

Christian Leaders Meet With Pentagon on Religious Liberty Violations

On Thursday, religious liberty leaders met with Pentagon officials to discuss the rapidly escalating incidents of **religious liberty** violations in the military under the Obama administration.

On April 28, Breitbart News broke the story of Pentagon brass meeting with anti-Christian activist Mikey Weinstein to discuss religious liberty policies. Quoting Weinstein in his own printed words, this activist has a record of calling observant Christians “fundamentalist monsters” who seek impose “theocratic terror” on America and of saying that evangelizing (sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ) in the military is an act of “sedition and treason” against this country, making those who do it “enemies of the Constitution.” He says those who do so should be court-martialed (criminally prosecuted).

As this story developed, the Obama-Hagel Pentagon defended its policy and changed its story several times as it was revealed these meetings with Weinstein had been going on for years. In the following months there were additional incidents, such as removing Christian patriotic artwork at a military base, censoring a Christian chaplain and a Christian service member reportedly being relieved of duty by his lesbian commander because he refused her order to say it is wrong not to support gay marriage.

Now leaders from Restore Military Religious Freedom—a coalition to protect service members of faith—met with Pentagon officials. Retired Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin of the Family Research Council, retired Col. Ron Crews of the Chaplains Alliance for Religious Liberty, Kellie Fiedorek of

Alliance Defending Freedom, and nationally known Christian talk radio host Sandy Rios took with them two petitions calling on Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel to protect religious liberty.

One was a general petition with 170,000 signatures, and the other—with 50,000 signatures—was sparked by the last incident mentioned above, where Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Phillip Monk was relieved of duty by Maj. Elisa Valenzuela, allegedly because of Monk's Christian beliefs on marriage. Monk now faces a possible court-martial.

These Christian leaders met with Lt. Gen. Richard C. Harding, the three-star judge advocate general of the Air Force (the top lawyer in that branch of the military), and Maj. Gen. Howard D. Stendahl, the two-star Air Force chief of chaplains.

Gen. Boykin said after the meeting, "The meeting included a productive discussion on the issue of **religious freedom in the military** as a whole and not just the U.S. Air Force. After delivering the petitions, we explained our concerns regarding the trend toward infringements on the constitutional liberties of service members in all uniformed services.

"We appreciate their offer to review decisions that do not reflect Air Force policy made by commanders at various bases. At their request, we will report future events and concerns directly to Air Force leadership. After reviewing a series of troubling incidents involving chaplains, the coalition members were assured in the meeting that chaplains would not be forced to do anything that violates the tenets of their faith.

"We also requested that the Department of Defense and the Air Force issue a definitive statement regarding the ability of service members to share their faith publicly. Previous statements on the subject have been confusing and contradictory.

"Additionally, we asked that the Department of Defense move

quickly to implement the religious freedom protections enacted in last year's National Defense Authorization Act. Given new incidents of military personnel facing career reprisals for their religious beliefs, it is vital that regulations preventing discrimination be issued by the secretary of defense as demanded by law. We intend to remain in contact with the Air Force to ensure that the law's implementation is consistent with the intent of Congress."

Congress is working on new statutory language to protect such **religious speech** in the military, which has passed the House and is pending in the Senate. President Obama threatens to veto this legislation.

Ken Klukowski *is director of the Center for Religious Liberty at Family Research Council. This article appeared on on Monday.*