

Equipping People of Faith to Defend People of Faith

21Wilberforce Strategy & Programs

2022 Activities Overview

21Wilberforce Global Freedom Center
405 North Washington Street, Suite 300
Falls Church, VA 22046
(571) 297-3177
www.21wilberforce.org

21WILBERFORCE
SPEAK
FREEDOM



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Organizational Summary

The **21Wilberforce Global Freedom Center** (<https://21wfreedom.center/about-21W>) is a Christian international human rights nonprofit dedicated to defending the dignity-affirming and universal right to freedom of religion, belief, and conscience for all people.

We take our name from the 19th century British parliamentarian William Wilberforce, who led a successful anti-slavery movement using a “top-down, bottom-up” strategy for sustainable social change that coordinated political advocacy with grassroots mobilization, empowerment, and collaborative action. Today, 21Wilberforce employs this powerful model around the world to address one of the greatest human rights challenges in the 21st Century—denial and suppression of the universal and fundamental human right of every individual to be free to choose and practice his or her own faith and beliefs without fear of government or social intimidation, repression, or persecution.

Based primarily in the Washington, D.C., suburb of Falls Church, Virginia, and with an office in Waco, Texas, 21Wilberforce operates globally, its small core team supplemented with senior fellows in different countries, mentored intern apprentices, various contract associates, senior Ambassadors and action teams in regions around the world, and a global network of other partners and volunteers. Our team members are high-energy, out-of-the-box creative, self-motivated, and agile problem solvers, allowing 21W to serve as a results-focused incubator and accelerator for global advocacy, innovative initiatives, and effective collaborative action.

Brief History

Today, most of the world’s population live in countries that experience high or extremely high levels of religious restrictions, whether from government or from societal pressures. Despite rising religious repression worldwide, there have only been limited efforts in the West by faith communities and grassroots networks to work together to defend this fundamental human right of freedom of religion, belief, and conscience (FoRB).

In 2014, Dr. Randel Everett, a long-time religious freedom advocate, founded 21Wilberforce as a Christian international human rights nonprofit organization dedicated to providing education, advocacy, and support for the persecuted and to defend the fundamental right of all people to freedom of religion and belief. He was joined in this effort by former Virginia Congressman Frank R. Wolf, a leading champion of international religious freedom in Congress for over 30 years and after whom the landmark 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (now U.S. law) was named.

Originally formed as the *21st Century Wilberforce Initiative*, our organization took our name from the 19th century British parliamentarian William Wilberforce, who identified the slave trade as the single greatest violation of human rights in his time. Responding to this seemingly impossible challenge, he led a successful abolition movement using a “top-down, bottom-up” strategy that coordinated political advocacy with grassroots mobilization, empowerment, and collaborative action. Today, we employ Wilberforce’s powerful model to engage grassroots networks, people of faith, and policymakers in addressing one of the greatest human rights crises and challenges in the 21st Century—denial and suppression of the universal and fundamental human right of every individual to be free to choose and practice his or her own faith and beliefs without fear of government or social intimidation, repression, or persecution.

2015-2017

We began our work focused on policy reform, political advocacy for specific groups or outcomes, and leadership training in Iraq. Our initial engagement in 2015 and 2016 addressed the genocidal actions of the Islamic State that

had pushed Christians and other religious minorities to the edge of extinction in Iraq. In 2016, we expanded our portfolio to include Nigeria, where Boko Haram and other militants have destroyed thousands of churches and millions have been displaced from their homes because of violence and human rights atrocities. We then added a third major focus: defending persecuted religious minorities in China and pressing for the freedom of imprisoned pastors and other religious leaders both in China and in such countries as Turkey and Myanmar.

In addition to ongoing campaigns for political reform and protection for prisoners of conscience, we engaged in a wide range of advocacy and activist training for emerging student leaders and transformational leadership training for pastors and other local leaders, equipping them to become champions for religious freedom in their own culture. During and since this time we have conducted trainings for over 4,500 leaders in Hong Kong (including over 1,800 Chinese house church leaders), Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Korea, and with Syrians in Lebanon.

2017- Present

Since 2017, we made a critical decision to also focus on mobilizing and empowering people of faith to work together locally and globally to provide tangible assistance to people and communities who suffer because of their faith and religious practice. In addition to our regular programs, we are actively involved in action teams and in coordinating advocacy and assistance for such current crisis areas as Myanmar/Burma and Afghanistan.

2020-Present

In 2020, 21Wilberforce changed its name to *21Wilberforce Global Freedom Center* and entered a strategic relationship with the 51 million-member Baptist World Alliance, while retaining its own separate 501(c)3 nonprofit status.

Based primarily in the Washington, D.C., suburb of Falls Church, Virginia, and with an office in Waco, Texas, 21Wilberforce operates globally, its small core team supplemented with senior fellows in different countries, mentored intern apprentices, various contract associates, senior Ambassadors and action teams in regions around the world, and a global network of other partners and volunteers. Our team members are high-energy, out-of-the-box creative, self-motivated, and agile problem solvers, allowing 21W to serve as a results-focused incubator and accelerator for global advocacy, innovative initiatives, and effective collaborative action.

Mission, Goals & Programs

21Wilberforce is dedicated to defending the dignity-affirming and universal right to freedom of religion, belief, and conscience for all people. Seeking to follow Jesus' model of the Good Samaritan without any religious litmus test for helping those who suffer, our vision is to empower people to collaboratively work together to support persecuted communities, challenge repression, and expand freedom of religious faith and belief globally.

Toward that end, we serve as a results-focused incubator and accelerator for global advocacy, innovative initiatives, and effective collaborative action.

Our vision translates into three strategic goals: 1) Defend and assist the persecuted and vulnerable; 2) Mobilize and equip individuals and groups to effectively lead change for dignity-affirming freedom and justice for all people; and 3) Inform critical understanding and decision making.

These goals inform and shape our *three program action areas*.

- 1) **Collaborative Advocacy and Action:** Engage in and facilitate global religious freedom advocacy and effective action through collaborative partnerships, coalitions, and local initiatives.
- 2) **Mobilization, Equipping, and Training:** Help organizations build capacity for effective action and educate and train individuals to be effective advocates and leaders of transformative change.
- 3) **Strategic Communications:** Use strategic platforms and products to communicate with multiple external audiences for critical awareness and informed decision making.

Program Activities

Program Area 1: Collaborative Advocacy, Action & Impact

The goal of our advocacy campaigns and programs is to make a difference—achieving concrete results that make a tangible impact on people's lives.

- ***21W Global Ambassadors***

In 2022, 21Wilberforce has continued to develop and expand its global Ambassadors program. 21Wilberforce Ambassadors are notable Baptist leaders in different regions around the world that voluntarily work with regional denominations, organizations, and churches in helping identify and meet the needs of churches and members facing religious restrictions or persecution.

A current example of this is in Brazil, where one of our Ambassadors for Latin America is leading successful efforts to provide asylum for hundreds of Christians and other religious minorities fleeing persecution and targeted religious killings in Afghanistan following the takeover by the Taliban. For more information, visit <https://21wilberforce.org/21w-ambassadors>.

- ***Defenders Fund***

21Wilberforce is currently laying the foundation for the development of a Defenders Fund, an initiative for the Global Defenders Network (see below) that will help provide financial resources to assist religious prisoners of conscience and groups facing persecution and help fund the efforts of their legal defenders.

In April and May 2022, 21Wilberforce provided donor partner introductions and facilitated the BWA (Baptist World Alliance) raising over \$1 million in direct assistance for victims of violence during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

- ***Church Engagement for Global Impact***

In mid-2022 our team began laying the groundwork for the creation of an alliance of churches in Texas and Virginia that will engage their members in advocating for religious freedom and assisting persecuted believers in select countries around the world.

- ***UN Engagement***

21Wilberforce works with partner organizations to represent and help coordinate efforts and communication with the global network at the United Nations.

- **United Nations Representative:** Since 2021 21Wilberforce has served as an official Geneva-based UN representative for a 51-million-member global alliance (Baptist World Alliance) and as a member of the UN NGO Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief. In July 2022 21Wilberforce made a

presentation to the UN Human Rights Council to raise awareness about what is happening throughout Myanmar (Burma) to Christians, Muslims, and other religious minorities.

- **Advising grassroots United Nations engagement:** In 2022 21Wilberforce initiated and is leading a collaboration with the University of Stirling (in the UK) and other institutional partners to conduct an action research project: the results will be used in 2023 to advise civil society organizations on optimal strategies for engaging the UN Human Rights Council reporting system and influencing governments in protecting religious freedom.

- ***Washington, DC-based International Religious Freedom Roundtable (IRFR)***

In 2022, 21Wilberforce continues to serve on the leadership team (Steering Committee, Chair of multiple working groups) and as a primary operational partner for an NGO-led civil society assembly (irfroundtable.org) that is the leading global multifaith advocacy forum and network.

- Over 300 organizations have participated in hundreds of multifaith initiatives, including developing affiliated roundtables worldwide.
- Craft and help develop results-focused working groups and collaborative advocacy campaigns for multiple faiths suffering in repressive countries.
- Support the development of dozens of coordinated religious freedom roundtable forums around the world. 21Wilberforce initiated and helped launch the first of these global partner roundtables in Nigeria.
- Built and launched the first phase of a multi-phase online Center of Excellence for a growing global network of parliamentary and civil society roundtables and forums.

- ***Country Specific Campaigns***

In line with the Wilberforce model of top-down and bottom-up engagement, we initiate collaborative campaigns or join partner initiatives in various countries around the world to spur policy changes, empower communities, and connect the persecuted with resources. Our campaigns include advocacy work for religious prisoners of conscience, support for specific legislation or government actions, and empowering other advocates with advocacy training and technology to multiply their impact. For examples of these campaigns, visit <https://21wfreedom.center/campaigns>.

Program Area 2: Mobilize, Train, and Equip

21Wilberforce helps organizations build capacity for effective action and trains individuals to be advocates and leaders of transformative change.

Developing Collaborative Partnerships, Coalitions, and Local Initiatives

- ***Global Defenders Network (GDN)***

As of mid-2022, 21Wilberforce initiated and began building a Global Defenders Network (GDN) of individuals and human rights organizations that work together to defend victims of laws that violate freedom of religion and belief (FoRB) and that seek to reform the laws and systems that have led to these violations.

Initially, GDN's first phase will focus on providing training, mentoring, and professional development to a group of young lawyers in one nation, Nigeria, that are committed to serving as FoRB and human rights

defenders and advocates. During Phase II, GDN will gradually scale up to work with other young lawyers in Nigeria, incorporating lessons learned in Phase I. During Phase III, GDN will introduce this program in several other countries, always working with local partners. Phases II and III will reflect lessons learned in earlier phases to significantly increase the number of FoRB/human rights legal advocates in targeted countries. These advocates will bring to this effort diverse ethno-religious backgrounds who are committed to working collaboratively with those with other backgrounds.

- ***2022 and 2021 Annual International Religious Freedom National Summit (Washington, DC)***

In both 2021 and 2022, 21Wilberforce served on the Executive Steering Committee and Co-chaired the team developing the Young Leaders/Religious Prisoner of Conscience Track and training workshops for 1,000 plus-attendee event (irfsummit.com). Advising development of global youth leader network.

- ***FoRB Women's Alliance***

In early Fall 2022, 21Wilberforce began serving as the nonprofit host for the newly formed FoRB Women's Alliance (forbwomen.org), a global community of religious freedom and human rights advocates and future leaders with a shared vision: advancing freedom of religion or belief for women.

- ***U.S. and UK-sponsored Annual Global Ministerial to Advance International Religious Freedom***

For three past years, 21Wilberforce designed an online event management platform and helped coordinate logistics for nearly 100 civil society events for each of two U.S. State Department sponsored annual global religious freedom ministerials in Washington, D.C. (2018, 2019) as well as the third annual online/virtual global ministerial for government officials and civil society hosted by the Government of Poland (2020). (state.gov/ministerial-to-advance-religious-freedom/)

Training & Equipping Leaders

- ***Impact Leadership Training***

In April 2022 21Wilberforce conducted a conference/training in Texas for pastors and faith leaders, an example of our efforts to provide leadership training, education, and resources to prepare these leaders to serve their communities as champions and change agents for religious freedom and justice. During July 2022, 21Wilberforce conducted a similar training conference at the Annual Global Baptist World Alliance Gathering at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama.

- ***Timothy Program (for Baptist Emerging Leaders)***

In June 2022, 21Wilberforce launched a 3-year training program for a select group of young Christian Baptist men and women from each of the global regions, with the program officially beginning with the BWA Annual Gathering in Birmingham, Alabama in July of 2022 and concluding at the BWA Congress in Australia the summer of 2025. The purpose of the cohort is to provide close mentorship of this core group of young adults who will serve as leaders and are equipped to advocate for religious freedom in their regions.

- ***Leadership Learning Lab/FoRB Academy***

In 2022, 21Wilberforce is re-organizing and expanding its leadership and advocacy training programs into an integrated Leadership Learning Lab. To support these programs, 21Wilberforce is currently building an online FoRB Academy for active learning focused on incubating and accelerating innovative global human rights/FoRB initiatives.

- ***Emerging Leaders Network - Global FoRB Action Summit***

In November 2021, 21Wilberforce convened university-level student and young professional leaders from around the world to learn from leading practitioners as they worked together to develop multifaith advocacy and political action campaigns on behalf of selected prisoners of conscience. (<https://21wfreedom.center/young-leaders-summit/>)

- ***Global Leadership Fellows and Associates***

Two in-house mentoring and training programs for 21Wilberforce are the Global Leaders Fellows Program and the 21Wilberforce Associate Program. The Fellows Program is a post-university, one-year mentored apprenticeship and training program that provides selected individuals with “in-the-field” engagement to gain the knowledge and experience in the tasks, structures, processes, and collaboration essential to advancing global religious freedom.

Throughout the year 21Wilberforce engages college and graduate students as mentored Associates in an immersive intern apprenticeship that provides “in-the-field” education and training on tasks, structures, processes, and collaboration essential to advancing global religious freedom.

Program Area 3: Strategic Communications

21Wilberforce uses strategic platforms and products to communicate with multiple external audiences for critical awareness and informed decision making. In 2022 the team has accomplished the following.

- ***IRF (International Religious Freedom) Congressional Scorecard***

In mid-2023, 21Wilberforce will publish its 5th annual IRF Congressional Scorecard (irfscorecard.org). This tool seeks to increase Congressional awareness of international religious freedom issues, encourage legislators to take even bolder actions in support of this freedom, and provide citizens with a nonpartisan, concise summary of public actions taken by Congress on issues related to international religious freedom. The Scorecard highlights the voting records of members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives for bills, resolutions, and amendments that support international religious freedom. It also tracks sponsorship and co-sponsorship of bills and membership in international religious freedom-related caucuses.

21Wilberforce is currently working to further develop and automate this Scorecard tool.

- ***Global Religious Freedom (GRF) Data Spectrum: Comparative Perspectives and Data Analysis by Region and Country***

In 2022 21Wilberforce continued development of the Global Religious Freedom (GRF) Data Spectrum project that it officially launched in the Fall of 2021 in partnership with George Washington University’s Loeb Institute for Religious Freedom. This initiative provides the FoRB community, analysts, and political decision makers with a comparative framework for viewing geospatial data and analytical perspectives from a wide range of politically and socially diverse organizations that evaluate and rank countries according to criteria related to freedoms and restrictions.

In April 2022 21Wilberforce highlighted the initiative in a panel discussion on “Measuring Religious Liberty Domestically and Globally: Challenges and Opportunities” at Calvin University’s Eleventh Biennial Henry Institute Symposium on Religion and Public Life.

- ***21Wilberforce Online Freedom Center***

The principal component of 21Wilberforce’s integrated resource framework is the Online Freedom Center ([21wfreedom.center](https://21wilberforce.org/online-freedom-center/)). Developed and hosted by 21Wilberforce, this online platform is designed for activists, legislators, faith leaders, and those who want to put their faith into action. This flagship online platform informs and prepares stakeholders to take effective action with a curated library of resources, training and education platforms, and online action tools. This powerful resource helps users inform stakeholders, makes their voice heard, and allows them to actively make a difference in a seamless experience.

- ***Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Award***

21Wilberforce annually presents the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom (IRF) Award to an outstanding role-model and leader that has significantly advanced global religious freedom. This annual award is named after former Congressman Wolf, one of 21Wilberforce's founders and a decades-long champion in Congress for religious freedom, and after whom the U.S. 's landmark 1988 International Religious Freedom Act was named and then signed into law. (<https://21wilberforce.org/award/>)

- ***Speak Freedom Alert***

This newsletter highlights critical current events and makes freedom of belief and persecution relevant to over 3,800 people each week. (<https://21wilberforce.org/category/alerts/>)

- ***WAVA***

21Wilberforce joins the Don Kroah Show on the WAVA 105.1 FM radio station every Monday at 5:15pm to speak about pressing cases of persecution and inform the audience about religious freedom development in key countries. We have reached over 1 million people through these interviews.

- ***IRF Retrospective***

The International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) — landmark legislation signed into law in the fall of 1998 — has been a driver of considerable human rights initiatives for two decades. To mark the 20th anniversary of the act, 21Wilberforce researched and produced a retrospective featuring reflections from IRF participants and a timeline of the collaborative efforts that ensued to integrate international religious freedom within U.S. foreign policy. Referenced by academics and practitioners worldwide, this educational resource is being used in universities and government training programs as a valuable case study and reference tool. (<https://21wilberforce.org/reports-data/#irfa-anniversary>)

- ***21Wilberforce Website***

21Wilberforce maintains its own organizational website (21wilberforce.org) that provides information about the organization, its projects and programs, and current news and alerts.