

Archbishop Elpidophoros attends Appeal of Conscience Foundation gathering on safeguarding religious freedom



By Salvatore Ambrosino

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WASHINGTON D.C. — His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America joined religious leaders representing multiple faith traditions at the U.S. Department of Justice on August 27 for a high-level gathering focused on strengthening protections for houses of worship, safeguarding religious freedom and confronting religious hatred.

The gathering, convened by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation and Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Harmeet Dhillon of the U.S. Department of Justice, brought together Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu leaders, along with representatives of the Department of Justice and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

Archbishop Elpidophoros, a trustee of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, emphasized the importance of solidarity among religious communities in the face

of threats and violence.



“It is in this spirit of mutual concern that we gather today, united not by fear, but by love—love for our own faithful and for our neighbor,” Archbishop Elpidophoros said. “By seeking to ensure that all places of worship are protected, and that our freedom to worship is safeguarded, we choose to remain resolute in the face of fear, hatred, and violence.”

The meeting, held on the first anniversary of the attack at Annunciation Church in which two children were killed and 21 people were injured, focused on threats facing religious communities and the responsibility of faith leaders to stand together when any religious community is targeted. Participants also discussed steps that religious institutions and government can take collectively to protect houses of worship and combat religious hatred.

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The program included remarks from representatives of the Department of Justice and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, a panel discussion for faith leaders, an invocation, the issuance of a public statement by participating religious leaders and a benediction by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros.

The public statement called for stronger legislation to protect houses of worship and the creation of an ongoing body of religious leaders to monitor threats and work with the Department of Justice to help ensure that people of faith can worship safely. The participating leaders also reaffirmed that the protection of religious

liberty and the free exercise of religion are fundamental First Amendment rights.

The gathering was held at the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., amid continuing concern over attacks against churches, synagogues, mosques, temples and other houses of worship across the United States.

Participants included Harmeet Dhillon, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights; H.E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See to the United States; His Grace Bishop Irinej Dobrijevic, Serbian Orthodox Church; Rev. Hovsep Harapetyan, Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America; and representatives of Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and other Christian communities.

> Find a full list of the attendees [here](#).

The Appeal of Conscience Foundation, founded in 1965 by Rabbi Arthur Schneier, has worked on behalf of religious freedom, human rights and the protection of houses of worship. The Foundation advocates for mutual understanding and cooperation among people of faith and against bias, hatred and division.

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