

A Review of Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein's comments at the Global Faith Forum

By Marianna Richardson

At the Global Faith Forum, Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein, one of the founders of the organization, emphasized the interconnectedness of democracy, human rights, and religious freedom. He highlighted the decline of democracy and the rise of authoritarian regimes since 2006, noting that these trends often lead to increased restrictions on religious freedom. Saperstein argued that religious freedom is essential for the exercise of other human rights and vice versa.

Current Religious Freedom Crises

He pointed out the persecution faced by religious minorities in various countries, including the Uyghurs in China, Buddhists and Christians in Myanmar, and Muslims in India. Saperstein described how authoritarian governments and non-state actors use religious discrimination to maintain control, often targeting minority groups for persecution.

He also mentioned the humanitarian crisis in Sudan, where recent conflicts have displaced millions and worsened living conditions. Saperstein criticized the U.S. for withdrawing from its historic leadership role in promoting democracy and human rights, leaving a vacuum filled by destabilizing forces from countries like China and Russia.

Saperstein called for a renewed commitment to religious freedom and human rights, urging religious communities to work together to support peacebuilding and social service efforts. He stressed that the decisions made in the coming years will significantly impact the future of humanity, and it is crucial to use technology and resources wisely to promote peace and protect the environment for future generations.

Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein emphasized the critical role of religious freedom in enhancing democracy and ensuring justice. He highlighted the moral responsibility to use advancements, such as AI and genetic engineering, for the betterment of humanity. Rabbi Saperstein pointed out that we live in a time where we can feed, educate, and lift every person out of poverty. However, failing to do so reflects a lack of moral vision and political will.

The Future of Religious Freedom

Rabbi Saperstein stressed that the decisions made today will significantly impact future generations. The moral question of "what should we do" is the fundamental challenge facing humanity. Religious communities worldwide must urgently address this question, guided by their history, values, and moral conscience.

He noted that the current generation is the first in history capable of adequately feeding every human being on earth. Yet, the failure to achieve this is a failure of moral vision and political will. He also highlighted the importance of educating every child, lifting people out of poverty, and undoing environmental damage.

In his 50 years of religious and moral advocacy, Rabbi Saperstein learned that it is up to individuals and communities to decide whether to be passive observers or active authors of these crucial decisions. He urged people not to remain silent, as silence allows voices that do not share our values to dominate.

Quoting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rabbi Saperstein emphasized the "fierce urgency of now" and the need to act promptly for the sake of future generations. He concluded with a call to be the shapers of a better and more hopeful future for all of God's children, hoping this would be the legacy of their efforts.