

Diverse Faith Leaders Join Forces for National Religious Freedom Conference

The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, Shaykha Reima Yosif and Rabbi Meir Soloveichik may have significant differences when it comes to religion and theology. But on Thursday in Washington, D.C., these U.S. faith leaders—alongside other representatives of the Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Latter-day Saint, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist, Muslim and Sikh faith communities—will set aside religious and political differences in the defense and promotion of religious freedom in America.

The second annual National Religious Freedom Conference, hosted by the American Religious Freedom Program of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, will bring together leaders from major U.S. faith groups and legislators from both major parties to strategize and build consensus around religious-freedom efforts across the country.

“At a time when government restrictions and social hostility against religion are increasing in America, members and leaders of all faiths are coming together to reaffirm the integral role religious diversity plays in our nation,” says Brian Walsh, executive director of the American Religious Freedom Program.

Key conference speaker Rodriguez, evangelical founder of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, concurs: “People of all faiths come to America because it has been a land of hope where they may practice their religious beliefs without government interference or coercion. We must resist every threat to religious freedom and ensure that people of faith remain free to establish equality and justice

throughout society.”

Some 200 faith representatives, policy leaders and state legislators from across the country are expected to attend the one-day, invitation-only conference—themed “Many Faiths, One America”—that will see major addresses from Rodriguez, Soloveichik and Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, representing the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice. (Lantos Swett also chairs the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.)

Top faith and government leaders will brief participants on threats facing religious freedom in America today and on bipartisan multifaith efforts to enact new protections for religious liberty and rights of conscience. Attendees will also hear from state lawmakers representing more than 15 states, many of whom have enacted important religious freedom protections in 2013.

The National Religious Freedom Conference award dinner will honor the Brookings Institution’s William A. Galston with the 2013 American Religious Freedom Award. Galston’s achievement comes on the 20-year anniversary of the landmark Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). As a senior advisor to President Bill Clinton, Galston was instrumental in shepherding RFRA into federal law, and he has defended it with brilliance and great civility. Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission will be on hand to present the award, which was given last year to Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore.