

November 11, 2011

Thorbjørn Jagland  
Chairman  
Nobel Prize Committee  
Henrik Ibsens gate 51  
0255 OSLO

Dear Chairman Jagland and Nobel Peace Prize Committee Members:

Michael L. “Mikey” Weinstein understands that religious discrimination and harassment within the ranks of the U.S. military is far from a marginal issue or isolated problem, and it was the shocking realization of just how deeply ingrained and widespread this problem is that led him to found the Military Religious Freedom Foundation in 2005. As a Jewish-American honor graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Mr. Weinstein’s own experiences were not free from the bitter experience of persecution. However, Weinstein had not expected that his sons, also Jewish cadets, and his now daughter-in-law, a Christian cadet, would experience the same environment at the Academy, tainted as it is by religious coercion and sectarian bigotry. After some investigation, Mikey Weinstein soon realized that only a fearlessly direct and aggressive approach would be effective in addressing the deeply-rooted and all-too-prevalent culture of religious extremism within the strongest armed body on the planet: the U.S. Military.

The initial tasks of the Foundation entailed the protection of the civil rights of servicemembers within the U.S. military. However, it soon became obvious that men and women in uniform were not the only victims of the fundamentalist Christian encroachment upon military matters. Indeed, proselytization towards the war-blighted, majority-Muslim peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan had spread like an epidemic, with churches, religious organizations, private military contractors, and U.S. military personnel taking up the task of evangelizing, while military authorities, rather than curtailing these sometimes illegal activities, encouraged them by providing direct aid and support. In the midst of a “Global War on Terror,” gatherings of U.S. troops soon began to resemble Big Tent Revival Church meetings, and various means of mass indoctrination were introduced for the purpose of consolidating a uniform fundamentalist Christian religiosity, repurposing the U.S. military as an evangelical mission. The mission at hand, for all too many U.S. servicemembers, became combat against the Islamic faith itself, and the weapon of choice became proselytization for the purpose of conversion and the “salvation of souls.”

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the United States has made unprecedented attempts towards practicing dialogue for the purpose of building bridges between civilizations and securing worldwide peaceful coexistence. However, pacific approaches toward conflict resolution are largely negated by loud claims that equate the conventional

and nuclear arsenal of the United States military with the “soul-saving” tools of fundamentalist Christianity. Only the most deluded hypocrite can claim that they are fighting the influence of religious extremism and politicized, belligerent religious fervor abroad while actively practicing it themselves. It is precisely these dangerously nationalistic Christian-militarist “Crusader” tendencies within the U.S. armed forces that MRFF continually and aggressively fights against.

In January 2010, MRFF’s exposure of U.S. military rifle sights containing coded New Testament references created an international media firestorm, due to the fact that our soldiers were operating in Muslim nations and training Muslim soldiers with weapons proclaiming Jesus to be the “light of the world.” This “Jesus Rifles” story ultimately resulted in the manufacturer’s distribution of modification kits throughout the military to remove the Bible verses. More recently, in July 2011, MRFF publicly exposed the fact that the U.S. Air Force’s mandatory Nuclear Ethics and Nuclear Warfare training for young missile officers included passages from the New Testament and religious commentary from a former officer of the Nazi Party’s SS paramilitary organization. As a result of this disclosure, the Nuclear Ethics and Nuclear Warfare training “has been taken out of the curriculum and is being reviewed,” according to David Smith, chief of public affairs of Air Education and Training Command at Randolph Air Force Base in Texas. Subsequent to this action, on August 14, 2011, the *Air Force Times* reported that the Air Force was reviewing all training materials related to ethics, core values and character development after more Christian-themed course work surfaced.

Since MRFF’s founding, over 25,000 active duty United States marines, soldiers, sailors, airmen, veterans, and civilian personnel have contacted the foundation or retained its services. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority (approximately 96%) have been Christians – both Catholic and Protestant – who have been persecuted for not being the “right kind” of Fundamentalist Evangelical Christian. Fundamentalist Christians in positions of power have regularly abused their positions to bully Catholic subordinates who, in their words, belong to a “false church,” and have excoriated mainline Protestants as practicing allegiance to “false Christianity.” MRFF has also devoted a significant amount of resources towards the representation of clients of the Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Earth-centered faiths (among other faith groups), in addition to servicemembers of atheist and agnostic convictions.

Traumatic stress is a common consequence of the experiences that many servicemembers undergo when serving in theaters of war, and the pernicious culture of religious persecution that exists within the echelons of the U.S. military has only exacerbated the trauma of military service. The military’s official channels of redress via the chain of command have proven themselves, time after time, to be ineffective, as these chains of command include the victimizers themselves. Contrary to disdainful claims that the Military Religious Freedom Foundation exists solely for the purpose of advancing a domineering “ultra-secularism” within the military, clients have hailed MRFF as the

lifeline that lifted the weight of shame and spiritual torment from their shoulders in their hour of need, when they had nowhere else to turn.

The strenuous labor of the Foundation has received warm support from organizations committed to upholding secular principles, including Veterans for Common Sense, and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. MRFF has also received strong endorsements from religious organizations including the Interfaith Freedom Foundation, the Columbus Jewish Foundation, the California Council of Churches IMPACT, and the Interfaith Alliance, as well as many other Muslim-American and Jewish organizations.

Mr. Weinstein has carried out his helmsmanship of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation at the risk of life, limb, and loved ones; he and his family regularly receive death threats and have undergone their own traumatic experiences of victimization. Such attacks have included, but are not limited to: the placement of slaughtered animals on his front porch, the shooting out of windows of their home, and the mass distribution of imprecatory prayers calling for the deaths of Mikey, his family, and ten generations of his descendents. Swastika-and-cross vandalism, par for the course of American ultra-nationalism and Christian extremism, has been committed against the Weinstein home on numerous occasions.

Mr. Weinstein has received numerous honors for his leadership of MRFF and the ongoing effort to advance its vital humanitarian and civil rights cause. The foremost Jewish publication, *The Forward*, named Weinstein one of 2006's "Forward 50" for his contributions in the sphere of "Ideas & Activism." For his selfless pursuit of justice, Weinstein received the prestigious honor of the Jews for Racial and Economic Justice's Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer Risk-Taker Award in 2008. In 2010, Weinstein received the Anne Froehlich Political Courage Award from the Pacific Palisades Democratic Club in Los Angeles, California, joining the prestigious ranks of past awardees such as Ambassador Joseph Wilson IV, former talk show host Phil Donahue, and Daniel Ellsberg. In 2010 and 2011, MRFF received nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize. Crowning Mr. Weinstein's list of honors, in November 2011 he received the inaugural "Person of the Year" award from Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The ongoing critical efforts of MRFF have earned this acclaimed civil rights organization, the only such organization dealing solely with issues of religious freedom in the military, a deeply profound admiration from many officials and officers within the commanding ranks of the United States military, as well as the respect and moral support of their colleagues and counterparts in military and civilian governing circles abroad.

MRFF efforts have proven key to the establishment and maintenance of vital lines of communication with those whose influence, authority, and ability have allowed them to enact and enforce the policies necessary to address the brutal and systemic civil rights

violations which take place within the U.S. military. One example of the fruit of MRFF's efforts came in the form of an official watershed edict on September 1, 2011 by U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton A. Schwartz, underscoring a newfound commitment by the top Air Force official to religious neutrality. Additionally, lines of communication established with influential members of the armed forces' chain of command have allowed MRFF to play a decisive role in addressing the very real problems resulting from the commanding ranks being infected by prevalent fundamentalist Christian currents. MRFF's work is a direct challenge to the perverse notion of a revival of the medieval Crusades, and in this sense the Foundation is fighting for the protection and reinforcement of long-established norms stipulated by national and international humanitarian law, to prevent any future return to the sectarian bloodbaths of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In consideration of the numerous accomplishments and important ongoing work of this organization to ensure the basic human right of religious freedom in the United States Armed Forces, both domestically and in all nations where they are present, it is my honor and privilege to hereby submit my nomination of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation for the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize.

Sincerely,

[Name Redacted]

[Title Redacted]