we live in, that means it affects the security and stability of the United States of America. So thank you for understanding the importance of this value and principle, and I hope for seeking ways, that we all can continue to further it, to protect it and to spread it.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Now I think we will maybe take a few questions. Jessica?

MS. : Please.

MODERATOR: OK.

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Well, in no particular order, this lady right there.

Q: Thank you. (Off mic.)

MODERATOR: And here comes a microphone.

Q: Thank you. Thank you so much, Madam Secretary, for what you do in the world and for our United States. My name is Samia Harris and I'm Egyptian-American, and thank you very much for caring about Egypt. I'm the founder of Democracy for Egypt. And so my question to you, Madam, is it's not only the Christians that are worried in Egypt; the liberals are, too. And I don't know if you have read the last report from – (inaudible) – el-Tahrir (ph) that the change for Egypt, it's really is asking President Morsi right now that he is not delivering what he promised in forming the new government. And you have mentioned that you will be observing closely and there would be steps to be taken – if you can enlighten us on what's next.

Thank you so much for your effort.

SEC. CLINTON: Well, thank you. And, you know, let me start by saying that I do recognize that a democratic transition is a complicated one for any country. And in all humility, it took us quite some time to get it right, to include all of our citizens, starting with African-Americans and women and – to really fulfill not only the letter of our constitution, but the aspirations of our people.

So as I monitor what is happening in Egypt, I am conscious of how challenging it is to get off on the right footing, to be absolutely clear what your principles and values are. And as you're aware, there was certainly a very concerted effort by the president and the Freedom and Justice Party and other associated with it, including the Muslim Brotherhood, to make commitments about the kind of inclusivity that the government would represent, the respect that all Egyptians would be held in, and the protection of the rights of all Egyptians.

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Now we are waiting to see how that gets translated into action. And we are certainly aware of the forming of the new government, with the announcement of a new prime minister. We're waiting to see who's in that government. That will be an important step along the way. We are looking for ways to try to support the government, particularly in fulfilling the economic aspirations of all Egyptians. But we are going to judge by actions, not words. And the actions are really just at the very beginning stages.

I think it's important to make absolutely clear to everyone that we are not supporting any individual party or any individual. There seems to be a view on the part of some that we are. But that is not the case, never has been the case. We have supported a transition that we hope does lead to a democracy, which, as we have made clear, is not just about elections. I think there were mistakes in the past in some of the ways that we shorthanded our support for democracy in our country that people thought, OK, let's have an election; then we're a democracy and maybe we never have to have another one. (Laughter.) You know, one election one time and that's it; we don't have to be held to any standard about how we actually continue to reach out and include people and respect people. And I've tried to make it very clear that that is not the case, that an election is not a democracy make.

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So we're emphasizing the independence of the press, the freedom of expression, the freedom of religion, respect for minorities, the kinds of things that we have learned over many years of practice, now, are what sustains a democracy. And we're hoping that as the – as Egypt adopts a new constitution, as it votes again for a parliament, as its government takes office, we will see a recognition, a commitment to what we view as essential for democracy to be sustainable.

Now, I am concerned that respect for religious freedom is, you know, quite tenuous. And I don't know that that's going to quickly be resolved, but since 2011 and the fall of the Mubarak regime, sectarian violence has increased; attacks on Christians and Muslims, sectarian violence from both communities has cost lives. And we don't think that there has

been a consistent commitment to investigate and to apply the laws equally to the perpetrators of such violence.

That then sends a message to the minority community in particular, but to the larger community, that there is not going to be any consequences for acting out one's own religious prejudices or social insecurities. And that's the kind of recipe that can quickly get out of control in terms of conflict and also undermine the new democracy. So I am urging the Egyptian government at all levels to respect the rights of all Egyptians.

And I'm urging those who are concerned, not only Christians but also moderates, liberals, secularists, to organize themselves. I mean, this is something that I started talking to the Tahrir Square veterans about shortly after the fall of Mubarak, that it's been my experience that when democratic space opens up, when freedom opens up in authoritarian regimes falling, those who are unorganized will not be successful. How's that for a profound statement? (Laughter.) But all too often, people who are in the moderate, liberal world don't have the same commitment to organization and follow-through and those whose beliefs are so certain that they know exactly what they're going to try to achieve.

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So there is the religious dimension, the constitutional inclusivity dimension, but there is also the political dimension, that in a democracy, you have to get out there and work to elect people who represent your views. And otherwise you are going to be sidelined. So it is – it is my hope that as we judge Egypt's leaders by their actions, that Egyptian activists really get more focused on how to influence the government themselves. And I know this is a long haul, but that's the way democracy works. It doesn't happen overnight.

Oh, my goodness. (Laughter.) Oh, no. Jessica, you should be calling on these people, I think, you know. This young man right there in the middle. Yes, sir. In the striped shirt.

Q: Secretary, very lucky to see you here.

SEC. CLINTON: Thank you.

Q: Religion sometimes mixed with some other issues like terrorism and separatism. And the terrorists and the separatists (usually ?) takes religion as a tool to mobilize supporters. So how to balance the (demand ?) of (practice ?) religion – religious freedom and counterterrorism or – as well as counter separatism? Thank you.

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SEC. CLINTON: That's an important question, because oftentimes when we talk about religious freedom, there is a tendency for people to worry about the free exercise of religion somehow supporting terrorists and separatists. I have a – the – almost the opposite view. I think the more respect there is for the freedom of religion, the more people will find useful ways to participate in their societies. If they feel suppressed, if there is not that safety

valve that they can exercise their own religion, they then oftentimes feel such anger, despair that they turn to violence; they become extremists.

Now, there will always be people in nearly every society who are going to believe that God is talking right to them and saying, you know, what you really need to do is overthrow the government. (Chuckles.) What you really need to do is to kill the unbelievers. What you really – there will be people like that. But we're talking about organizing society for the vast majority of people, having people who exercise their religious beliefs lawfully, protected by the law, and people who engage in violence, harassment, intimidation or other anti-social criminal behavior punished by the law. But one should not be punished or harassed merely because of who one is or what one believes, unless there are actions associated with that. And that often is the difficult rub in many areas when we talk about religious freedom.

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You know, and it's not just religions against one another; it is even within religions. Within Christianity, within Judaism, within, you know, Islam, which Hinduism, there are people who believe their version of that religion is the only right way to believe. And so in some of the countries we are most concerned about that are majority Muslim countries, it's the intimidation and violence against Muslims who are in minority sects that we most worry about. We watched for many years the conflict in Northern Ireland against Catholics on the one side, Protestants on the other.

So I think you're right that there always are issues about terrorism, about separatism, but those should be dealt with under the law without infringing on the rights of people whose religious beliefs are different from the majority. So I hope that governments can begin to make those distinctions.

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And it's not only important to do because you don't want to breed extremism, which you can do by cracking down on religion, especially if it's associated with a different ethnic group or tribal group, other identifying characteristics, but it's also because if you're not careful, people will feel that they are in a life-or-death struggle to protect their religion in the majority against the minority.

I remember going to Bosnia after the end of the war in Bosnia, and a woman telling me that she couldn't believe the hostility she started to feel from her neighbors. And she said to a neighbor, why are you behaving like this? You know, we've known each other for many years. We went to school together. We went to weddings. We buried our dead together. Why are you treating me like this? And the answer was, because we were told if we didn't do that to you first, you would do it to us.

So if the government doesn't step in and say, no, we're not going to let people be acting this way, we're not going to let them be discriminating, we're not going to let them be harming others on the basis of religion or any other characteristic, but focusing on religion, it can get out of control of any government.

And then unfortunately, as we know, governments can sometimes stoke religious discrimination for their own political reasons. You know, you've got problems at home, the economy is not doing so well; let's find an enemy, and let's go find, you know, those people over there. They're a different religion. And that gets everybody excited. And then you can light a match, and you can't put the fire out.

So I think that we need to be very thoughtful in separating out the problems posed by extremism, no matter where they're coming from, and terrorism, from legitimate religious differences that should be tolerated, respected and protected.

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MS. MATHEWS: We have time for just one more. And may I ask you, when the secretary has ended after this question, if you would just keep your seats until she has – (off mic) –

SEC. CLINTON: Jessica, why don't you call on the last person? (Laughter.)

MS. MATHEWS: (Off mic) – why don't we go in the back.

Q: Thank you, Secretary Clinton. I'm Randa Fahmy Hudome. I am serving as general counsel of the American Egyptian Strategic Alliance. We're a new lobbying organization working to bring together Egypt and the United States in a stronger alliance. One of the issues we've been talking to the new Egyptian government about is this issue of religious freedom. And we've told them, look to your left, meaning to places like Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, where Muslims and Christians, particularly in Palestine, have lived in peace for centuries. And so I'm wondering if your conversations touched upon that – look to your fellow Arab countries, where this is not a problem, frankly. And then just a quick follow-up question. I appreciate your emphasis on America, but we also have our problems here with respect to, of course, Islamophobia, which I'm sure you're very aware of. And I'm wondering whether you have any comments about this recent activity in Congress targeting one of your own aides.

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SEC. CLINTON: Well, as to – as to the first question, I think it is important to look at the historical precedents. But there's also been a lot of disturbing recent developments, with Christians being attacked and driven out of Iraq, Christians in Syria feeling like they are really going to be at risk almost regardless of what develops in the terrible conflict that is now raging, Christians feeling that they're under pressure in lots of places in the Middle East where, as you rightly say, they have lived for centuries side by side.

And I think it's – I think it's quite important for us to unpack that. Why is it happening now? What is it? And of course it's a new political identity; it's an effort by Islamists primarily, but not exclusively, to claim democracy, but trying to figure out how it fits with their pre-existing frameworks of belief. So there is a lot of tension and concern going on right now across the Arab world, particularly in places where Christians have lived and would love to continue living. And as several Christians in Egypt told me – said, you

know, our people have been here; I can trace my family back, you know, 2,000 years; I love this country; I want to be a part of this country; I want to help build this country; I just hope I'm going to be able to.

So it's at this point that leadership is incredibly important. Leaders have to be active in stepping in and sending messages about protecting the diversity within their countries. And frankly, I don't see enough of that. And I want to see more of it. I want to see more of it, and we did see some of that in our own country. You know, we saw Republicans stepping up and standing up against the kind of assaults that really have no place in our politics.

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So we have to set an example. There's no doubt about that. And we have to continue doing so. But we also have to expect other leaders to do the same. And when I think about how scared so many minorities – religious minorities are all over the world, and governments are not – I mean, I believe that governments have a bigger role to play and more leverage than they exercise. I think too many governments, particularly in these fast-transitioning societies where there's so much going on at the same time, too many governments believe that religious freedom is something you get to after you deal with everything else. It's just not a priority for them. And we want to raise it up on the visibility list of what they need to be dealing with and to try to send a clear message: You need to stand up for the rights of all your people; you are now a leader of a diverse society. If you're in Iraq, you need to be protecting every community, not just one or maybe two at the most. If you're in Lebanon, you need to be standing up for the rights of everyone in the community, every confession. And similarly in Egypt or Pakistan or Indonesia or China or India or anywhere, leaders need to be out front saying that and then acting on it.

So I'm hoping that we will see more actions that move in that direction. And the United States will continue to try to push and prod and persuade and then, if necessary, you know, look at ways to use consequences that can send a very clear message that we believe that you will not be successful, you will not be stable, you will not be secure, and you will certainly not have a sustainable democracy.

Let me add one other thought about this, though. I think in some societies where we're seeing, to go back to the young man's question, terrorism, extremism and religion, there's – there can also be fertile ground out of which that grows if a government is not paying attention to the needs of all of its people. So it's not just, we respect your right to exercise your religion, but we also are going to have policies that, if you're living in northern Nigeria, you're going to see more development, so that you can not only take on Boko Haram on the security front, but you take it on on the economic development front.

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There are lots of ways to try to knit this together. And it is probably the most exciting time, but the most daunting time to be a leader in the world right now, especially in these new transitioning democracies, because there is just so many high expectations that will be so difficult to meet. So stand for principles, stand for values, gain people's trust that

you're trying to help their lives improve, and you're going to leave to them the space they should have to exercise the most precious, you know, freedoms that any human being should have regardless of who their leaders are and begin to make that case. And the United States will stand ready to assist in any way possible.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

[00:57:10]

(END)