



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1403

June __, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington D.C. 20500

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear President Biden and Secretary Blinken,

We are writing to express our grave concern that the State Department is using appropriated funds to support atheism and radical, progressive orthodoxy across the world.

In April 2021, the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) announced a grant program to promote atheism worldwide. The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) was officially titled "DRL FY20 IRF Promoting and Defending Religious Freedom Inclusive of Atheist, Humanist, Non-Practicing and Non-Affiliated Individuals."¹ It announced a "competitive" process that would award grants of up to \$500,000 to organizations committed to the practice and spread of atheism and humanism, namely in South/Central Asia and in the Middle East/North Africa.

To be clear, atheism and "humanism" are official belief systems.² As an initial matter, therefore, we would like to know what other United States government programs supported with

¹ <https://www.state.gov/statements-of-interest-requests-for-proposals-and-notices-of-funding-opportunity/drl-fy20-irf-promoting-and-defending-religious-freedom-inclusive-of-atheist-humanist-non-practicing-and-non-affiliated-individuals/> (noting that priority in funding will be given to programs that assist minorities and marginalized groups – "*particularly atheists and nonbelievers*" – to advocate with community and government leaders) (emphasis added). NOFO #SFP{pppp7977 in grants.gov (accessed June 27, 2022)

² <https://twitter.com/americanhumanist/status/1384238178643582979?s=20>

appropriated funds are being used either to encourage, inculcate, or to disparage *any* official belief system – atheist, humanist, Christian, Muslim, or otherwise. It is one thing for the Department to be tolerant and respectful of a wide range of belief systems, and to encourage governments to respect the religious freedom interests of their citizens. It is quite another for the United States government to work actively to *empower* atheists, humanists, non-practicing, and non-affiliated in public decision-making.³ Any such program – for any religiously-identifiable group – in the United States would be unconstitutional. In addition to its constitutionally dubious legal foundation, we also question how such a grant or cooperative agreement program advances the foreign policy interests of the United States. Were such programs known by the citizens of the target countries, we would expect that local populations, interest groups, and governments would bristle at what any “objective observer” would see as “covert” funding from a foreign power designed to shatter local religious and cultural relationships.

This is not “religious freedom.” This NOFO, like others we have reviewed, prioritizes atheists and humanists above all other potential recipients. Not only does such a priority violate both the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses, but also the No Religious Test Clause of Article VI of our nation’s constitution. In the NOFO, the State Department characterizes atheists as a unique religious group while then encouraging the building of “networks and advocacy groups” for atheists. This would be analogous to official State Department promotion of religious freedom “particularly for Christians” in China, with the express goal being to build a corresponding missionary network. Obviously, this goal that would never pass constitutional muster⁴ and would be derided by radical leftist bureaucrats in your agency as completely out-of-bounds. So why is this atheist NOFO not viewed with similar objection?

Americans rightly discern this as a part of the broader effort on the part of your administration to promote radical, progressive orthodoxy abroad. Atheism is an integral part of the belief system of Marxism and communism.⁵ A few weeks ago, the United States Embassy in Germany erected a “Black Lives Matter” flag. Americans should be very alarmed at this. It’s not only that “Black Lives Matter” remains a highly divisive and increasingly unpopular movement here in the United States;⁶ the display is also denoting a promotion of a specific radical organization.⁷ Other recent initiatives of the State Department include creating a “Special Representative for Racial Equity and Justice,”⁸ whose mission will be to spread Critical Race Theory and other progressive dogmas worldwide, and working to remove restrictions on abortion around the globe.⁹

³ The bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor’s (DRL) express goal in the NOFO is to “strengthen [atheist and humanist] networks and “provide organizational training and resources” to these same groups.

⁴ This is to say nothing of the preeminence of faith, and Christianity in particular, in America’s founding and history. See, e.g., <https://www.heritage.org/political-process/report/did-america-have-christian-founding>.

⁵ [The Role of Atheism in Marxian Philosophy on JSTOR](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2709000)

⁶ <https://www.bet.com/article/tszncy/black-support-of-black-lives-matter-movement-in-decline-poll-finds>

⁷ <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>

⁸ <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/house-gop-grill-state-dept-special-representative-racial-equity-justice-left-wing-social-agenda>

⁹ <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-november-04-2021/>; see also, <https://twitter.com/secblinken/status/1540676257855131650?s=21&t=5GaoTvy-EoxojWN2oF5ZcA>.

Given the role of the State Department in promoting radical, divisive, and destructive cultural policies, please answer the following questions:

1. After the April 2021 NOFO, which implementing partners were selected for the funding, if any? Please provide any contracts and sub-contracts signed with those partners.
2. What specific training programs and materials have the NGOs funded?
3. In which countries have these funds been utilized?
4. Did DRL have an official opinion letter from the Office of the Legal Advisor signing off on the constitutionality of the proposed grants? If so, was the opinion dated before the NOFO was published? If not, why not? Will the Department provide a copy of this legal opinion to Congress?
5. Did DRL consult with either Assistant Secretary for South Central Asia, the National Security Council, or with relevant local Ambassadors before embarking on a program to offer U.S.-funded promotion of atheism? If so, please summarize that consultation.
6. How does deconstructing America's reputation as a country of faith into one that promotes the negation of it improve our standing in the world?
7. How does promoting atheism in parts of the world where religious persecution is widespread¹⁰ help those facing persecution?
8. How does promoting atheism in Muslim countries promote U.S. values and interests?
9. Why should Americans support the State Department in promoting a belief system the adherents of which remain a small minority in the United States?¹¹
10. Does the State Department have plans to create grant programs to promote other individual religions and belief systems?
11. Why should it be part of the State Department's mission to promote radical work organizations abroad?
12. Would you oppose a future administration flying a "Blue Lives Matter"¹² or another flag with comparable cultural connotations at a U.S. Embassy?

Thank you very much for your attention on this matter and we are looking forward to hearing your responses to these very important questions by Friday, July 15th at 5:00 PM.

Sincerely,

Jim Banks
Member of Congress

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/02/persecution-driving-christians-out-of-middle-east-report>

¹¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/06/10-facts-about-atheists/>

¹² <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/majority-of-likely-voters-want-blue-lives-matter-laws-punishing-attacks-on-police-poll>