

Clinton defends religious freedom envoy

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton defended her new ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom on Thursday (June 2), calling the Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook a bridge-builder who is right for the job.

Speaking at Cook's ceremonial swearing-in, Clinton cited Cook's firsts as an African-American Baptist minister and New York police chaplain, as well as her involvement in international activities.

"She is going to demonstrate every single day why she is the person for this job at this time," Clinton said. "To many, she is more than a minister, more than a spiritual leader, although she is certainly that. She is a passionate advocate for the God-given rights of people everywhere, no matter which god they believe gave them those rights in the first place."

Clinton called Cook's swearing-in "a long time coming" after a lengthy confirmation process as some critics questioned Cook's qualifications. Her nomination a year ago stalled in the Senate; she was renominated in February and confirmed in April.

The Baptist minister known as "Dr. Sujay" was cheered by an interfaith crowd of about 300 inside the State Department's ornate Benjamin Franklin Room, including Jewish and Muslim leaders and members from the Bronx Christian Fellowship Church that she founded in 1996.

"In this era of globalization and democratic uprisings, the values of religious freedom and respect are more important than ever," Cook said, "because religious freedom provides a cornerstone for every healthy society."