

The dialogue comes at a significant time of U.S. policy formation and implementation on the Middle East as Lebanon and the Levant face acute geopolitical pressures. Lebanon's religious diversity was recognized as both a strength and a vulnerability, with expert speakers stressing the need to protect endangered communities, civil society, local governance, and rule of law. Regional religious freedom is viewed as the intersectional priority between human rights and long-term security.



Habib Ephrem, President of the Syriac League and Advisor to the President of the Republic of Lebanon on Human Rights and Interfaith Dialogue, and ZPO board member Michel Zovighian participated in the high-level roundtable on international religious freedom.

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Habib Ephrem, President of the Syriac League and Advisor to the President of the Republic of Lebanon on Human Rights and Interfaith Dialogue, said: "The absence of democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rise of terrorism are increasingly earmarks of the Middle East and are shaking the conscience of all communities in the region. How do we stop the bloodshed?"

Representing multiple communities and groups in Lebanon, almost 20 participants shared their analysis with grounded data and evidence to help shape more responsive and effective approaches to advancing freedom of religion and belief and strengthening pluralism, resilience, and regional stability. Notably, high-charged moments in the discussion opened the floor for experts to share their profound fears and disagreements.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to hear directly from Lebanese leaders with deep experience in these matters," said Maenza.

ZPO board member Michel Zovighian stated: “Creating safe spaces for rigorous and respectful dialogue bridges the gap between analysis and local expertise, setting the stage for solutions, compromises, and sustainable opportunities.”

The session closed with consensus that the defense of religious freedom in Lebanon and its neighbors cannot operate in fragility, violence, and geopolitical uncertainty. Time-critical moral and political courage is necessary to enforce calls to action, including but not limited to equal citizenship, protection beyond over-simplified “minority” questions, genuine conflict resolution.

Lynn Zovighian, founder of ZPO, said: "It is essential that Washington carefully listens to the legitimate and urgent concerns shared today to partner with local communities to instill the necessary conditions for religious freedoms and a sustainable and safe future worth living for all."

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The Syriac League, established in 1975, is a Lebanese non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization whose purpose is to serve as the voice of the Syriac community and the Christian minorities in Lebanon, and to bring together people who believe in the League's cultural, social, and humanitarian goals.

About the Zovighian Public Office

Since 2015, the Zovighian Public Office partners with communities and survivors of atrocities in the Middle East and South Caucasus to uphold voice, reclaim dignity, and advance justice through research, culture, and diplomacy.

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publicoffice@zovighian.org
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