

**REVIEW OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN
PROTECTING INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

OCTOBER 11, 2017

Serial No. 115-61

Printed for the use of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.fdsys.gov>
<http://oversight.house.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

30-292 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2018

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REVIEW OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN PROTECTING INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Wednesday, October 11, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY,
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM,
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:02 a.m., in Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ron DeSantis [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives DeSantis, Russell, Duncan, Foxx, Hice, Comer, Lynch, Demings, Welch, and Gomez.

Also Present: Representatives Gowdy and Palmer.

Mr. DESANTIS. The Subcommittee on National Security would come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

The right to practice your religion freely is one of the cornerstone freedoms we have in our country. In fact, demonstrating its importance, freedom of religion is in the very first amendment of the Bill of Rights in our Constitution. Other countries take a narrower view of freedom of religion. Some impose an official religion, while others actively persecute those practicing a disfavored religion.

We are pleased to have here today witnesses from the State Department; the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent, bipartisan government agency charged with monitoring the religious environment overseas; the president of Religious Freedom Institute; and a witness from the nonprofit group Human Rights First.

In the State Department's most recent annual report on international religious freedom, the Department noted the U.S. Government promotes religious freedom because countries that effectively safeguard this human right are more stable, economically vibrant, and peaceful. The failure of governments to protect these rights breeds instability, terrorism, and violence.

Looking at countries with more restrictive religious practices, one sees that many of them have significant national security concerns. One commentator, a former high-level State Department and NSC official, surveyed a number of conflicts in U.S. history and noted, quote, "Including World War II, every major war the United States has fought over the past 70 years has been against an enemy that also violated religious freedom." As examples, he pointed to Nazi

Germany, North Korea, North Vietnam, and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, as well as other sub-war conflicts, including the Cold War standoff with Soviet communism. The subcommittee is interested in hearing about the correlation between national security risks and restrictions on the freedom of religion abroad.

We had a hearing on this issue in 2014, and there have been some developments since then. Just last December, Congress overwhelmingly passed the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act. That law amended the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, which made clear that international religious freedom is a national security issue.

The Wolf Act contemplates using a whole-of-government approach, including our national security agencies, to encourage religious freedom abroad. One way we can do this is already enshrined in Federal law: allowing the denial of a visa to come into the United States for a foreign government official responsible for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

To help Congress and the American people better understand religious freedom abroad, both the State Department and USCIRF produce annual reports discussing countries' levels of religious freedom. By law, State is required to designate countries of particular concern. State's deadline this year is in mid-November, and I'm eager to see which countries are designated.

The report listed countries of particular concern, but it also listed terrorist entities like the Islamic State, the Taliban, and Al Shabaab. It goes without saying that those enemies are hostile to the free exercise of religion and pose national security risks to the American people.

Looking at the USCIRF list of countries of particular concern, there are a number of which are potential national security threats, including China, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, and Syria, among others.

To help the United States' mission to enable religious freedom worldwide, the International Religious Freedom Act required the appointment of a Senate-confirmed ambassador. President Trump nominated former Senator and current Governor of Kansas Sam Brownback for the position, and he has had his confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee just last week.

As this subcommittee discussed during the 2014 hearing, the ambassador position sat vacant for extended stretches during the Obama administration. It is important that the Senate move quickly to confirm Governor Brownback. The world must know that the United States takes its role seriously as a world leader in promoting religious freedom.

Testifying today from the State Department is Ambassador Michael Kozak, Senior Advisor for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Also testifying is Kristina Arriaga, who serves as Vice Chair on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Joining us, as well, is Professor Thomas Farr, who is president of the Religious Freedom Institute, the director of the Religious Freedom Research Project at Georgetown University, and associate professor of the practice of religion at Georgetown School of Foreign Service. Finally, we have Rod Berschinski, a senior vice president of policy at Human Rights First.

I want to thank the witnesses for their attendance. I look forward to your testimony today.

And, at this point, I'd like to recognize the ranking member of the subcommittee, Mr. Lynch, for his opening statement.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank you for holding this hearing to examine the progress of U.S. Government efforts to promote international religious freedom.

I'd also like to welcome and thank our panel of witnesses this morning for its willingness to come and help this committee with its work.

The U.S. framework to address international religious persecution is based on our shared commitment to advancing religious freedom as a fundamental and inalienable human right.

It also recognizes that the protection of religious freedom abroad is critical to our national security. As recently stated by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson—this is a quote—“Where religious freedom is not protected, we know that instability, human rights abuses, and violent extremism have a greater opportunity to take root,” close quote.

Similarly, the independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom underscores that religious freedom is a vital element of national security and critical to ensuring a more peaceful, prosperous, and stable world.

In furtherance of these objectives, the Office of International Religious Freedom at the State Department monitors religious persecution and discrimination worldwide and releases an annual report detailing the status of international freedom in each country. The office also identifies—and this is a particular term to the study—countries of particular concern for subsequent designation by the Secretary of State given their severe violations of religious freedom.

In announcing the first annual report on religious freedom issued under the Trump administration in August of 2017, Secretary Tillerson highlighted the particular threat posed by the terrorist group known as ISIS as a result of its genocidal activities targeting Yazidis, Christians, Shia Muslims, and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq and Syria. This latest report also notes that 10 nations were rightfully designated as countries of particular concern—those have been listed by my colleague, the chairman—in October of 2016, including, again, North Korea, Iran, China, Saudi Arabia—excuse me—and Saudi Arabia.

As the State Department continues its work to identify countries of particular concern for 2017, the Office of International Religious Freedom should coordinate with the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. Congress has statutorily authorized this bipartisan and independent commission to conduct its own oversight in this area and develop policy recommendations to further inform the State Department's designation process.

Importantly, the Commission has strongly recommended that the State Department add six countries to its list for 2017 due to their perpetration and/or tolerance of systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom.

Chief among these additional countries is Russia. This year, in fact, marks the first time that the Commission has recommended Russia as a country of particular concern, in light of its continued

religious freedom violations in the Russian mainland as well as activities in Ukraine and Crimea. According to the Commission's 2017 annual report, Russia presents a unique case in religious persecution, as the sole state to have not only continually intensified its repression of religious freedom but also to have expanded its repressive policies to the territories of a neighboring state by means of military invasion and occupation.

The repressive policies implemented by the Russian Government include administrative harassment, arbitrary imprisonment, and extrajudicial killing, as well as the enactment of new laws in 2016 that criminalize all non-government-sanctioned private religious speech.

Moreover, the Russian Supreme Court recently upheld a Justice Ministry order calling for the liquidation of the Jehovah's Witnesses denomination and prohibiting its operations as a so-called extremist organization. Russian security forces also continue to subject minority Muslim groups to fabricated terrorism charges, kidnappings, and disappearances.

I strongly believe that the State Department should accept the Commission's recommendation and add Russia to the designation list.

Reports of religious persecution and intolerance in Russia are not at all surprising, considering the impunity with which the Russian Government continues to conduct itself on the world stage. In January of 2017, our Nation's intelligence community issued an unclassified and unprecedented high-confidence assessment that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign aimed at the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. This malicious campaign included cyber breaches and other covert intelligence operations, as well as nefarious efforts undertaken by Russian Government agencies, state-sanctioned media, and even paid social-media users to spread Russian-desired messaging and to interfere in the election.

To date, our committee has not held a hearing to examine that intelligence-community-wide assessment that Russia attempted to undermine our national security and compromise the very foundation of our democratic process.

And, in closing, I just want to say that I am very happy that the name of Frank Wolf was resurrected in today's hearing. I had a wonderful part of my tenure serving with Frank Wolf, and I know he represented the 10th Congressional District in Virginia. It is great that we're carrying on the work of such a great champion of religious freedom.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to discussing these and other issues with today's witnesses, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DESANTIS. I thank the ranking member.

I have introduced the witnesses in my opening statement, but, just for the record, we do have Ambassador Kozak, we have Kristina Arriaga, we have Dr. Farr, and we have Mr. Berschinski.

So we appreciate you all being here. Thank you.

Pursuant to committee rules, all witnesses will be sworn in before they testify. So if you could all please rise, raise your right hand.

Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you're about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Thank you. Please be seated.

All witnesses answered in the affirmative.

In order to allow time for discussion, please limit your testimony to 5 minutes. Your entire written statement will be made a part of the record. As a reminder, the clock in front of you shows your remaining time. The light will turn yellow when you have 30 seconds left and red when your time is up. Please also remember to press the button to turn your microphone on before speaking.

And, with that, I would like to recognize Ambassador Kozak for 5 minutes.

WITNESS STATEMENTS

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MICHAEL G. KOZAK

Mr. KOZAK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For you and members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing to focus attention on international religious freedom—a cherished American value, a universal human right, and a Trump administration foreign policy priority.

As you mentioned, President Trump has nominated Governor Brownback to be the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. Amongst his other accomplishments, he's coauthored two books on the subject and, as Senator, was a key sponsor of the International Religious Freedom Act. We could not ask for a more distinguished nominee.

President Trump has stated that the United States looks forward to a day when people of all faiths—Christians and Muslims and Jewish and Hindu—can follow their hearts and worship according to their conscience. Vice President Pence has said, under President Trump, America will continue to stand for religious freedom of all people of all faiths across the world.

In August, Secretary Tillerson mentioned that conditions in many parts of the world are far from ideal. As was mentioned, he stated that ISIS is clearly responsible for genocide against Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims and is responsible for crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

United States efforts to help include our leadership of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Coalition-backed forces have liberated more than three-quarters of the territory ISIS once controlled in Iraq and about two-thirds of the territory it once controlled in Syria. ISIS has not regained control of any of this territory due in part to the Coalition's work to stabilize liberated communities.

But more robust steps must be taken in coming months so that Iraq's religious minority communities can provide for their own security. We continue to support the Iraqi Government's efforts to enhance local government and establish local security forces.

Stabilization projects in Iraq include minorities ISIS targeted for genocide. In Sinjar District, a predominantly Yazidi area, the U.N. Development Programme has completed the rehabilitation of the Sinouni hospital and primary health clinic, seven schools, and seven water wellheads and pumps, and has more projects planned

for later this year. In the historic Christian town of Bartella, trained explosive ordnance disposal teams have cleared schools, medical facilities, and other key infrastructure.

These efforts are setting up conditions for displaced people to voluntarily return to their home. We will ensure stabilization assistance reaches all liberated areas as quickly as possible.

Our bureau is working on programs that empower minorities to advocate on issues such as key pieces of legislation. Programs also promote stabilization efforts, more equitable and representative political participation, and access to services and governance structures. These programs engage the majority as well as minority communities, recognizing that preservation of ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq cannot be sustained without support and understanding of their value within mainstream Iraqi society.

Another global concern is our work to reform discriminatory laws that deprive many of their ability to exercise their religious belief. Iran, for example, has 20 individuals executed in 2016 on charges that included waging war against God. Members of the Baha'i community are in prison for abiding their beliefs.

In Saudi Arabia, the government does not recognize the right of non-Muslims to practice their religion in public and has used prison sentences, lashings, fines for apostasy, atheism, blasphemy, and insulting the state's interpretation of Islam.

In Turkey, non-Sunni Muslims face discrimination and violence. The United States continues to advocate for the immediate release of Pastor Andrew Brunson, who has been wrongfully imprisoned there.

In Bahrain, the government continued to target Shia clerics, and members of the community were discriminated against in government employment, education, and the justice system.

In China, the government tortures, detains, and imprisons thousands for practicing their religious beliefs.

In Pakistan, two dozen people are on death row or life imprisonment for blasphemy.

And, in Sudan, the government arrests and intimidates clergy.

We appreciate the committee raising the connection between the state of international religious freedom and America's national security. Our efforts to defend religion, in brief, is in our national interest. Places where religious freedom is denied, left unattended, can become full-blown security crises with effects far beyond their immediate neighborhoods. Mass migration caused by persecution can be destabilizing. And resentment borne of discrimination and persecution for one's faith can create a fertile ground for radicalization to violence and terrorist recruitment.

In closing, I would note that the International Religious Freedom Act calls on our government to stand for liberty and stand with the persecuted, to use and implement appropriate tools in the United States foreign policy apparatus, including diplomatic, commercial, charitable, educational, and cultural channels, to promote respect for religious freedom by all.

We appreciate that these issues have always had strong bipartisan support, and we want to work closely with Congress to help persecuted minorities. Thank you again for holding this hearing to review the U.S. role in protecting international religious freedom.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Kozak follows:]

**Testimony of
Ambassador Michael Kozak
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
Before the
Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security
October 11, 2017**

Chairman DeSantis and Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing to focus attention on international religious freedom, a cherished American value, a universal human right, and a Trump Administration foreign policy priority.

As you know, President Trump has nominated Governor Sam Brownback of Kansas to be the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on the nomination last week. Governor Brownback is the highest ranking government official ever to be nominated for this important post, and he brings great commitment and experience. He has co-authored two books on the subject, and as a Senator was a key sponsor of the *International Religious Freedom Act*. We could not ask for a more distinguished nominee.

President Trump has stated that the United States looks forward to a day when, *“people of all faiths, Christians and Muslims and Jewish and Hindu, can follow their hearts and worship according to their conscience.”* And Vice-President Pence has said, *“Since the founding of our nation, America has stood for the proposition that the right to believe and the right to act on one’s beliefs is the right of all peoples at all times....Under President Trump, America will continue to stand for religious freedom of all people, of all faiths, across the world.”*

In August, when Secretary Tillerson released the 2016 International Religious Freedom Report, he noted that almost twenty years after the passage of the International Religious Freedom Act *“conditions in many parts of the world are far from ideal.”* Secretary Tillerson said that we cannot ignore these conditions, and then emphasized that, *“ISIS is clearly responsible for genocide against Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims in areas it controls or has controlled. ISIS is also responsible for crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing directed at these same groups, and in some cases against Sunni Muslims, Kurds, and other minorities.”*

United States efforts to help members of minority religious communities are broad, and include our leadership of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. To date, Coalition-backed forces have liberated more than three quarters of the territory ISIS once controlled in Iraq, as well as about two thirds of the territory it once controlled in Syria. ISIS has not regained control of any of this territory due in part to the Coalition’s work to stabilize liberated communities.

Religious minorities face a critical moment and we understand the gravity of the situation, one in which Iraq’s historic diversity risks disappearing. Robust steps must be taken in the coming months so Iraq’s religious minority communities can provide for their own security. We continue to support the Iraqi government’s efforts to enhance local governance and establish local security

forces and to eventually incorporate these local forces into law enforcement agencies to meet local security requirements as Iraq transitions from major combat operations against ISIS.

We are committed to ensuring that stabilization projects in Iraq remain inclusive of all communities in need, including minorities ISIS targeted for genocide and who have historically experienced discrimination and marginalization. In Sinjar district, a predominantly Yazidi area, UNDP has completed the rehabilitation of the Sinuni Hospital and the primary health clinic, seven schools, and seven water wellheads and pumps, and has more projects planned for later this year. Additionally, the Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs and our Coalition partners support the removal of explosive remnants of war in areas liberated from ISIS control. In the historic Christian town of Bartallah, trained explosive ordnance disposal teams have cleared schools, medical facilities, and other key infrastructure. These efforts – and many more like them – are helping set the conditions for displaced persons to voluntarily return to their homes, but there remains much to do. We will continue to work with UNDP to ensure stabilization assistance reaches all liberated areas as quickly as possible, including minority communities in the Ninewa Plains.

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor supports minority communities in Iraq through programs that empower minorities and civil society groups to advocate on issues that impact minority communities, such as key pieces of legislation. Additionally, programs seek to promote greater inclusiveness of minorities within Iraq society through reconciliation and stabilization efforts; more equitable and representative political participation; and access to services and governance structures. These programs engage the mainstream community as well as minority communities, recognizing that preservation of ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq cannot be sustained without support and understanding of their value within mainstream Iraqi society.

Another global concern is our work to reform discriminatory laws that deprive many of their ability to freely exercise their religious beliefs. The 2016 International Religious Freedom Report makes clear that many governments around the world use discriminatory laws to deny those within their borders freedom of religion or belief. For example, in Iran, Baha'is, Christians, and members of other religious minorities are targeted for their faith. Iran continues to sentence individuals to death under vague apostasy laws – 20 individuals were executed in 2016 on charges that included “waging war against God.” Members of the Baha'i community are in prison today simply for abiding by their beliefs.

In Saudi Arabia, we remain concerned about the state of religious freedom. The government does not recognize the right of non-Muslims to practice their religion in public and has applied criminal penalties, including prison sentences, lashings, and fines, for apostasy, atheism, blasphemy, and insulting the state's interpretation of Islam. Of particular concern are attacks targeting Shia Muslims, and the continued pattern of social prejudice and discrimination against them. We urge Saudi Arabia to embrace greater protection for religious freedom for all.

In Turkey, authorities continued to limit the human rights of members of some religious minority groups, and some communities continue to experience protracted property disputes. Non-Sunni Muslims, such as Alevi Muslims, do not receive the same governmental protections as those

enjoyed by recognized non-Muslim minorities and have faced discrimination and violence. Additionally, the United States continues to advocate for the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson, who has been imprisoned in Turkey, exactly one year as of October 7.

In Bahrain, the government continued to target Shia clerics, community members, and opposition politicians with questioning, detentions, and arrests. Members of the Shia community there continue to report ongoing discrimination in government employment, education, and the justice system. The Secretary of State, Ambassador and other senior officials have met with government officials to urge them to implement fully the Independent Commission of Inquiry's recommendations on the reconstruction of places of worship; to respect freedom of expression for clerics; to ensure Shia had equal access to employment and services; to pursue reconciliation between the government and Shia communities; and to further empower the human rights ombudsman to engage with the government in support of the right of prisoners to practice their religions.

In Burma, Muslims, Christians, and members of other religious minority communities continue to report physical abuse, arbitrary arrest, and detention on account of their religious beliefs by security forces in areas of violent conflict. Rohingya Muslims face particularly harsh treatment, including severe restrictions on freedom of movement and access to citizenship, and coercive population control measures, including forced abortion. In the last two months, we have seen horrific reports of security forces razing Rohingya villages and committing grave human rights violations against Rohingya men, women, and children. Roughly 509,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh, and more continue to arrive each day. Over half of Burma's Rohingya population has now been forcibly displaced.

In China, the government tortures, detains, and imprisons thousands for practicing their religious beliefs. The government has instituted harsh new policies restricting Uighur Muslims' and Tibetan Buddhists' religious expression and practice, detained unknown numbers of Uighurs and Tibetans for their religious beliefs, and demolished or appropriated centers of worship throughout the country. Members of unregistered Christian "house churches" face harassment, detention, and imprisonment for their unapproved religious activities, and for their refusal to join state-sanctioned churches. Falun Gong practitioners have also been singled out for harsh treatment and detention.

In Pakistan, more than two dozen people are on death row or serving a life imprisonment for blasphemy. Human rights organizations continue to express concerns regarding the marginalization of Ahmadiyya Muslims. We have urged the government to protect the human rights of members of religious minorities.

In Sudan the government arrests, detains, and intimidates clergy and church members. It denies frequently permits for the construction of new churches and is closing or demolishing certain existing ones. We have provided the Government of Sudan recommendations for how to concretely improve observance of religious freedom and urge them to take concrete steps to that end.

We appreciate this Committee for raising the connection between the state of international religious freedom worldwide and America's national security. While the moral imperative to promote religious freedom around the world is clear, our efforts to defend freedom of religion or belief for all people is directly in our national interest. When we look at all of the places in which religious freedom is denied around the globe, it is not difficult to conclude that left unattended these situations can become full blown security crises with effects far beyond their immediate neighborhoods. Mass migration caused by persecution or violence against individuals based on their religion can be destabilizing to both the countries of origin and resettlement, and resentment born of discrimination and persecution for one's faith can create a fertile ground for radicalization to violence and terrorist recruitment. By using our diplomacy to address these problems before they become security crises, we improve the security of our own country and that of our allies, and by doing so, work to relieve our taxpayers of the greater burdens stemming from full-fledged global crises.

In closing, I would note that Congress was wise in passing the *International Religious Freedom Act of 1998*, which calls for our government to “[Stand] for liberty and [stand] with the persecuted, to use and implement appropriate tools in the United States foreign policy apparatus, including diplomatic, political, commercial, charitable, educational, and cultural channels, to promote respect for religious freedom by all governments and peoples.” We appreciate that international religious freedom issues have always had strong bipartisan support, and we want to work closely with Congress to help persecuted religious minorities. Thank you, again, for holding this hearing to review the U.S. role in protecting international religious freedom.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you.

Ms. Arriaga, you're up for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF KRISTINA ARRIAGA DE BUCHOLZ

Ms. ARRIAGA. Thank you. My name is Kristina Arriaga. I'm the vice chairwoman of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Today, I'd like to offer three observations, which I explore more fully in my written testimony. Thanks for accepting it for the record.

Number one, we ignore religious freedom at our own peril. The U.S. Government must factor into its foreign policy religious freedom, a foundational human right, a source of peace, stability, and economic vitality, and a key factor in countries worldwide. For example, those whose religious freedom has been violated can become susceptible to extremist indoctrination, and governments that commit violations or allow them to occur with impunity often sow the seeds of their own instability.

Number two, some view religion as competition or as alternate source of authority. This is dangerous to the United States. These countries use national security concerns to justify violating religious freedom, they pit groups against each other to enhance their own power, they allow violators to act with impunity, and they incite vigilante groups and others to violence. However, by exercising control in these ways, governments in Russia, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, for example, create more instability, not enhance authority.

Number three, hit them where it hurts. No one who violates human rights in their own country should be granted a visa to come to this country. The U.S. Government has tools to address religious freedom violations, including the 1998 IRFA, the 2016 Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, and the Global Magnitsky Act. However, we must have the political will to use these tools, and that is sometimes where we can fall short.

Congress plays an indispensable role, including by holding hearings, passing new legislation, and appropriating ample funding, exercising oversight, focusing on accountability, continually creating and refining the tools needed to address challenges, including accountability for genocide and crimes against humanity, using your own bully pulpits to highlight violations, and advocating for those who are persecuted and detained.

I will end by focusing on two issues dear to my heart: religious prisoners of conscience and women and religious freedom.

I hope all members can support prisoners through the Tom Lantos Commission Defending Freedoms Project, launched in conjunction with USCIRF and Amnesty International USA. To do our part, each one of us are advocating for a prisoner as part of our Religious Prisoner of Conscience Project. I chose Fariba Kamalabadi, who is in Iran in prison simply because she's a Baha'i.

Last week, during a USCIRF delegation visit to Turkey, Commissioner Sandra Jolley and I drove to the remote prison of Kiriklar to meet with Pastor Andrew Brunson. We were the first to see him besides his wife, attorney, and the consular officer. He has been imprisoned on fabricated charges.

This picture—he doesn't look like this anymore. He's lost over 50 pounds. He has suffered tremendous psychological pressure. And we must continue to advocate for his immediate release.

Finally, building lasting peace and security requires the participation of women. Especially during conflicts, women are often targeted for violence and discrimination, with religion or the excuse of religion used to disempower women. In fact, it is a betrayal of the very foundations of freedom of religion or belief whenever it's misused to justify inexcusable and harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, child brides, and forced conventions. Unfortunately, this practice has been exported. In our own country, there are half a million girls at risk for female genital mutilation.

My written testimony ended by quoting Martin Luther King. Here, I would like to quote Yogi Berra, who said, "If you come to a fork in the road, take it." The United States must commit to travel the road of advocating for international religious freedom with determination, passion, and commitment.

Thank you very much.

[Prepared statement of Ms. Arriaga follows:]

TESTIMONY

BEFORE THE NATIONAL SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

ON

REVIEW OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN PROTECTING

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

BY

KRISTINA ARRIAGA

VICE CHAIRWOMAN

U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

OCTOBER 11, 2017

I am Kristina Arriaga, Vice Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the National Security Subcommittee of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on the “Review of the U.S. Government’s Role in Protecting International Religious Freedom.”

I am honored to appear before this subcommittee and appreciate your interest in USCIRF’s assessment of the government’s role in protecting international religious freedom. In my testimony, I will highlight: why we should care about freedom of religion or belief as a core human right and a source of peace, stability and economic vitality; the different ways governments, recognizing the power of religion, seek to control their citizens and in the process sow instability and insecurity; the tools, some new, that our government can and should use; and recommendations for Congress.

It saddens me to report that the state of affairs for international religious freedom appears to be worsening in the depth and breadth of violations by both governments and non-state actors. Religious minorities and dissenting members of the majority community face many abuses worldwide, including imprisonment, displacement, and genocide, and non-state actors present increasing challenges. In fact, the violations are so egregious that less egregious abuses often go unnoticed. However, as I will note shortly, I believe that there is an increased recognition of the importance of this precious right to stability and security, and with this recognition some new tools have been created to confront these challenges.

Why the Freedom of Religion or Belief needs to be a Factor in U.S. Foreign Policy

When we consider the conditions and possible trajectories of countries that top the U.S. foreign policy agenda and the national security implications if these conditions are not addressed, it seems obvious that our government, using international standards, must factor freedom of religion or belief into our foreign policy. And then there is another fact: simply put, people care about religion. A reported 84% of the world’s population identifies with a specific religious group, and, according to the most recent Pew Research Center study on global religious restrictions and hostilities, more than three-quarters of the world’s population live in countries in which religion is restricted significantly, either by the government or societal actors.

So we know that religion and religious freedom are key factors in nations that top the U.S. foreign policy agenda. We also know that people care about religion. Yet for far too long, the U.S. government did not give this foundational human right the priority it merited. Many in government asserted that religion belonged, if at all, in the private sphere, or simply did not matter much in the modern world. This view reflects what commonly has been known as the secularization thesis: that as societies progress and modernize, religion loses its authority and secular institutions achieve supremacy.

Nothing could be further from the truth. World events repeatedly have demonstrated that religion remains central to people, and our nation and its diplomats cannot have productive dialogues and satisfactory relations or outcomes if we ignore, downplay, or dismiss religion’s pivotal role.

I am pleased to report that our government increasingly is recognizing the importance of freedom of religion or belief as a source for lasting stability and sustainable security, and that violations of

this essential freedom can feed instability and insecurity. As Secretary of State Tillerson noted when releasing the most recent International Religious Freedom Report, “[w]here religious freedom is not protected, we know that instability, human rights abuses, and violent extremism have a greater opportunity to take root.” Then Secretary of State John Kerry made the same point in 2013 remarks: “when countries undermine or attack religious freedom, they not only unjustly threaten those whom they target; they also threaten their country’s own stability.”

For the past several years, more Executive Branch officials are working on international religious freedom than ever before and Congress has supported USCIRF and passed measures that include robust funding for international religious freedom-related issues.

Violations of Religious Freedom

Government Abuses: Many foreign governments also understand the importance of freedom of religion or belief. Some are fearful of religion (and its adherents) as an alternate source of authority, especially in light of the relative ease of communication in the Internet age. These nations seek to repress this unwelcome competitor for their absolute power through repressive legal systems and laws, brute force, crack downs, and imprisoning members of religious communities. These tactics create more instability, not the enhanced security these governments seek. Examples of these types of governmental abuses include:

- **“Securitizing” Religious Freedom**: Some governments – including those in Russia, Central Asia, and China – use national security concerns to justify religious freedom violations. They severely limit religious communities’ activities through anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws which stifle peaceful dissent and imprison non-violent religious practitioners and their advocates.
- **Pitting Groups against Each Other to Enhance its Power**: Both the Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad regimes in Iraq and Syria pitted communities against each other, creating the conditions that lead to sectarian strife and conflict once these regimes began to lose their tight grip on power. Even today, the inability and sometimes refusal of the Iraqi and Syrian governments to curb sectarian attacks (such as those of the Popular Mobilization Forces assaults on Iraq’s Sunni Arab population, and the Shi’a Iranian-backed militias attacks on Sunni Arab communities in Syria) have exacerbated religious tensions between Syria’s and Iraq’s diverse religious communities.
- **Allowing Violators to Act with Impunity**: Coupled with efforts to sponsor violent ideologies, government inaction to prevent or punish religious freedom violations is a proven recipe for abuses. Instead of enforcing the law and protecting vulnerable populations, some governments turn a blind eye to violations, thereby creating climates of impunity. For example, funding reportedly originating in Saudi Arabia is used globally to finance religious schools, mosques, hate literature, and other activities that support religious intolerance and, in some cases, violence toward non-Muslims and disfavored Muslims. In Nigeria, the federal government continued to fail to implement effective strategies to prevent Muslim-Christian violence or to hold perpetrators accountable.

- **Targeting a Group and Inciting Vigilante Groups and Others to Violence:** Government targeting of members of religious minority communities, or dissenting members of majority communities, incite vigilante and other groups to violence. For instance, in India, seven states have adopted anti-conversion laws that restrict the right of individuals to freely convert from one faith to another. These laws have created a climate in which Hindu Nationalist groups, in particular, feel emboldened to harass and violently attack religious minority communities, especially Christian churches, leaders, and laity. In Iran, hundreds of pro-government articles have appeared online and in print inciting religious hatred and encouraging violence against Baha'is.

Blasphemy charges and accusations also can incite violence by vigilante groups in many countries. Blasphemy is “the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God.” In nearly 70 countries worldwide, laws criminalize acts and expression deemed contemptuous of sacred things, which some governments justify as necessary to promote religious harmony. In fact, they do the opposite: they restrict the freedoms of religion and expression, thereby violating two of the most hallowed human rights, and lead to abuses and the destabilization of societies.

Pakistan, where the crime of blasphemy carries the death penalty or life imprisonment, has the dubious distinction of having more people sentenced to jail for blasphemy than any other country. USCIRF is aware of nearly 40 prisoners convicted of blasphemy charges who have received life sentences or are on death row in Pakistan. Others have been killed by vigilante mobs just for being accused of blasphemy.

USCIRF recently released two reports on blasphemy. *Respecting Rights: Measuring the World's Blasphemy Laws* shows how blasphemy laws around the world fall short of international human rights benchmarks. The report catalogs the offending laws found in more than one-third of the world's nations. The other report highlights selected blasphemy cases, underscoring the fact that these unfair laws impact individuals.

Abuses by Non-State Actors: Governments are not the only actors that commit severe religious freedom violations. Increasingly, non-state actors, especially in failing or failed states, commit systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. Non-state actors vary greatly and include individuals, mobs, vigilante groups, anti-government insurgents, and militant organizations. They differ significantly in ideology, purpose, end goals, and level of international and domestic recognition. Generally, they are motivated by a violent religious ideology and seek to impose their religious beliefs on local populations and harshly punish those who do not abide by their religious edicts.

Non-state actors are among the primary perpetrators of egregious religious freedom violations, and the source of instability, in countries including the Central African Republic, Syria and Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Selected Case Studies

The United States government has an important role to play, both reactively and proactively, in promoting freedom of religion or belief, pursuant to international standards. Both the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) and the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act provide some of the tools to do so, including the “country of particular concern” (CPC) designation. Through the CPC designation, the U.S. government designates countries that commit systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief, as defined in international human rights law. I discuss these and other tools in more detail later in my testimony.

Burma, Iraq and Syria, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Russia, to name just a few, are nations in which egregious religious freedom violations threaten stability and progress. Not recognizing these violations for what they are, but rather blaming other factors, limits the United States’ ability to achieve its foreign policy goals.

- **Burma:** While Burma has taken some important steps in its transition from a military dictatorship, conditions for the country’s religious and ethnic minorities have severely deteriorated. The Burmese security forces have created a staggering humanitarian disaster, which the United Nations has labeled ethnic cleansing, by killing hundreds of Rohingya Muslims and forcing more than 400,000 to seek refuge in Bangladesh since late August. Non-state actors such as Ma Ba Tha and other nationalist individuals and groups merit continued international scrutiny for their severe violations of religious freedom and related human rights.

Given that the National League for Democracy (NLD) government has allowed systematic, egregious, and ongoing violations of freedom of religion or belief to continue, USCIRF has recommended that Burma continue to be designated a CPC, in 2017. The State Department has designated Burma as a CPC since 1999, most recently in October 2016, and should continue to make this designation.

- **Iraq and Syria:** Religious freedom conditions in Syria continue to deteriorate and significant challenges remain in Iraq. Notwithstanding differences between the two, religious minorities and dissenting members of the majority community in both nations face the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’s (ISIS) egregious and barbarous attacks. These attacks have threatened some communities’ very existence. Regrettably, the actions of both governments provided fertile ground for ISIS’s advancement.

In March 2016, then-Secretary of State Kerry proclaimed that groups including Yazidis, Christians, and Shi’a Muslims in Iraq and Syria are victims of genocide by ISIS, also referred to as Daesh. In his statement, Secretary of State John Kerry rightly observed that: “Daesh is responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control,” is “genocidal by self-proclamation, by ideology, and by actions,” and that it “kills Christians because they are Christians; Yezidis because they are Yezidis; Shia because they are Shia.”

On August 15, 2017, at the release of the International Religious Freedom Report, Secretary of State Tillerson similarly stated that “ISIS is clearly responsible for genocide against Yezidis, Christians, and Shi’a Muslims in areas it controls or has controlled,” and “is also responsible

for crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing” directed at these and other groups. He also stated that “the protection of these groups – and others subject to violent extremism – is a human rights priority for the Trump administration.”

While there has been some success militarily in confronting ISIS, religious and ethnic minorities in both nations face daunting challenges. Thus, the swift enactment of H.R. 390, the Iraq and Syria Genocide Emergency Relief and Accountability Act of 2017, is imperative. This vitally needed measure would provide emergency relief for victims of genocide and crimes against humanity in Iraq and Syria, address urgent humanitarian, stabilization and recovery needs, and provide accountability for perpetrators of these crimes. In addition, USCIRF has recommended in 2017 that Syria be designated as a CPC, and that ISIS be designated an “Entity of Particular Concern” for its systematic, ongoing and egregious violations in Iraq and Syria.

- **Nigeria:** Widespread challenges continue to impact religious freedom in Nigeria. Fears of ethnic and religious domination are longstanding. Religious identity, which frequently falls along regional, ethnic, political, and socioeconomic lines, routinely provides a flashpoint for violence. Sectarian violence between predominately Muslim herders and Christian farmers has increased, and the Nigerian federal government has failed to implement effective strategies to prevent or stop such violence or to hold perpetrators accountable. The Nigerian government at the federal and state levels continues to repress the Shi’a Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), including holding IMN leader Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky without charge, imposing state-level bans on the group’s activities, and failing to hold accountable Nigerian Army officers who used excessive force against IMN members. The Nigerian military continues to recapture territory from Boko Haram and arrest its members, but the government’s nonmilitary efforts to stop Boko Haram are insufficient. Finally, other religious freedom abuses continue at the state level. Based on these concerns, in 2017 USCIRF again has recommended that Nigeria be designated a CPC, as the Commission has since 2009.
- **Pakistan:** Pakistan has a severe religious freedom problem. Both USCIRF and the State Department consistently have documented the Pakistani government’s systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations. Religiously discriminatory constitutional provisions and laws, such as the country’s blasphemy and anti-Ahmadiyya laws, continue to result in prosecutions and imprisonments. At least 40 individuals have been sentenced to death or are serving life sentences for blasphemy. An elderly Ahmadi, Abdul Shakor, was sentenced in January 2016 to eight years in prison, three years under the Penal Code for blasphemy and five years under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Religious minority communities, including Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and Shi’a Muslims, also experience religiously-motivated and sectarian violence from both terrorist organizations and individuals within society; the government’s longstanding failure to prevent or prosecute such violence has created a deep-rooted climate of impunity that has emboldened extremist actors. Provincial textbooks with discriminatory content against minorities remain a significant concern.

USCIRF has recommended every year since 2002 that the State Department designate Pakistan a CPC. Despite USCIRF’s longstanding recommendation, the State Department has never designated Pakistan as a CPC.

- **Russia:** Russia has not only intensified its repression of religious freedom, but it also expanded its repressive policies to the territory of a neighboring state by means of military invasion and occupation. The government has implemented these policies, ranging from administrative harassment to arbitrary imprisonment to extrajudicial killing, in a fashion that is systematic, ongoing, and egregious. In mainland Russia, new laws effectively criminalized all private religious speech the state does not sanction. The government also banned the Jehovah's Witnesses and has targeted the Scientologists, and has tried innocent Muslims on fabricated charges of terrorism and extremism. In the North Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya and Dagestan, security forces carried out with impunity arrests, kidnappings, and disappearances of persons suspected of any links to "non-traditional" Islam. In Crimea, which Russia has occupied since 2014, Russian authorities have co-opted the spiritual life of the Muslim Crimean Tatar minority and arrested or driven into exile its community representatives. In the Russian-occupied para-states of eastern Ukraine, religious freedom is at the whim of armed militias not beholden to any legal authority. Russia also has not tolerated critics of these policies: the two most prominent domestic human rights groups that monitor freedom of religion or belief were officially branded as "foreign agents" in 2016. Based on these particularly severe violations, in 2017 USCIRF for the first time has recommended that Russia merits being designated a CPC.

Tools in the U.S. Government Arsenal

The U.S. government has tools, some of which are new, that can be used to help counter the violations of religious freedom abroad and the resulting violence and insecurity, and help nations achieve freedom of religion or belief. For these and other efforts, Congress needs to appropriate ample funding, exercise its oversight responsibility, tirelessly focus on accountability, and continually create and refine the tools needed to address new challenges, including accountability for genocide and crimes against humanity.

Before noting some of these tools, I want to highlight legislation I referenced earlier and urge its immediate enactment: H.R. 390, the Iraq and Syria Genocide Emergency Relief and Accountability Act. This bill has two main goals: (1) promoting accountability for the various atrocity crimes committed by ISIS and other foreign terrorist organizations operating within Iraq and Syria and (2) addressing humanitarian, stabilization, and recovery needs for persecuted religious and/or ethnic minorities. The House passed the bill and sent it to the Senate where the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported out an amended version that included the provisions of S. 905, the Syrian War Crimes Accountability Act, another vitally needed measure. USCIRF urges the full Senate quickly to take up this urgently needed legislation, the House swiftly to reconsider it, and the President expeditiously to sign it into law.

Current tools include:

IRFA: Congress, recognizing the need to arm the U.S. government with tools to address the violations of the freedom of religion or belief, introduced and passed the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), which President Clinton signed into law (P.L. 105-292). IRFA, among other provisions, stipulates that the President should designate as CPCs those countries that commit "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" violations of religious freedom. The Act also

provides a menu of actions that the U.S. government should take in consequence of this designation.

- USCIRF's CPC recommendations: USCIRF recommends that the State Department again designate 10 countries as CPCs in 2017 because of the governments' "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" violations of religious freedom: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. USCIRF also finds that six other countries meet the CPC standard and should be so designated: Central African Republic, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Syria, and Vietnam.
- The Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom: IRFA created the position of the Ambassador-at-Large for International Freedom (AAL). The AAL heads the Office of International Religious Freedom and helps coordinate the Executive Branch's efforts in support of freedom of religion or belief abroad. USCIRF has urged the prompt appointment of a qualified and experienced individual who, after confirmation, is given the authority and resources necessary to carry out the position. USCIRF also has called for the development and implementation of a whole-of-government strategy to guide how the U.S. government will protect and promote religious freedom abroad and the establishment of an interagency working group, which the AAL co-chairs with the Special Adviser to the President on International Religious Freedom, to oversee implementation.

As an *ex-officio* member of USCIRF, the AAL is a direct connection between the Executive Branch and the Commission, which is a legislative entity. Commissioners deeply valued the many contributions of the last AAL, Rabbi David Saperstein, and welcomed the nomination of Governor Sam Brownback as the new AAL.

The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 114-281): IRFA was amended several times, but none of these measures, until the Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, focused on updating the law so that it would reflect contemporary conditions on the ground and provide needed new tools. Important provisions in the Wolf Act include:

- The Ambassador at Large: The Act requires that the Ambassador at Large report directly to the Secretary of State and be the principal adviser to the Secretary on international religious freedom matters. However, according to the Secretary's reorganization plan, the Ambassador-at-Large is to report to the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights (J).
- CPC Requirements: The Act requires the President to make CPC designations not later than 90 days after the release of the annual report (November 13, 2017) and notify Congress not later than 90 days after these designations (February 11, 2018) about the parties responsible for the violations giving rise to the designation, the actions the U.S. government has taken in response, and the effectiveness of these actions.
- Special Watch List: The Act also creates a State Department "Special Watch List" by requiring the President to designate annually each country that engaged in or tolerated severe violations

of religious freedom during the previous year but does not meet, in the opinion of the President, the CPC threshold.

USCIRF's Tier 2 is similar in character to the Special Watch List. In the 2017 Annual Report, USCIRF placed 12 countries on Tier 2: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malaysia, and Turkey. USCIRF's Tier 2 includes countries where the violations are serious and meet one or two, but not all three, of the "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" test.

- Entities of Particular Concern: The Act requires the President to identify non-state actors that commit systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations and designate them as "entities of particular concern," or EPCs. The act defines a non-state actor as "a non-sovereign entity that exercises significant political power and territorial control; is outside the control of a sovereign government; and often employs violence in pursuit of its objectives."^f
USCIRF recommends in the 2017 Annual Report that ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and al-Shabaab in Somalia be designated EPCs. But for the territorial requirement in the new law, USCIRF would have recommended Boko Haram, the Taliban in Pakistan, and ISIS affiliates in Bangladesh and Egypt.
- Curriculum/Training for Foreign Service Officers: The law requires the Ambassador-at-Large, in coordination with other Federal officials as appropriate and in consultation with USCIRF, to make recommendations to the Secretary of State about the curriculum to be used for religious freedom training for Foreign Service Officers. Such training is to be included in the A-100 course all Foreign Service officers attend and the courses required of every Foreign Service Officer, deputy chief of mission, and ambassador prior to a posting outside of the United States with segments tailored to the particular religious demography, religious freedom conditions, and U.S. strategies for advancing religious freedom in each receiving country. The law also recommends that the curriculum and training materials be shared with the U.S. Armed Forces and other Federal departments and agencies with personnel stationed overseas.
- Designated Persons List for Particularly Severe Violations of Religious Freedom: The law: 1) directs the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Ambassador-at-Large and in consultation with relevant government and nongovernment experts, to establish and maintain a list of foreign individuals to whom the consular post has denied a visa on grounds of particularly severe violations of religious freedom, or who are subject to financial sanctions, or other measures, for particularly severe violations of religious freedom; 2) requires the Secretary to submit to Congress a report that contains the list required under this subsection and a description of the actions taken; and 3) requires updates to the report every 180 days thereafter and as new information becomes available.
- National Security Strategy: The law recognizes the connection between security and the promotion of religious freedom by expressing, through a sense of Congress, that the President's annual national security strategy report should promote international religious freedom as a foreign policy and national security priority and should articulate that promoting religious freedom is a strategy that protects other, related human rights, and advances democracy outside

the United States; and the national security strategy report should be a guide for the strategies and activities of relevant Federal agencies and inform the Department of Defense's quadrennial defense review.

- **Prisoner List:** The law requires USCIRF, to the extent practicable, to compile online and in official publications, lists of persons it determines are imprisoned, detained, disappeared, placed under house arrest, tortured, or subject to forced renunciations of faith for their religious activity or religious freedom advocacy by the government of a foreign country that the Commission recommends for designation as a country of particular concern or a non-state actor the Commission recommends for designation as an entity of particular concern, and include as much publicly available information as practicable on the conditions and circumstances of such persons.

The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act: This Act gives the United States a powerful accountability tool by authorizing the President to impose U.S. entry and property sanctions against any foreign person (or entity) who:

- Is responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights committed against individuals in any foreign country seeking to expose illegal activity carried out by government officials, or to obtain, exercise, or promote human rights and freedoms;
- Acted as an agent of or on behalf of a foreign person in such activities;
- Is a government official or senior associate of such official responsible for, or complicit in, ordering or otherwise directing acts of significant corruption, including the expropriation of private or public assets for personal gain, corruption related to government contracts or the extraction of natural resources, bribery, or the facilitation or transfer of the proceeds of corruption to foreign jurisdictions; or
- Has materially assisted or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services in support of, such activities.

Focusing on Prisoners of Conscience: It is vitally important to shine a light on prisoners of conscience who have been unjustly prevented from enjoying the most fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international human rights instruments and standards, as well as on the laws and actions that have led to their imprisonment. It also is important to advocate for these prisoners of conscience until they are free – and until the countries that have imprisoned them have implemented needed reforms that reflect the internationally approved standards that many of them have agreed to in writing but violate in practice.

A focus on individuals makes concrete and understandable the impact of unjust laws: people often are numbed by large numbers and cataclysmic events that are beyond their control and understanding. To address this concern, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission launched an initiative in the House of Representatives, in conjunction with USCIRF and Amnesty International

USA, called the Defending Freedoms Project. The initiative aims to draw attention to prisoners of conscience around the world by having Members of Congress advocate in support of individual prisoners.

Along with working to fulfill the prisoners lists mandate noted above from P.L. 114-281, USCIRF has created the Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project whereby Commissioners select a prisoner of conscience (see Appendix), advocate on his or her behalf, and highlight the conditions in the country that led to their imprisonment. Commissioners' selections are:

- China: Gulmira Imin – Vice Chair Sandra Jolley
- China: Panchen Lama – Commissioner Tenzin Dorjee
- Eritrea: Patriarch Abune Antonios – Commissioner Thomas J. Reese, S.J.
- Iran: Fariba Kamalabadi – Vice Chair Kristina Arriaga
- Iran: Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani – Commissioner Jackie Wolcott
- Pakistan: Abdul Shakoor – Chairman Daniel Mark
- Russia: Bagir Kazikhanov – Commissioner John Ruskay
- Saudi Arabia: Raif Badawi – Commissioner Cliff May

Empowering Women through Religious Freedom: Building lasting peace and sustainable security requires the participation of women, and during conflicts, women often are targeted for violence and discrimination. Around the globe, many women are deeply religious, yet religion has been used to disempower women. USCIRF's reporting has documented that women and girls often are victims of religious freedom violations, violent extremism, discriminatory personal status laws, and laws that restrict religious dress, and has highlighted the plight of female prisoners of conscience. In fact, it is a betrayal of the very foundations of freedom of religion or belief whenever it is misused to justify inexcusable and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, child brides, and forced conversions.

While such dire vulnerabilities exist, Commissioners began to be concerned that this kind of reporting could be viewed as supporting the entrenched misperception that women's rights to equality and freedom of religion or belief are clashing rights. This misperception, however, does not take into account that the freedom of religion or belief is neither a right of "religion" as such, nor an instrument for the support of religiously phrased reservations and limitations on women's rights to equality. This view also misperceives the universal nature of all human rights and their indivisibility, interdependency, and inter-relatedness and the duty of all states to promote and protect human rights. One hundred and seventy-one states affirmed this stance in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna adopted on June 25, 1993:

All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms

With this understanding, the Commissioners decided to explore the complexities and synergies between the rights of women and girls and the freedom of religion or belief. To that end, USCIRF commissioned the report, Women and Religious Freedom: Synergies and Opportunities.

The report explored this common misperception that women's rights to equality and freedom of religion or belief are clashing rights, finding instead that the two are indivisible and interrelated. Harmful practices affecting women and girls cannot be accepted as legitimate manifestations of religious freedom because the assertion of one human rights claim cannot be used to extinguish other rights. Moreover, freedom of religion or belief can play an important role in responding to harmful practices by: mobilizing belief-based actors; supporting individuals to understand and interpret their religion in harmony with the rights of others; and encouraging everyone to consider whether their religious laws should be imposed on others.

USCIRF will continue to explore these synergies and opportunities to use the freedom of religion or belief as a tool to empower women.

Congressional Leadership is Needed

Congress has an important role to play in promoting the freedom of religion or belief abroad. Along with urging Congress to work with and support the Commission, USCIRF urges Members of Congress to:

Support Legislation and Take Initiatives that Promotes Freedom of Religion or Belief Abroad: Through legislation and appropriations, the Commission urges Congress to develop an international religious freedom strategy, support legislation that highlights positive examples, and focus on issues including: anti-blasphemy laws, genocide, violent religious extremism, religious prisoners of conscience, and religious freedom violations in specific countries. The Commission also urges Congress, through legislation and other initiatives, to urge the Executive Branch to more fully integrate international religious freedom policies into democracy promotion, public diplomacy, countering violent extremism and counterterrorism, and multilateral diplomacy. Finally, USCIRF urges Congress to craft legislation that includes remedies that underscore the human rights, foreign policy and national security dimensions of religious freedom and address violations by:

- Developing additional targeted visa bans and asset freezes for foreign government officials and other individuals and entities implicated in egregious violations of religious freedom;
- Developing specific sanctions directly related to a country's violation of religious freedom;
- Requiring the State Department and other Federal agencies to certify, prior to obligating aid to countries that violate religious freedom and related human rights, that the countries receiving any U.S. funding are implementing policies to protect the freedoms of religion, expression, association, and assembly, and providing heightened security for targeted religious communities and their places of congregation and worship; and

- Creating political, financial, and diplomatic tools to address particularly severe violations of religious freedom committed by non-state actors and foreign individuals as well as governments.

Hold Hearings in Support of International Religious Freedom: USCIRF urges Congress to hold hearings on international religious freedom and related issues.

Focus on Competency in International Religious Freedom During Confirmation Hearings: During confirmation hearings for officials in the State Department (including Ambassadorial nominees) and other agencies, USCIRF urges that Members of Congress raise the importance of freedom of religion or belief as a central component of U.S. foreign policy, and highlight the need for these officials to exhibit a core competency in this area.

Monitor Required Curriculum Development and Training for Foreign Service Officers and Provide Adequate Funding: USCIRF urges Congress to conduct oversight on the required training specific to religious freedom for all Foreign Service Officers, the development by the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom of a curriculum for training Foreign Service Officers on international religious freedom, and the sharing of the curriculum and training materials with the U.S. Armed Forces and other Federal entities with personnel stationed overseas or working with the international community. USCIRF also urges Congress to encourage the Ambassador-at-Large to consult with USCIRF on the development of this curriculum, and appropriate sufficient funding to develop and implement this curriculum and training.

Engage the State Department, USAID and other Entities: USCIRF urges Congress to encourage the State Department, USAID, and other government entities to prioritize programs that develop and disseminate educational and teacher training materials, especially in countries of concern, on international human rights and religious freedom standards and the centrality of interfaith understanding to achieving development objectives. USCIRF also urges that these programs be implemented especially in countries with public and private education systems that promote religious intolerance and extremism, and that the National Endowment for Democracy and other entities that receive federal funding solicit competitive proposals on specific international religious freedom programming.

Conduct Oversight on the Implementation of P.L. 114-281, the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act: Given that this law includes new mandates and responsibilities for both the State Department and USCIRF, USCIRF urges that Congress conduct oversight and ensure that adequate funding is appropriated to fulfill the new mandates and responsibilities.

Support Civil Society, Prisoners of Conscience, and Religious Freedom Advocacy Networks Abroad: During delegation trips abroad, USCIRF urges that Members of Congress meet with individuals and organizations that promote religious freedom and related human rights, targeted religious communities, and people detained for their religious freedom and human rights work or beliefs. USCIRF also urges Members to undertake delegations to “countries of particular concern” and “Special Watch List” countries to examine conditions of religious freedom. Finally, USCIRF urges that Members of Congress work with religious freedom advocacy networks including the International Panel of Parliamentarians on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Support Congressional Entities that Focus on Religious Freedom and Related Human Rights: USCIRF urges Members of Congress to support the efforts of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, the Congressional International Religious Freedom Caucus, the Religious Minorities in the Middle East Caucus, and the Senate Human Rights Caucus.

Promote Religious Freedom through Public Commemorations: USCIRF urges Members of Congress elevate international religious freedom through Congressional press releases, briefings, hearings, and one-minutes on the Floor. For example, International Religious Freedom Day (October 27) and Religious Freedom Day (January 16) provide opportunities for public commemorations.

While we face an enormously challenging landscape for the freedom of religion or belief abroad, I believe that a consensus finally is being achieved that this freedom is a foundational human right, a key factor in achieving stability and security abroad, and a necessary component of U.S. foreign policy. Such centrality is underscored by the many millions who care about this fundamental freedom, the governments that fear and oppress it, the other governments that support it, and the many prisoners of conscience worldwide who languish in detention because of their religious beliefs, actions, identity, and advocacy. We must not forget them.

The U.S. government, with Congress needing to play a central role, also has tools in its arsenal that would facilitate the promotion of this key freedom. The possibility of achieving real progress toward religious freedom and other human rights is in our hands, the hands of our fellow citizens, and the hands of citizens of nations worldwide.

We must not delay and we must have the political will to take action. As Martin Luther King said: “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”

Appendix: Religious Prisoners of Conscience

Through USCIRF's Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project, Commissioners advocate in support of a prisoner of conscience. Through increased education, outreach, and advocacy, USCIRF hopes to raise awareness of these and other individuals being imprisoned for their religion or beliefs, reduce their number, and highlight the country conditions that led to their imprisonment.

Gulmira Imin

Country: China

Key Fact: Community leader, website administrator, and government worker

Detained Since: July 14, 2009

USCIRF Advocate: Vice-Chair Sandra Jolley

Biography: Gulmira Imin is a Uighur Muslim and former web administrator for Salkin, a Uighur-language website. Ms. Imin was also a government employee in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in Northwest China. Xinjiang is home to the majority of the country's Uighur Muslim population.

Ms. Imin was born in 1978 in Aksu in Xinjiang and graduated in 2000 from the Chinese-Uighur translation department of Xinjiang University. In spring 2009, Ms. Imin became the moderator of Salkin, a website to which she had previously contributed poetry and short stories. Many of her online writings criticized government policies.

On July 5, 2009, Ms. Imin participated in a major demonstration protesting the deaths of Uighur migrant workers in Guangdong Province. Initially peaceful, the protests turned violent, with about 200 people, including ethnic Han Chinese, killed during the riots and confrontations with police. On July 14, 2009, Ms. Imin was arrested in Aksu after authorities alleged she had organized the protests, posted an announcement for them on Salkin, and leaked state secrets by phone to her husband in Norway. Her family was not notified of the arrest and was unaware of her location until the October 2009 airing of a China Central Television documentary that depicted Imin in prison garb.

On April 1, 2010, the Urumqi Intermediate People's Court sentenced Ms. Imin to life in prison under Articles 103, 111, and 296 of China's Criminal Law on charges of "splittism, leaking state secrets, and organizing an illegal demonstration." Ms. Imin alleges she was tortured and forced to sign documents while in detention. She also reportedly was not allowed to meet with her lawyer until the trial. Her appeal was subsequently rejected. Ms. Imin is currently detained in the Xinjiang Women's Prison (Xinjiang No. 2 Prison) located in Urumqi, where she is allowed one family visit every three months.



Gedhun Choekyi Nyima – The Panchen Lama

Country: China

Key Fact: 11th Panchen Lama

Disappeared Since: May 17, 1995

USCIRF Advocate: Commissioner Tenzin Dorjee



Biography: Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was born on April 25, 1989 in Lhari County, Tibet. After the death of the 10th Panchen Lama, His Holiness the Dalai Lama chose Gedhun on May 15, 1995 to be the 11th Panchen Lama, which is the second highest position in Tibetan Buddhism.

Three days after his selection as Panchen Lama, Chinese government authorities kidnapped then six-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family. On November 11, 1995, Chinese authorities announced their own pick to serve as the Panchen Lama: Gyancain Norbu. Most Tibetan Buddhists have rejected him.

In the more than 20 years since Gedhun's abduction, Chinese authorities have provided little information about his whereabouts, alleging that they need to protect him from being "kidnapped by separatists." In May 2007, Asma Jahangir, then-United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, suggested that the Chinese government allow an independent expert to visit and confirm Gedhun's well-being. On July 17, 2007, the Chinese authorities said that he is a "perfectly ordinary Tibetan boy" attending school and leading a normal life, and that he "does not wish to be disturbed." Chinese authorities also say that the state employs both of his parents and that his brothers and sisters are either working or at university.

Patriarch Abune Antonios

Country: Eritrea

Key Fact: Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church

Detained Since: May 27, 2007

USCIRF Advocate: Commissioner Thomas J. Reese, S.J.



Biography: Patriarch Abune Antonios was born on July 12, 1927, in Himberti, a town north of the Eritrean capital, Asmara. His father was a priest. At the age of five, Patriarch Antonios entered the monastery of Debre Tsege Abuna Andrewes, where he was educated, ordained a deacon at the age of 12, and then served as a monk. Patriarch Antonios was ordained a priest in 1942 and was eventually elected Abbot in 1955.

When the Eritrean Orthodox Church first sought its independence, Patriarch Antonios was one of the five abbots from monasteries sent to Egypt to be ordained a bishop so that the church would be able to constitute its own Holy Synod. Antonios was ordained as Bishop Antonios of Hamasien-Asmara on June 19, 1994, in Saint Mark's Cathedral in Cairo by His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria.

Following the death in 2003 of Abune Yacoub, then Patriarch of the Eritrean Church, Patriarch Antonios was elected as the third Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church by a joint vote of the Holy Synod and representatives of all dioceses in the presence of the delegates of the Holy Synod of the Egyptian Orthodox Church. Pope Shenouda III, assisted by Eritrean and Coptic Orthodox Metropolitans and Bishops, ordained and enthroned Antonios as Patriarch on April 23, 2004.

The Eritrean government notified Patriarch Antonios on January 20, 2006, that he would no longer lead the country's largest religious denomination after he called for the release of political prisoners and refused to excommunicate 3,000 parishioners who opposed the government. One year later, on January 20, 2007, authorities confiscated Patriarch Antonios' personal pontifical insignia. On May 27, 2007, the Eritrean government replaced Patriarch Antonios with Bishop Dioscoros of Mendefera, forcefully removed the Patriarch from his home, and placed him under house arrest at an undisclosed location. Patriarch Antonios, who is 90 years old, continues to be held incommunicado and reportedly is being denied medical care despite suffering from severe diabetes.

Eritrean authorities briefly allowed Patriarch Antonios to appear in public for the first time in over a decade at a Mass held at St. Mary's Cathedral in Asmara on July 16, 2017. However, the Patriarch was prevented from concelebrating or speaking to his congregants during the event and was quickly placed back under detention after the Mass concluded.

Fariba Kamalabadi

Country: Iran

Key Fact: Developmental psychologist and Baha'i member

Detained Since: May 14, 2008

Charges: Espionage, propaganda against the Islamic Republic, and establishment of an illegal administration

USCIRF Advocate: Vice-Chair Kristina Arriaga



Biography: Fariba Kamalabadi was born on September 12, 1962, in Tehran, Iran. Ms. Kamalabadi graduated from high school with honors but was barred from attending university due to her Baha'i faith.

In her mid-30s, Ms. Kamalabadi embarked on an eight-year period of informal study and eventually received an advanced degree in developmental psychology from the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), an alternative institution the Baha'i community of Iran established to provide higher education for its young people. The Iranian government does not recognize the BIHE.

Ms. Kamalabadi is one of the seven Baha'i leaders known as "Yaran" or "Friends," who tended to the spiritual and social needs of the Iranian Baha'i community in the absence of a formally elected Baha'i leadership due to restrictions by the Iranian government. The other six members are Mahvash Sabet, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm.

Ms. Kamalabadi was arrested on May 14, 2008 after an early morning raid on her home. Ms. Kamalabadi and the other Baha'i Seven were held incommunicado for weeks, placed in solitary confinement for months, and spent a year behind bars without access to legal counsel. In 2010, the seven were tried and convicted of charges of "espionage" and "spreading propaganda against the regime." The Seven were sentenced to 20 years in prison, longer than any current prisoners of conscience in Iran.

In 2013, Iran passed a reformed Islamic Penal Code that stipulated that courts may carry out only the most severe punishment assigned to a prisoner, rather than carrying out multiple, similar punishments for related crimes. In early 2016, the Baha'i Seven were informed that this rule would be applied to their cases, reducing their imprisonment from 20 years to 10 years.

Ms. Kamalabadi currently is being held in Tehran's Evin prison, along with other female prisoners of conscience.

Ms. Kamalabadi married fellow Baha'i Ruhollah Taefi in 1982 and they have three children, Vargha, Alhan, and Taraneh. Ms. Kamalabadi's father was fired from his job in the government health service in the 1980s because he was a Baha'i; he was later imprisoned and tortured.

Youcef Nadarkhani

Country: Iran

Key Fact: Pastor repeatedly targeted by the Iranian government

Start of Latest Government Action: May 13, 2016

Charges: Acting against national security

Sentence: 10 years imprisonment and two years of exile in southern Iran

USCIRF Advocate: Commissioner Jackie Wolcott



Biography: Youcef Nadarkhani was born on April 11, 1977 to Muslim parents in Rasht, Iran. Although he was not religious as a child, he converted to Christianity when he was 19, becoming a member of the Only Jesus Church. He is the pastor of a 400-member house church and a member of the evangelical Church of Iran.

Pastor Nadarkhani and his wife were among several Christians whom officials from the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence detained in the city of Rasht on May 13, 2016, releasing them the same day. Three other Christians arrested with them (Yasser Mossayebzadeh, Saheb Fadaie, and Mohammad Reza Omid) also were released on bail. However, on July 24, Pastor Nadarkhani again was detained, charged with “acting against national security,” and accused of being a Zionist and evangelizing. He was released the same day on condition that he raise within a week the equivalent of US \$33,000 for bail.

In October 2016, Pastor Nadarkhani and his three co-defendants were tried in Rasht. However, the court could not reach a verdict and transferred the case to a court in Tehran. The Revolutionary Court in Tehran held hearings in December 2016 and February and June 2017. During the June 24, 2017 hearing, officials charged them with “acting against national security,” and the presiding Judge Ahmadzadeh reportedly accused their church of annually receiving 500,000 pounds (\$650,000) from the British government. Non-presiding Judge Abolghasem Salavati reportedly burst into the courtroom and disrupted the proceeding, proclaiming that Christians “make foolish claims.” On July 6, 2017, the four Christians received a verdict backdated to June 24. Each was sentenced to 10 years in prison and was allowed twenty days to appeal. Nadarkhani received an additional sentence of two years in exile in Nikshahr in southern Iran. As of August 15, 2017, Nadarkhani has yet to report to prison and the status of the appeal is uncertain.

Iranian authorities have previously targeted Pastor Nadarkhani on numerous occasions. His first imprisonment took place in December 2006 when he was charged with “apostasy” and “evangelism,” but was released two weeks later. On October 13, 2009, while applying to register his church, he was arrested after protesting a government policy that required all students, including his two young sons, to study the Quran in school. The tribunal charged Pastor Nadarkhani with “apostasy” and “evangelism.” On September 22, 2010, he verbally was issued a death sentence for apostasy. On November 13, 2010, officials of the Revolutionary Tribunal delivered the written verdict from the September trial: execution by hanging. The pastor and his attorney, Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, appealed the sentence. The Court found in September 2011 that Pastor Nadarkhani had committed apostasy because he was born to Muslim parents and left Islam after the legal age of majority. Advocacy and human rights groups believe his execution order was issued in February 2012. On September 8, 2012, amid continuing international outcry, Nadarkhani was acquitted of apostasy in a retrial and the court rescinded the death penalty, allowing him to leave prison, though he was briefly rearrested on December 25, 2012 before finally being fully released on January 7, 2013.

Abdul Shakoor

Country: Pakistan

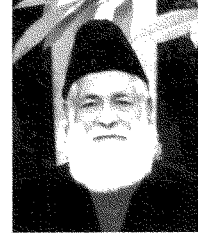
Key Fact: 80-year-old Ahmadi manager of a bookshop and optician store

Detained Since: December 2, 2015

Charges: Propagating the Ahmadiyya faith and stirring up “religious hatred” and “sectarianism”

Sentence: Three years in prison under the Pakistan Penal Code for blasphemy and five years under the Anti-Terrorism Act on January 2, 2016

USCIRF Advocate: Chairman Daniel Mark



Biography: Abdul Shakoor was born on February 2, 1937 in Qadian, India. He is married and the father of five daughters and two sons. Before his arrest, Mr. Shakoor was the manager of an optician’s store and bookshop in the main bazaar of Rabwah (also known as Chenab Nagar), Punjab Province, Pakistan. The population of the Ahmadiyya community in Rabwah, about 70,000, is about 95 percent of the city’s total population. Many view the city as the de facto headquarters of Pakistan’s Ahmadiyya community.

On December 2, 2015, officials from the Counter Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police and Pakistan’s Elite Force raided the bookshop Mr. Shakoor managed. He was arrested along with the shop’s assistant, Mazhar Abbas – a Shia Muslim – and accused of selling an Ahmadiyya commentary on the Qur’an, among other publications. The officials confiscated Ahmadiyya publications during that raid and a later raid that took place on December 9. After their arrest, the two men were held in unknown locations and were not permitted to contact their families.

Mr. Shakoor’s trial was held in the Anti-Terrorism Court in Faisalabad, Punjab province, with the officers who raided the bookstore as the only witnesses. The prosecution entered into evidence a letter (ostensibly recovered during the December 9 raid) from the Ahmadiyya Director of Public Affairs to Mr. Shakoor notifying him that the Punjab provincial government had banned some Ahmadiyya literature and that he should neither display nor sell the banned literature. Ahmadiyya leaders assert that the prosecution fabricated the letter to support their story, noting that none of the literature cited in the letter was banned until January 20, 2016, after the trial’s conclusion. Mr. Shakoor contended during the trial, and maintains the position, that he did not distribute any of the literature listed, although he admits to being in possession of some of them. However, possession of Ahmadiyya literature is not a crime in Pakistan.

On January 2, 2016, Mr. Shakoor was given a five-year prison sentence for violating article 11-W of the 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) which involves “printing, publishing, or disseminating any material to incite hatred.” He also was given a three-year sentence for violating article 298-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, for a total of eight years. (Section 298 of Pakistan’s Penal Code criminalizes acts and speech that insult a religion or religious beliefs or defile the Qur’an, the Prophet Muhammad, a place of worship, or religious symbols.) Mazhar Abbas was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment for violating article 11-W of the ATA. Mr. Shakoor filed a writ petition for bail and appeal against the verdict with the Lahore High Court. On multiple occasions, the Lahore High Court listed Mr. Shakoor’s appeal on the daily docket, but each time the case was postponed. The last postponed hearing date was believed to be June 22, 2017. Mr. Shakoor remains in prison and is suffering from a hernia and back pain.

Bagir Kazikhanov

Country: Russia

Key Fact: Follower of Said Nursi

Detained Since: April 2014

Sentence: Three and a half years' imprisonment

USCIRF Advocate: Commissioner John Ruskay



Biography: Bagir Kazikhanov was born on September 9, 1983 in the Republic of Dagestan, an administrative entity of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Kazikhanov organized regular Islamic study sessions in rented flats between 2012 and 2014. During these sessions, he and his fellow Muslims studied the works of the Turkish Islamic revivalist theologian Said Nursi, along with watching football. Nursi, who died in 1960, was an ethnic Kurd who wrote a body of Quranic commentary advocating the modernization of Islamic education. Nursi also criticized the secular character of the post-Ottoman Turkish government, for which he was persecuted. Nursi's emphasis on the integration of modern science into Islamic learning is said to have inspired Fethullah Gülen, the prominent exiled Turkish Islamic preacher. Although Nursi's writings do not advocate hatred, violence, or the violation of human rights, many of Nursi's works are banned in Russia, reportedly due to state opposition to foreign spiritual and cultural influence.

Mr. Kazikhanov was arrested in the city of Ulyanovsk on April 9, 2014, after participating in one of these study sessions, which authorities deemed to be the "organization of extremist activity" under the Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. He was accused of recruiting a terrorist cell of Nursi followers as part of a supposed "Nurdzhular" movement, which was officially banned in Russia in 2008 but is widely believed to be a legal fiction invented for the purpose of prosecuting Nursi adherents. Mr. Kazikhanov was held in a pre-trial detention center from April to October 2014, and then placed under house arrest until his February 25, 2015, conviction by Judge Natalya Damayeva at the Lenin District Court in Ulyanovsk. Judge Damayeva sentenced Mr. Kazikhanov to three and a half years' imprisonment.

Raif Badawi

Country: Saudi Arabia

Key Fact: Blogger

Detained Since: June 27, 2012

Charges: Violating Islamic values and propagating liberal thought

Sentence: 10-year imprisonment, 1,000 lashes, a fine of 1 million riyals (equal to about \$266,000) and banned from any media work or foreign travel for 10 years after his release from prison

USCIRF Advocate: Commissioner Clifford D. May



Biography: Raif Badawi was born on January 13, 1984, in Khobar, Saudi Arabia. He is a blogger, activist, and the creator of the website *Free Saudi Liberals*, which encourages debate on religious and political matters in Saudi Arabia.

First detained on apostasy charges in 2008, Mr. Badawi was released after a day of questioning. He was then arrested on June 17, 2012 and charged with insulting Islam through electronic channels. Later, Mr. Badawi was brought to court on several charges, including apostasy, a conviction which carries an automatic death sentence. Badawi's website reportedly had hosted material criticizing "senior religious figures." Mr. Badawi also suggested that Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University had become "a den for terrorists."

Mr. Badawi appeared before a district court in Jeddah on December 17, 2012, charged with "setting up a website that undermines general security," "ridiculing Islamic religious figures," and "going beyond the realm of obedience." On July 30, 2013, the Jeddah Criminal Court sentenced Mr. Badawi to seven years in prison and 600 lashes for founding an internet forum that "violates Islamic values and propagates liberal thought." On May 7, 2014, an appeals court increased the punishment to 1,000 lashes and 10 years in prison. He also received a fine of 1 million riyals (equal to about \$266,000) and is banned from any media work or foreign travel for 10 years after his release from prison.

On January 9, 2015, Mr. Badawi was flogged 50 times before hundreds of spectators in front of a Jeddah mosque. He has not received additional floggings, due partly to international reaction and partly to a medical doctor's finding that he could not physically endure more lashings. On June 7, 2015, Saudi Arabia's Supreme Court denied another appeal from Badawi and upheld the sentence of 1,000 lashes.

Mr. Badawi received the 2015 Sakharov Prize for his human rights work. Raif Badawi married Ensaf Haidar in 2002 in Saudi Arabia; they have three children. His wife and children were granted political asylum in Quebec, Canada in 2013.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you.
Dr. Farr, you're recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THOMAS F. FARR, PH.D.

Mr. FARR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My message to you today is straightforward and hopeful. Advancing religious freedom more successfully in our foreign policy can help the victims of religious persecution abroad and increase the security of the American people. But if we are to succeed, we will need to change some of our thinking and strengthen some of our programs at the State Department.

Growing evidence indicates that religious freedom can undermine religion-related terrorism. The evidence applies to violence that emanates from any religion, but the primary threat to U.S. national security and that of most other nations, especially Muslim-majority nations, is Islamist terrorism.

Our approach to terrorism as a religious freedom issue has understandably focused on the minority religious groups victimized by the terrorists or by governments. The methods historically used by the State Department to address religious persecution consist in large part of annual reports and annual designations of the worst violators. The International Religious Freedom Act also authorized economic sanctions.

These reports are important. They are vitally important. They are generally accurate and reliable. But they are entirely diagnostic in nature. They shine a light on the problem but do little to solve it.

Unfortunately, economic sanctions are rarely effective. When they've been tried, they haven't worked. Governments are unlikely to change their religion policies because of sanctions alone. Additional policies are needed to supplement the leverage provided by sanctions or other negative incentives the United States might impose.

State Department-funded programs are a good place to start, especially if those programs provide convincing reasons to the target nations why religious freedom is in their interests. Under former Religious Freedom Ambassador David Saperstein, program funding increased to \$20 million a year. But even that amount pales in comparison to other programs intended to protect American national security.

Unfortunately, the religious freedom programs that do exist, such as those mentioned by Ambassador Kozak, which are often splendid programs, are not part of a strategy, certainly not an all-of-government strategy. They are spread too thin. They are too ad hoc to have any appreciable impact on Islamist terrorism or to convince governments that religious freedom is in their interest.

The unfortunate reality is that our religious freedom policy has been isolated from the mainstream of U.S. foreign policy. Until recently, it's been largely overlooked as a means of promoting stability and national security.

Social scientists at the Religious Freedom Institute, where I work, are demonstrating something that America's founders understood instinctively: Religious freedom forms the basis of other

human rights. It's necessary for the success of any society, especially highly religious societies.

The evidence shows that religious freedom has a causal impact on social, political, and economic goods, such as long-term political stability, economic growth, and undermining religion-related violence. Societies that lack religious freedom are far more likely to incubate, experience domestically, and export internationally religion-related terrorism.

The reverse is also true; societies that protect religious freedom generally do not incubate or export violence and terrorism. Several Muslim-majority states in West Africa, for example, have avoided the violent extremism that plagues other Muslim states. Each has significant legal protections for religious freedom of Muslims and non-Muslims. The result is a stabilizing religious pluralism that discourages religious extremism.

Let me conclude with some practical recommendations.

Religious freedom policy can advance U.S. national security by focusing less on rhetorical enunciations and combining practical incentives with convincing self-interest arguments.

For example, the State Department recently announced the withholding of \$290 million in aid to Egypt because of its harsh restrictions on religious communities and other human rights violations. This is a good start but unlikely to change things on the ground. Egypt is not going to change its religious freedom policies for \$290 million.

The U.S. should also provide the Egyptian Government with hard evidence that their repressive laws and policies—that altering their repressive laws and policies will benefit Egypt, for example, by reducing the violent extremism that is harming the country's all-important tourist industry.

Iraq provides another opportunity. Since 2014, the U.S. has allocated nearly \$1.7 billion in humanitarian aid to Iraq, but most of that aid has not reached the Christian minorities designated by us as victims of ISIS genocide. This is a U.S. national security problem as well as a humanitarian problem. Religious pluralism is a necessary condition for long-term stability in Iraq. If minorities do not return and stay, Iraq will likely become a perpetual Shia-Sunni battleground, where terrorism flourishes.

Success in these efforts will not come easy, Mr. Chairman, but the long war against Islamist terrorism cannot be won with law enforcement and military force alone. America needs new ideas and new combatants to win this war, and religious freedom should be part of the mix.

Thank you.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Farr follows:]

Religious Freedom and American National Security
 A Hearing of the National Security Subcommittee of the
 House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, October 11, 2017
 Thomas F. Farr¹

Chairman DeSantis, Ranking Member Lynch, and members of the sub-committee, thank you for holding this important hearing and for inviting me to testify.

My message to you today is straightforward and hopeful: advancing religious freedom successfully in our foreign policy can help the victims of religious persecution abroad and increase the security of the American people.

But if we are to succeed we will need to change some of our thinking at the State Department about religious freedom, and our approach to promoting it in U.S. foreign policy.

Growing evidence indicates that an effective religious freedom policy can help increase our security, and that of other nations, by undermining religion-related terrorism. The evidence applies to violence that emanates from any religion. But the primary threat to U.S. national security, and that of most other nations, especially Muslim-majority nations, is Islamist terrorism.

Integrating the promotion of religious freedom across all U.S. foreign policy agencies is essential to reducing religion-related terrorism. This work will be accelerated the Senate's confirmation of Governor Sam Brownback, the President's nominee for the position of U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom.

Governor Brownback has the opportunity and the skills to build upon the work of his predecessor, Ambassador David Saperstein, and integrate religious freedom into American national security strategy. I urge the Senate to confirm Governor Brownback immediately. Those suffering violent religious persecution around the world, including the Rohingya Muslims of Burma and the Christians and Yazidis of Iraq, need him on the job now.

The Existing IRF Approach to Islamist Terrorism

Most Islamist terrorism is born and incubated in the Middle East. Our approach to terrorism as a religious freedom issue has understandably focused on the minority religious groups victimized by ISIS or the governments in the region such as Syria, Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. As we should, we focus most of our attention on the terrible suffering of religious communities that our

¹Thomas Farr is President of the Religious Freedom Institute. He also directs the Religious Freedom Research Project at Georgetown University, where he is an associate Professor of the Practice of Religion and World Affairs in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. Farr was the first Director of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom (1999-2003).

own government has designated as victims of genocide, including Yezidis, minority Shiites, and Christians.

The methods historically used by the State Department to draw attention to the victims of religious persecution, and to their persecutors, consist of annual reports on the status of religious freedom, and annual designations of the worst violators – the “countries of particular concern” or CPCs. The 1998 International Religious Freedom (IRF) Act also authorized economic sanctions and the funding of religious freedom programs.

All of these provisions are needed. The annual reports from the State Department and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom are accurate and thorough. Both the State Department and the Commission are to be commended for their most recent reports. In particular, I want to recognize the work of Dan Nadel, Director of the State Department’s Office of International Religious Freedom, and his staff, as well as Knox Thames, Special Adviser for Religious Minorities in the Middle East and South/Central Asia. These two men have led U.S. IRF policy since the departure last January of Ambassador Saperstein.

As for the annual identification of the worst persecutors, the “countries of particular concern,” that report is also vitally important.

But the problem is that these reports are entirely diagnostic in nature. They shine a light on the problem but do little to solve it.

Economic sanctions are rarely effective. When they have been tried, they have not worked. Governments are unlikely to change their religion policies because of sanctions alone. Additional policies are needed to supplement the leverage provided by sanctions or other negative incentives the United States might impose.

State Department-funded IRF programs are a good place to start, especially if they provide reasons why religious freedom is in the target nation’s interests. Program funding historically has hovered around \$4 million annually, an amount Ambassador Saperstein succeeded in increasing to \$20 million. But even that amount pales in comparison to other programs intended to protect American national security.

Moreover, IRF programs funded by State, though often meritorious, are not part of an all-of-government strategy. They are spread too thin and are too *ad hoc* to have any appreciable impact on Islamist terrorism, or to convince governments that religious freedom will improve governance, stimulate economic growth, or undermine religious violence.

The unfortunate reality is that IRF policy has been isolated from the mainstream of U.S. foreign policy. It has been overlooked as a means of promoting stability and national security.

How Religious Freedom Undermines Terrorism

Until recently the social sciences have ignored the connections between religious freedom and religion-related violence. However, scholars at the Religious Freedom Institute are demonstrating something that the American Founders instinctively understood: religious freedom is the basis for all other rights. It is necessary for the success of any society. The evidence shows that religious freedom has a causal impact on other social, political, and economic goods, such as long-term political stability, economic growth, and even better health.

But the religious freedom effect that can best contribute to American security, and help persecuted minorities at the same time, is to help prevent religion-related violence and terrorism. Societies that lack religious freedom, such as those of the Middle East, are far more likely to incubate, suffer domestically, and export internationally, religion-related terrorism.

The reverse is also true. Societies that protect religious freedom generally do not incubate religious violence and terrorism. Despite its difficulties with Hindu radicalism, India's success as the world's largest democracy, with a huge and largely peaceful Muslim minority, stems in large part from its history of religious tolerance. The same can be said of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country. Despite its own Islamic extremism, Indonesia's tolerant Islamic civil society helps keep that nation democratic and stable. That both India and Indonesia are moving in a worrisome direction is precisely because each is experiencing a decrease in respect for the religious freedom of all their citizens. But, at present, neither is an exporter of religion-related terrorism.

In West Africa, no less than seven Muslim-majority countries -- Senegal, Mali, Niger, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and The Gambia—have avoided the violent extremism that plagues other Muslim states. Each has significant legal protections for the religious freedom of Muslims and non-Muslims, and each encourages interreligious cooperation. The result is a stabilizing religious pluralism that discourages religious extremism.

How to Integrate Religious Freedom into U.S. National Security Strategy

How can religious freedom be integrated into our national security strategy? For one thing, by focusing less on ineffective rhetorical denunciations, and instead combining practical incentives with arguments that appeal to the self-interest of the target society.

For example, the State Department recently announced the withholding of \$290 million in aid to Egypt because of human rights violations, including harsh restrictions on religious communities. This is a good start, but unlikely to change things on the ground. History strongly suggests that Egypt will not alter its policies on religious freedom for \$290 million.

The U.S. should augment the withholding of aid by providing hard evidence that altering repressive laws and policies will benefit Egypt, for example by reducing the violent extremism that is harming the country's all-important tourist industry.

To date, U.S. religious freedom arguments to Cairo have emphasized injustice, human rights, and international law. Those arguments have been correct, and fruitless. They should be amplified with evidence that religious freedom, by requiring full equality for all religious groups and open debate about Islam, does not sanction violence or extremism, and will work to undermine it.

U.S. aid can also help develop the institutions that will advance religious freedom, by, for example, integrating religious freedom training into programs with Egyptian military and local police forces, judges and lawyers, educational institutions, and civil society groups.

Iraq provides another opportunity. Since 2014, the U.S. government has allocated nearly \$1.7 billion dollars to Iraq for humanitarian assistance (USAID Fact Sheet, 9/20/17). Most of that aid has not reached the Christian minorities designated as victims of ISIS genocide. Most are unlikely to return to their ancestral homes without aid.

The plight of Christians, Yazidis and other minorities in Iraq is of course a monumental humanitarian crisis. But it also constitutes a serious U.S. national security problem. Religious pluralism is a necessary condition for long-term stability in Iraq. If minorities do not return and, over time, become fully integrated into Iraqi society, that nation will very likely become a perpetual Shia-Sunni battleground where terrorism flourishes.

The office of International Religious Freedom should ensure that USAID, State Department, and Defense resources are expended to counter the religion-related violence that is at the root of this crisis. The U.S. should mount a sustained campaign to convince Iraqi stakeholders that they will never live in peace and security without the pluralism that non-Muslim minorities bring. With our help, Iraq must provide security, jobs, and religious freedom to these non-Muslim minorities so that they can integrate into Iraqi society.

Success in such efforts will not come easy. But the long war against Islamist terrorism and religious persecution cannot be won with law enforcement and military force alone. America needs new ideas and new combatants to win this war. Religious freedom should be part of the mix.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you.

Mr. Berschinski, you're recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ROB BERSCHINSKI

Mr. BERSCHINSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for having me here today to testify.

I work in an organization whose mission is to foster American global leadership on human rights, including religious freedom, not just as a moral obligation but also as a vital national interest. I bring this perspective to today's hearing and hope that it will inform discussion this morning in at least three ways.

First, it's important to recognize that the U.S. Government's work to ensure that foreign governments do not encroach on an individual's rights to freedom of religion and conscience will be less effective if these efforts are divorced from work to uphold other fundamental freedoms.

As several have mentioned, a review of the U.S. Government's list of countries of particular concern bears out this fact. In no state is religious intolerance an outlier to a more widespread pattern of abuses. Simply put, repressive governments tend to seek control over any organized body of individuals and to view those outside of the government's direct control as a threat to their power.

Thus, attacks on religion and belief often relate to and sometimes stand in for attacks on political opposition, human rights activists and lawyers, as Ms. Arriaga mentioned, on women, on LGBT people, and on ethnic minorities. This fact is worth bearing in mind as this committee considers the administration's ability to promote religious liberty and reduce attacks on religious communities.

As this committee is no doubt aware, the administration's budget request of \$37.6 billion to fund the State Department and USAID for fiscal year 2018 is roughly 30 percent lower than that which Congress appropriated for fiscal year 2017. The request for human-rights-related work, which includes funding dedicated to international religious freedom, seeks to cut even deeper. While both the House and Senate to date have largely rejected these draconian cuts, the fact that they were both proposed in the first place should raise questions.

The administration deserves credit for nominating a distinguished public servant for the position of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. Yet the White House has yet to announce a nominee for the position of Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor or nominees to lead the Bureaus of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and Near Eastern Affairs, among others. These are areas of ongoing gross abuses against religious minorities, and we deserve to have appropriately credentialed leaders focusing on them daily.

Secretary of State Tillerson recently wrote that, while he intends to retain the position of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and place other envoys under this position, he did not plan to have the Ambassador-at-Large report directly to him, which, in my analysis, does not appear to conform to the Frank Wolf Act.

The Secretary also indicated that he sought to eliminate other positions working to advance religious tolerance. This includes the U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which was created during the Bush administration and has since performed a valuable, tangible function: to increase protections for believers and nonbelievers alike.

Additionally, the administration has elected, through its various travel bans and recent decision to cap the number of refugee admissions at an all-time low, to take steps that will be seen by audiences around the world as not in keeping with America's leadership role in promoting religious freedom and protecting the most vulnerable.

This brings me to my second point, which is that among the greatest challenges to religious freedom today is that foreign governments are acting in the name of countering terrorism to repress their citizens.

As we have seen from countries as diverse as Azerbaijan, Bahrain, China, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Tajikistan, governments are increasingly conflating peaceful religious expression with terrorist activity in order to justify repression. Not only do such laws and policies regularly threaten religious communities and other peaceful civic organizations, they often have the effect of advancing the very radicalization that they are ostensibly meant to confront.

In the Middle East, these actions contribute to the heightened sectarian nature of the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Countries including Azerbaijan, China, and Tajikistan have moved aggressively against members of peaceful political opposition groups and religious communities, often justifying their actions on dubious counterterrorism grounds. And, as was mentioned, in Russia, recently amended anti-extremism laws have established a legal framework that allows the state to curtail essentially all forms of peaceful dissent as well as disfavored religious speech and practice.

Concluding with a third point, I'd like to touch on an issue that deals with rising anti-Semitism in Europe, a trend that the U.S. Government should do more to address head-on.

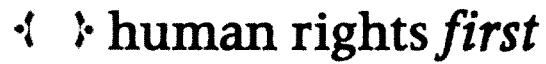
Examples of anti-Jewish violence from members of Muslim communities in France and elsewhere, as well as recurring credible allegations of anti-Semitic statements by members of the U.K.'s Labour Party, demonstrate that this is not a trend confined to a certain sector of European society or the political spectrum.

That said, in countries ranging from France to Germany to Hungary to Poland, right-wing populist parties and governments are increasingly trafficking in and turning a blind eye to anti-Semitic rhetoric. They are thus engendering climates increasingly conducive to violence.

In instances in which these parties have come to power, as in Hungary and Poland, they have embarked on a multifaceted effort to undermine the rule of law, weaken governmental checks and balances, and impair civil society. As these values underpin transatlantic security and prosperity, this should alarm us all.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Prepared statement of Mr. Berschinski follows:]



American ideals. Universal values.

Testimony of Robert G. Berschinski

Senior Vice President for Policy
Human Rights First

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY

HEARING ON

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN PROTECTING INTERNATIONAL
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

October 11, 2017

Chairman DeSantis, Ranking Member Lynch, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today regarding the U.S. government's important role in protecting international religious freedom.

The right of each of us to believe and worship as our conscience dictates is enshrined in both the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Freedom of religion—to believe or not believe, to change one's beliefs, and to practice one's faith in private or in observance with others—is the essence of what makes us human.

During my time in the Obama administration, I was privileged to work closely with then Ambassador-at-Large David Saperstein, as well as the many dedicated staff of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom. These men and women embody the professionalism and nonpartisanship so integral to the successful advancement of U.S. foreign policy.

Today, I work at an organization, Human Rights First, whose mission is to foster American global leadership on human rights not just as a moral obligation, but also as a vital national interest. Our belief is that the United States is strongest, most secure, and most prosperous when our policies and actions match our ideals.

I bring this perspective to today's hearing, and hope that it will inform discussion this morning in at least three ways.

First, it's important to recognize that the U.S. government's work to ensure that foreign governments do not encroach on an individual's rights to freedom of religion and conscience will be less effective if they are divorced from efforts to uphold other fundamental freedoms.

As the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) rightly stated in its most recent annual report, freedom of religion is impossible without the freedom to assemble, to express one's views, and to live under the equal protection of law.

A review of the U.S. government's list of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) bears out this fact. The ten countries currently listed as CPCs by the U.S. State Department include a veritable who's who of the world's most repressive and abusive governments. In no state is religious intolerance an outlier to a more widespread pattern of abuses. Rather, from North Korea to Saudi Arabia to Uzbekistan, attacks on freedom of conscience constitute only one aspect of a broader approach to limiting civil and political rights.

Simply put, repressive governments tend to seek control over any organized body of individuals, and to view those outside the government's direct control as a threat to their power. Thus, attacks on religion and belief often relate to, and sometimes stand in for, attacks on political opposition, human rights lawyers and activists, women, LGBT people, and ethnic minorities.

This fact is worth bearing in mind as this committee considers the U.S. government's ability to confront attacks on religious communities. As illustrated by the establishment and implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 and the Frank R. Wolf

International Religious Freedom Act of 2016, the Congress and executive branch each deserve credit for promoting religious freedom as a key U.S. foreign policy interest. At the same time, current trends in the funding, staffing, and organization of the State Department leave room for concern that maximizing protections for freedom of conscience and other human rights are increasingly at risk.

As this committee is no doubt aware, the administration's budget request of \$37.6 billion to fund the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development for fiscal year 2018 is roughly 30% lower than that which Congress appropriated for fiscal year 2017. The administration's request for human rights-related work, which includes funds dedicated to promoting international religious freedom, amounted to roughly 62% of requests made in recent years, or a reduction of roughly 38%. While both the House and Senate have to date largely rejected these draconian cuts, the fact that they were proposed in the first place should call into question the administration's commitment to advancing fundamental freedoms.

The administration deserves credit for nominating a distinguished public servant for the position of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. Yet the White House has yet to announce a nominee for the positions of Assistant Secretary of State for the bureaus of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; East Asian and Pacific Affairs; and Near Eastern Affairs, among others. Given the inseparability of ensuring religious freedom from other pressing human rights matters, as well as ongoing abuses against religious minorities in countries ranging from Burma to Syria, the lack of well-qualified diplomats in these vital positions does little to advance American interests, including the protection of religious minorities and other vulnerable populations.

Continuing with the theme of personnel being policy, I would recommend that Congress reflect on the implications of Secretary of State Tillerson's recent letter to Senator Corker with respect to envoys working to advance religious freedom and conduct outreach to religious communities. While I commend the Secretary for his stated intention to retain the positions of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Special Advisor for Religious Minorities in the Near East and South/Central Asia, and U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, I would note that his desire to place the Ambassador-at-Large under the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights appears not to conform with the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, which states that the Ambassador-at-Large "shall report directly to the Secretary."

I also suggest that Congress question the utility of the State Department eliminating other positions working to advance religious tolerance and freedom of conscience. In particular, the U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which was created during the George W. Bush administration, has performed a valuable function in working with governments around the world to reject so-called blasphemy laws. Notably, in 2011, the Special Envoy to the OIC played a significant role, in coordination with other offices in the State Department, USCIRF, and Members of Congress, in working with members of that organization to successfully defeat the "defamation of religions" resolution previously sponsored at the UN, and substituting for it a resolution that addresses the roots of religious intolerance while

protecting freedoms of belief and expression in a manner consistent with First Amendment principles.

Finally, on this topic, I would urge that the administration not view the policies that it has implemented with respect to its various travel bans, and its recent decision to cap the number of refugee admissions at an all-time low of 45,000, as existing in isolation from America's leadership role in promoting religious freedom and protecting believers abroad.

An in-depth study concluded by my organization in July on the first six months of the administration's travel and refugee admissions bans demonstrated a significant drop in resettlement of Syrian and Muslim refugees. Among other things, we found that since the President's January 27 Executive Order, the United States has cut its resettlement of Syrian refugees by 80 percent, despite this population representing about 40 percent of global refugee resettlement needs. The United States' sharp reduction in the resettlement of these vulnerable individuals, the majority of whom are women and children, sends the wrong message to the world about America's commitment to religious liberty.

To its credit, USCIRF has spoken out consistently in favor of resettling and otherwise protecting those fleeing war and persecution, including religious persecution. Doing so is completely in keeping with America's highest ideals. As dozens of our nation's senior-most security experts have stated, before being resettled, refugees are subjected to among the most rigorous screening of any population entering the United States. Terrorists, meanwhile, are eager to tout these policies to buttress their false narrative that the United States is at war with Islam.

This brings me to my second point, which is that the greatest threat to religious freedom today is increasingly governments acting in the name of countering terrorism to repress their citizens and curtail human rights.

As we have seen from countries as diverse as Azerbaijan, Bahrain, China, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Tajikistan, to name but a few, governments are increasingly conflating peaceful religious expression with terrorist activity in order to justify repression. The effect of this trend is two-fold. Not only do such laws and policies regularly threaten religious communities and other peaceful civic organizations directly, they often have the effect of advancing the very radicalization that they are ostensibly meant to confront.

To touch briefly on instances of this trend:

In Bahrain, following the orchestrated crackdown of 2016, the government has increasingly turned its attention toward clerics from its majority Shi'a population in what UN experts have described as systematic harassment on the basis of religious affiliation. In so doing, it has often charged religious leaders with unsubstantiated claims of supporting terrorism and extremism.

Saudi Arabia continues to classify as terrorism most forms of peaceful dissent, including contesting the government's interpretation of Islam. Iran continues to discriminate against, imprison, and in some cases execute members of its Sunni minority community (among other populations), on national security grounds.

These actions contribute to the heightened sectarian nature of the wars advanced by governments and their affiliated proxies on both sides of conflict in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Intensification of sectarian divisions is driving both Shi'a and Sunnis toward a zero-sum contest for survival, with negative impacts on these groups and other religious minorities, such as Christians and Yazidis in Iraq.

Countries including Azerbaijan, China, and Tajikistan have moved aggressively against members of peaceful political opposition groups and religious communities, often justifying their actions on dubious counterterrorism grounds. These actions in turn risk promoting the views of the most radical actors within these communities.

In Russia, recently amended anti-extremism laws have established a legal framework that allows the state to curtail essentially all forms of peaceful dissent, as well as disfavored religious practice. The Russian government's definition of "extremism" goes well beyond the threat, much less the use, of violence, so as to encompass essentially all peaceful religious rites and speech not sanctioned by the state.

The third point that I'd like to touch on deals with rising antisemitism in Europe, a trend that the U.S. government must do more to address head on.

Human Rights First is proud of its standing as one of the few globally-oriented human rights organizations outside of the Jewish advocacy community to consistently prioritize antisemitism as a human rights concern. For more than a dozen years, we have placed a special emphasis on documenting and combating this form of bigotry, which threatens individual communities as well as the stability of European democracies and institutions such as the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and NATO.

Today, we are witnessing an unprecedented and alarming resurgence of antisemitism in a number of western, central, and eastern European countries. The factors underpinning these trends are complex. They include the growing power of populist and ethno-nationalist political parties and governments, at times backed for cynical reasons by Russia; the migrant and refugee crisis, and xenophobia stoked by several national governments; and actors that inappropriately conflate discrimination and violence against Jews with opposition to Israeli state policies.

Examples of anti-Jewish violence from members of Muslim immigrant communities in France and elsewhere, as well as recurring credible allegations of antisemitic statements by members of the UK's Labour party, demonstrate that this trend is not confined to a certain sector of European society or its political spectrum. That said, in countries ranging from France to Germany to Hungary to Poland, right-wing populist political parties and governments are increasingly trafficking in, or turning a blind eye to antisemitic rhetoric. They are thus engendering climates increasingly conducive to violence.

Antisemitic crimes, some 93% of which are linked to far-right extremists, have risen in Germany in the first eight months of 2017, compared with last year. The country's recent election ensured that a radical-right party will enter the Bundestag for the first time since World War II.

The Hungarian government has in recent years engaged openly in historical revisionism and attempted rehabilitation of antisemitic figures from its interwar and World War II-era governments. More recently, the President of Hungary's Federation of Jewish Communities confronted its Prime Minister over a government-led propaganda campaign that the former described as returning Hungary's Jews to living in a state of fear.

The European Jewish Congress has in recent months publicly expressed what it described as "grave concerns" over the rise of antisemitism in Poland, and a deterioration of relations between the country's Jewish community and government. Researchers at the University of Warsaw have documented that acceptance of antisemitic hate speech is rising across the country, particularly amongst younger Poles.

At least two factors bind together these disparate national-level trends, each of which should be a cause of concern for the U.S. government. First, far-right populist parties in Europe appear to be cloaking latent antisemitism in more active forms of anti-Muslim bigotry. Second, in instances in which these parties have come to power, as in Hungary and Poland, they have embarked on a multifaceted effort to undermine the rule of law, weaken governmental checks and balances, and impair civil society. As described elsewhere, intolerance for religious plurality has tended to coincide with actions that threaten other aspects of democracy and human rights. As these values underpin transatlantic security and prosperity, this should alarm us all.

Recommendations

Based on the above, Members of the Committee should consider the following recommendations, which are meant to improve the U.S. government's role in protecting international religious freedom:

1. In coordination with committees of jurisdiction considering the administration's State and Foreign Operations appropriations requests for fiscal year 2018 and beyond, ensure a holistic approach to efforts to advance religious freedom, including by fully funding the needs of the State Department and USAID, recognizing that, in order to be effective, such efforts must by necessity cut across a multitude of bureaus and programs.
2. Urge the White House and Secretary of State Tillerson to nominate for confirmation appropriately qualified individuals to serve as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and to head vacant leadership roles in regional bureaus.
3. Engage Secretary of State Tillerson on his initial recommendations concerning the ongoing reorganization of State and USAID, noting that an individual with a record for building tolerance and respect across faiths should be nominated to serve as Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism; and that he should reconsider retention of the position of U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

4. Recognizing that repressive governments frequently justify human rights violations against religious communities and other peaceful dissenters on the basis of countering terrorism, which in turn can fuel alienation and violence, review U.S. government security-focused policies and assistance to foreign governments to ensure that they do not contribute to counterproductive actions.
5. Prioritize protecting the rights of displaced minority religious communities in Iraq to return to their homes in safety, which would serve as a powerful renunciation of ISIS' extremist ideology.
6. Challenge the administration to uphold the United States' bipartisan tradition of welcoming those fleeing conflict and persecution by reviewing and revising its decision to cap refugee admissions at an all-time low. Human Rights First recommends that the administration cap refugee resettlement at no less than 75,000 individuals at a time in which the number of people displaced stands at the highest level since World War II.
7. Consider increasing foreign assistance to fund civil society groups, including those promoting religious freedom and interfaith dialogue, and combatting antisemitism, in central and eastern Europe.
8. Increase diplomatic engagement with European allies backsliding on democracy and human rights, including with respect to religious freedom and tolerance.
9. Support efforts to pass the Combating European Anti-Semitism Act of 2017 (H.R. 672), which would amend the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to require enhanced reporting in the State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report on, *inter alia*, the security challenges facing European Jewish communities; the efforts of the U.S. government to partner with European law enforcement and civil society on these issues; and European educational initiatives that aim to impart values of pluralism and tolerance.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you.

The chair notes the presence of our colleague, the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Palmer. I ask unanimous consent that Mr. Palmer be allowed to fully participate in today's hearing.

And, without objection, it's so ordered.

The chair also had noted the presence of the full committee chairman, but I think he will grace us with his presence shortly.

The chair now recognizes myself for 5 minutes.

Dr. Farr and Ambassador Kozak, you both touched on some of the discrimination against people in places like Iran and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Berschinski had mentioned how sometimes the oppressing people based on religion can be a proxy for just political disagreements, but in Iran and Saudi Arabia the root of the discrimination is just based on a sharia-based society. I mean, the law is being applied to where, if you're not of that particular persuasion, you are disfavored, correct?

Mr. KOZAK. Yes. I mean, I think both are true, that you're disfavored because you're not of that persuasion, but it's also people who want to maintain political power make themselves the interpreters of what is the applicable religious doctrine. So they play off each other to a very bad effect.

Mr. FARR. Couldn't agree more. This is religious persecution, plain and simple. It's motivated by a religious view that certain religious opinions and groups are not acceptable. Ms. Arriaga has talked about these Baha'i in Iran, these women who have been in prison for 10 years for nothing more than being Baha'i. That's religious persecution par excellence, if I can put it that way.

Mr. DESANTIS. So what—because you had mentioned some of the countries in Africa that don't have the same problems. What is the distinction between those?

Because I noted, you know, the President of Egypt, el-Sisi, he gave a speech in front of some of the Islamic clerics, and he said, look, you can't have a faith that views its role to be at war with people who disagree with you. So he was, I think, trying to chart a course where, you know, you can have an Islamic-based society that doesn't necessarily do that.

But what separates the Irans from the countries that, even though they have Muslim majorities, are not trying to discriminate against non—and it's not just non-Muslims. I mean, you've got to be this certain type of Muslim if you're in Iran.

Mr. FARR. Precisely so. And I think the answer lies in the history of these countries, but it also, in these seven West African countries, has to do with the fact that they've discovered this works. I mean, it produces more economic growth, it produces more political civility, people are killing each other less, people are freer.

So some of this is just practical. And what I've called for is for us to be a little bit more down to Earth in the way that we can convince governments that it's in their interest to allow greater religious freedom or at least religious tolerance. Move away from some of these crackdowns.

Each government is tough—and you named the two toughest, frankly, other than North Korea: Iran and Saudi Arabia. They are very, very difficult. But it doesn't mean we should not be really trying to make the self-interest argument to them, particularly in

Iran, where you have, it seems to me, a large number of younger Iranian citizens who are generally pro-American. They are open to some of these messages, but if they speak out, they're going to get hurt. We need to address those problems too.

Mr. DESANTIS. Well, I hope that—I mean, the practical point you make about the experience clearly is lost on the ruling elites in Iran. But, hopefully, throughout Iranian society, where I think you do have people who are much more pro-Western in terms of some of their values, that that could be an impetus to eventually go in a different direction with that society. Because, I mean, it's a totalitarian state.

What about the suspension of the visas for people who are denying religious freedom? Ms. Arriaga, you mentioned it. It's in the law. I mean, my view is we ought to enforce that. I mean, if we're not going to enforce this stuff, then why are we even passing it?

What has been done to do that? I mean, I think if we followed the law, it'd be very difficult for people from Iran and Saudi Arabia to get visas to come here, but yet that happens.

Ms. ARRIAGA. We need to have a more comprehensive way to keep those lists. We know for a fact that there are thousands of the children of human rights violators around the world that come here to go to school and go to college here, and the Wolf Act precisely is asking for a more comprehensive list of violators as well as a more comprehensive list of conscience prisoners. So making sure that we have the correct information is a good place to begin.

Mr. DESANTIS. Ambassador Kozak, what's the answer?

Mr. KOZAK. Yes. No, we've found that the visa denial is a very effective tool, whether it's for human rights violations generally or religious freedom violations in particular.

One of the complications of making lists is that there are multiple bases for denying people visas, and the consular officers tend to take the easiest one. So if you have someone who has committed extrajudicial killings or torture, they're banned anyway as part of the Immigration and Nationality Act, so they don't need to go to the question of did they do this for religious reasons or did they do this for human rights reasons. So it makes compilation of lists a little bit complicated.

But it's a very effective tool, and we've deployed it, I think, to great effect in a number of places.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you. My time is up, and I will recognize the ranking member for 5 minutes.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let's take this from sort of a 30,000-foot level. I know that President Trump has recommended a 30-percent cut in the State Department budget. That's for the State Department and also USAID. Let me put it in the words of a Republican Senator, Lindsey Graham. He described that move, cutting the budget by 30 percent, as, quote, "radical and reckless."

Ms. Arriaga, your feelings on that?

Ms. ARRIAGA. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom makes recommendations to the State Department, but we do not take a position on its budget. I'm sure Ambassador Kozak will be happy to answer that question.

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Kozak, she just threw you under the bus, but go ahead.

Mr. KOZAK. I support the President's budget request——

Mr. LYNCH. Oh, do you?

Mr. KOZAK. —as any administration——

Mr. LYNCH. Okay.

Mr. KOZAK. —witness would. But——

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Berschinski, how about you?

Mr. BERSCHINSKI. So, as I mentioned a little bit in my testimony, I think, overall, the budget cuts are pretty reckless. I think that they were made out of the gate, without appropriate understanding of the nature of diplomacy, the number of complex issues the State Department and USAID are working through. I think ultimately they're going to harm our ability to promote human rights and religious liberty as well.

Mr. LYNCH. Fair enough.

So, Ms. Arriaga and Mr. Berschinski, you both bring up the situation of Russia in your written remarks. As you've both noted, last year, new Russian laws effectively criminalized all private religious speech not sanctioned, not approved by the Russian Government—sort of a government filter on religious speech.

Also, the Jehovah's Witnesses were banned in the North Caucasus. Particularly in Chechnya and Dagestan, security forces continue to carry out arrests and kidnappings of people suspected of any link to, quote, "nontraditional Islam," as defined by the government.

So, Mr. Berschinski, do you think that Russia's repression of the religious rights of its own people and those of neighboring countries is something that should be of particular concern to the United States?

Mr. BERSCHINSKI. I do.

And I wouldn't limit it to just repression on religious grounds. In addition to all the things you mentioned, the Russian Government is involved in a widespread focus on repressing any actor or organization that can pose a challenge to state control.

So we see that in terms of journalists and opposition politicians murdered and imprisoned. We see it in terms of broad-based attacks on NGOs working on human rights and religious freedom, certainly, but also on issues of health and the environment, forcing dozens to close, many more tarred as foreign agents, as traitors, harassed, raided, and so on.

We see a media landscape that at one point had a fairly free and fair media environment that's now essentially a propaganda machine directed and controlled by the Kremlin. We see it in terms of what should be described as pogroms against gay people in Chechnya, detaining them illegally, abusing them, and, in some cases, murdering them.

So we see this repression across the board right now in Russia. And I think that we can draw a tie between the repression that the Russian Government is enacting at home and its behavior abroad, some of which was mentioned earlier in terms of the invasion of Ukraine, annexation of Crimea, the attacks on the Tatar Muslim minority population there, as we all know, the Russian Government's involvement in Syria and the Russian Government's in-

v involvement in both the U.S. Presidential election and what seem to be continuing efforts to raise societal tensions in the United States and in countries across Europe.

I think this is a continuing threat, and I feel that there is reason for the U.S. population to be concerned, because the repression at home is tied to some of these behaviors abroad.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

Ms. Arriaga, in the most recent report that I have on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, they talk about what's going on in eastern Ukraine and also in Crimea. We don't hear a lot about that. What is going on? That report seems to lay out some very repressive activity.

Ms. ARRIAGA. Yeah. USCIRF continues to receive weekly reports of Putin's thugs acting with impunity. The Jehovah's Witnesses have even produced, for instance, videos, information being planted in their houses of worship. And, unfortunately, in Ukraine and Crimea, we have received reports of people being arrested arbitrarily and also being executed without a trial.

John Ruskay, a fellow commissioner, has adopted a Muslim political prisoner from Russia. He was accused of studying pacifist Islam. His name is Bagir Kazikhanov. And we are advocating for individuals, humanizing the story and also highlighting what's going on in Crimea and the Ukraine.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My time has expired. Thank you for your courtesy.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you.

The chair now recognizes Chairman Foxx for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for convening this hearing.

Ambassador Kozak, I believe the freedom-defending world can do more to prevent atrocity crimes if it can deter severe violations of religious freedom earlier on. The Frank Wolf Act amends the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act in several ways, including by creating the designating persons list and sanctioning mechanisms for non-state actors.

Could you elaborate on how this provision of the act could be used to address violations of religious freedom, particularly those committed by Burmese security forces, non-state actors, and other nationalist groups and individuals against the Rohingya minority facing ethnic cleansing?

Mr. KOZAK. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The act does give us some additional tools in being able to—I mean, obviously, we have spoken out against non-state actors who've committed these gross violations, as Secretary Tillerson did with respect to the genocidal acts of ISIS in Iraq, and we have been able to speak out against individuals. But I think this will give us an opportunity or an impetus to put them together more methodically.

The Rohingya situation today is just appalling. The attacks with security forces and also societal attacks have resulted, at this point, in half of the people in Rakhine State, half of the Rohingya, leaving and living across the border in terrible conditions—murders, rapes, just every manner of atrocity committed against them.

We have, as I think you know, been trying for years to find some way to throttle back people's behavior in this respect and have appealed to the government, appealed to the Burmese military to stop it. But it's a little bit what the chairman said: People in power—sometimes the argument as to what's in the best interest of the country doesn't resonate with them because it's not in their best interest in terms of maintaining their own power. And trying to find the right combination of carrots and sticks to persuade them to do otherwise is difficult.

But it's something that's got to be done. It's something we've spent an awful lot of time and energy on, trying to find the right combination of programs, diplomatic activity, advice, pressure. And hopefully we will find a way to throttle it back, because it's a terrible situation that's getting worse.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you.

Ms. Arriaga, I note in your testimony you highlighted how religion has been used to disempower women and that women and girls are often victims of religious freedom violations, extremism, and discriminatory personal status laws.

Could you discuss the complexities and synergies between the rights of women and girls, freedom of religion, and what religious freedom advocates have been doing to address the issue?

Ms. ARRIAGA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

We at the Commission have issued a brand-new report precisely on the synergies between religious freedom and women's rights. We find that countries that fully respect religious freedom also ban child brides, they also allow communities to reject harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. Women who are divorced are not forced into poverty. Women are not forced to convert to the religion of the person they're marrying. Marriages are recognized.

It's been, unfortunately, our experience that women's rights and religious freedom advocates were not working together. They thought that rights were pitted against each other. However, after we issued this report, we have met with a number of academics at Oxford, we have met a number of parliamentarians through the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief, and we have found there has been a great reception. We think we can double the advocates for religious freedom if we take in advocates for women's rights as well.

Ultimately, human rights are interdependent, and to take one out of the equation arbitrarily or artificially hurts the rights of everyone else. And every single human right should be considered in tandem as cooperating and collaborating with each other.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentlewoman yields back.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Gomez for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOMEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

When I was sworn into Congress, I said that one of my main duties was to fight for my constituents, no matter where they were from, no matter what God they worshipped, no matter the color of their skin; if they came here, they believed in our values, contributed to our country, that they deserved a place here in the United States of America.

And freedom of religion and freedom of expression are the bed-rock freedoms on which our country was founded. It is these freedoms that should give us the authority and ability to do what we can to promote these freedoms with people around the world. It is the moral authority upon which our ability to promote international religious freedom rests.

Unfortunately, religious freedom under this administration means nothing more than giving certain groups the license to discriminate against people of color, Muslims, people of a non-Christian faith, and the LGBT community. It is deeply disturbing to me that some people have used religious freedom as their basis to fire people who don't share the same religious beliefs or who are LGBTQ. Where I come from, that is just discrimination, plain and simple. There is no need to dress it up.

I believe that this administration's repeated attempt at a Muslim ban, the normalization of racism by this Department of Justice, and the brazen attacks on the LGBT community undermine our moral authority and undermine our ability to promote religious freedom abroad.

Quick question. Last week, Attorney General Sessions issued a directive to all Federal agencies which included the following guidance: "To the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, religious observance and practice should be reasonably accommodated in all government activity." The Human Rights Campaign, a national LGBT rights group, called these guidelines a, quote, "all-out assault on civil rights" and a, quote, "sweeping license to discriminate."

Mr. Berschinski, do you believe that the rolling back of regulations protecting LGBT groups in the name of religion promotes religious freedom?

Mr. BERSCHINSKI. Thank you, Congressman.

What I would say in response to that is that I think that the protections for religious freedom that are enshrined in the First Amendment do not and should not give broad license to discriminate against any class of people.

So, with the understanding that some of the memoranda that the Department of Justice has put out are long and complex, just came out and have yet to be fully analyzed, I would say that I would hope that the Department of Justice would act fully in keeping with that spirit.

Mr. GOMEZ. Thank you.

Commissioner Arriaga, you've mentioned that some people use discrimination against other religions as a way to promote their own self-interest. Have you seen any of that here in our country recently?

You don't have to answer that question.

Let me ask you one other question. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom does not review repression of religious freedoms in the United States. How would the banning of a particular religious group affect your analysis of religious freedoms in this country?

Ms. ARRIAGA. I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question, please?

Mr. GOMEZ. How would the banning of a particular religious group affect your analysis of religious freedom in this country?

Ms. ARRIAGA. Mr. Gomez, my name is Kristina Arriaga. As a fellow Latino, I think I know a little bit of what you're talking about in terms of discrimination.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom advocates for all religions in every single country. We find that banning one religion or granting preference to one or the other is generally not in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18.

Mr. GOMEZ. Great.

Mr. Berschinski, according to a recent report by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, there has been a, quote, "91-percent increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes during the first half of the year compared to the same period in 2016." Would a 91-percent increase in a foreign country over a 6-month period raise concerns for you?

Mr. BERSCHINSKI. Yes, absolutely, it would.

Mr. GOMEZ. Thank you so much.

One of the things that I'm trying to highlight is that our ability to promote religion freedom abroad rests on how people view how we promote that same freedom in our own country. Anything that undermines it makes our ability less so and weakens our ability to protect religious freedom of individuals in other countries.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the vice chairman, Mr. Russell, for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUSSELL. I thank the chairman.

And I also thank the chairman for holding this important hearing. I think it's vital not only to, obviously, how we treat all human beings, but also it intertwines in so much of our foreign policy and our relations around the globe in making sure that these differences and these pretexts do not become a thing that divide and ultimately result in the slaughtering of thousands of innocent people, which seems to be the trend of history.

Mr. Chairman, I guess I would like to speak a little bit about—you know, having extensively traveled the globe and fought in several different places around it, while some of our colleagues may imagine that we have such religious oppression in this country, this is one of the greatest nations that we have as far as religious tolerance. Differences in religious opinion? Sure. Protected by the First Amendment? Also.

But those opinions being forced upon religious groups to force them to violate their rights of conscience, which are also protected in the First Amendment, we can't use one group's pretext or agendas to violate the religious beliefs of another group. And in that, I think the United States does very well.

As I look at this list of the CPC recommendation nations, there's a trend that I find kind of interesting. Sixty percent on the recommended list are Asian countries. And we often focus on, you know, the habitual troublemakers, you know, that we become accustomed to, but we're seeing 60 percent in Asia, 25 percent in Africa, and 15 percent in the Middle East. And I find that intriguing because oftentimes we don't make the type of investments in Asia, and yet this is where we're seeing a, just on the CPC list, interesting trend.

Along that line, too, on the Tier 2 countries, two key allies of the United States are on this list, one a NATO ally, which is of particular concern.

And, Ms. Arriaga, you intrigued me with your visa restriction but extend that to the education piece, which I think would be useful.

But, as I try to walk through that, one of the successful programs that we have is the international military exchange program, IMET. And, you know, in decades past, we're kind of darned if we do and darned if we don't. You know, if we try to promote human rights through the education of military officers, most of which will grow up to be major commanders and generals in that nation and, you would hope, would be trained in our values, you know, they can actually do some good. On the other hand, if you exclude them, then, you know, they will not be exposed to any of those Western things.

And one of the things we see with Turkey right now, as they continue to oppress, is even ferreting out those that have been trained in Western countries, particularly the United States, out of their military. And that causes great alarm.

So I've stated several observations here, and I would like, kind of, your commentary on that and anyone else that would like to opine on some of these observations and what concerns you might have. Thank you.

Ms. ARRIAGA. Thank you, Mr. Russell.

I just came back from Turkey 3 days ago. The situation there is extraordinary. There is an enormous amount of stress and anxiety on the Turkish people on the minority religious communities. As you know, Pastor Brunson has been incarcerated; it's been a year last Saturday. And, regrettably, as you also know, 24 hours before USCIRF's arrival to Turkey, a DEA officer, whose a Turkish national, was arrested.

So I think right now Turkey stands as a NATO ally who's having great difficulties respecting human rights in that country.

Mr. RUSSELL. Which is part of the NATO charter, by the way. It's embedded in that alliance.

Do you see resistance in calling out Turkey in these, you know, Tier 2 countries? Are you getting pushback on that?

Ms. ARRIAGA. Well, USCIRF continues to be greatly troubled by the recent developments. And, unfortunately, when we see such a bad panorama for human rights in general, for all the journalists getting arrested, generally religious freedom also falls in the same category.

We met with several religious communities in Turkey that still have no legal persona. Turkey has spent a great deal of the summer revising its textbooks. There is a mandatory religious education, which characterizes anyone from a minority religion as being outside of the spectrum of, many times, acceptable behavior. This is very traumatic for children.

So we will continue to watch closely what's going on.

Mr. RUSSELL. Well, I thank you for that.

And I would love to hear from the others, but, unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, my time has expired. I yield back.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for 5 minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank each of our panelists for being here this morning and for the role that each of you play in defending religious liberties around the world, regardless of what that religion may be.

My background is that of a pastor for about 25 years before being in Congress. And I personally have seen a lot of what you deal with, and this has been an area of great concern of mine for a long time. And I appreciate the fact that y'all are on the tip of the spear in trying to deal with this and keep us informed.

Religious liberty is a universal right, not just something that we cherish here in America. It should be something that is cherished around the world, regardless, again, of what the religion may be that is held by an individual. We've brought up today already some in the Muslim communities, be it in places like Burma or Russia or the Middle East, even, where the Yazidis—I mean, we're seeing that.

The one area of concern for me, not so much with your work, but it seems at least with the media and otherwise that is largely missing is the persecution of Christians around the world that seems to largely go unnoticed.

And I recall in November 2012 that, from Germany, Merkel, made the comment that Christianity was the most persecuted religion in the world. And, of course, that statement was met with a great deal of criticism, but it's backed up, and there have been many, many reports, as you well know, of the plight that Christians are facing in many places around the world.

And, goodness, we can even look at some of the various laws of apostasy that many countries have, where, if someone converts to Christianity, the punishment can be extremely severe and torturous.

And many of these countries you've mentioned, from Saudi Arabia to Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar—I mean, the list goes on and on and on and on. North Korea. We're seeing some horrible stories coming out of North Korea. China. In fact, I have a resolution to try to call China's hand on some of the catastrophes happening there.

And, bottom line, we just can't allow these things to continue. They've got to be brought to the public's awareness and to be dealt with.

Just a couple of questions within all that context.

Ambassador, let me begin with you. When the State Department is considering which refugees are admitted to the United States, what role, if any, does the threat of religious persecution against an individual play in the determination as to whether or not they would be allowed to come to the United States as a refugee?

Mr. KOZAK. Thank you, sir.

It's key. The definition of a refugee is somebody who has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion or political opinion or several categories, ethnicity, but religion is one of them. So, to qualify as a refugee, if you say, I have a well-founded fear of persecution, that is the key thing you have to show.

In terms of deciding, you know, how to allocate our refugee numbers around the world, they tend to look at what are the most vulnerable populations, the most at-risk populations. And, again, that can be based on people who are at risk because of their——

Mr. HICE. Do you believe that allocation is properly manifested when it deals with Christians around the world? I mean, we've got—the studies I've seen—some 200 million Christians around the world suffering persecution in one way or another.

Mr. KOZAK. Yeah. And you've got, like, now we're usually in the order of 75,000 or 50,000 refugee numbers per year to allocate.

It really depends on the particular area. In some countries, I think we've had a high percentage of the refugees coming in have been Christians because Christians have been persecuted there. In others, it gets——

Mr. HICE. Let me ask my——

Mr. KOZAK. Yep.

Mr. HICE. —final question. I've only got 20 seconds. What does Congress need to do to help achieve the goal of both awareness and of stopping religious persecution around the world?

And I'll open that to anyone who would like to answer.

Mr. KOZAK. Well, I think you already have given us a tremendous amount of tools. The International Religious Freedom Report, which is mandated—and, as Dr. Farr said, it's diagnostic, but that's where you start. And we try to do a good job of saying what is the problem in each one of these places.

Then you have the second set of, what do you do about it? And there, the tools that have been given—having an office with programming, having an ambassador-at-large who can go around the world and try to raise awareness of these issues, having sanctions that we can apply, whether it's on visas or on economic assistance or military assistance or other things—those are all the kinds of tools you would use for other diplomatic efforts. But it's putting the combination together, getting across-the-board effort from the government.

I think one of the things that adds to that, though, is the efforts of individual Members of Congress. People do pay attention when they hear you and your colleagues speak up on these issues, because they know that decisions that affect them are made in Congress as well as in the executive branch, and it really amplifies the message we're trying to get across.

Ms. ARRIAGA. If I——

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DESANTIS. Did you want to——

Ms. ARRIAGA. Yeah. If I may add, H.R. 390 has passed the House; it's now in the Senate. In the Senate, it was amended to include assistance to the Syrian population. It would be terrific if this passed and there was more funding appropriated immediately for that, for genocide victims.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, did you want to ask questions?

Mr. GOWDY. If the chairman would allow.

Mr. DESANTIS. I think I have no other choice but to allow.

Mr. GOWDY. Oh, but you do.

I want to thank you for having this hearing, Chairman DeSantis, and for your commitment to religious freedom.

Dr. Farr, it's good to see you again.

I asked you a question during the last administration, and, in the interest of fairness, I'm going to ask you the exact same question under this administration.

Leave Congress out of it for a second; just focus on the executive branch. What are the three things that you would change, if you could, at the executive-branch level given the fact that we have had a change in administration? What are the first three things that should be done, from your perspective, in this sphere?

Mr. FARR. Thank you, Mr. Gowdy, speaking as a fellow South Carolinian.

One of those things has already been done, and that is that the—this goes to something Mr. Lynch asked about earlier, and that is the budget cuts in the State Department. I agree with Mr. Berschinski that this was a bad idea.

But one of the good things that has happened, in my view, is that the Office of International Religious Freedom has become larger. And so long as the positions that are being moved in there are being moved with the funds to support them—which I think is the case, but I'm not sure. As long as that is the case, that is a good thing. So what I am talking about is more staff and more oomph for the Office of International Religious Freedom.

The second thing the Wolf Act requires, and that is that the Ambassador-at-Large report to the Secretary of State. Now, as has already been mentioned here—I forget who mentioned it. It may be my colleague to the left.

Thank you for mentioning it.

In the same letter where Secretary Tillerson proposed moving these positions under the Ambassador-at-Large, he said he is going to report to a lower-ranking official. Well, this is pretty clear in the law: The Ambassador-at-Large shall report to the Secretary of State.

Why is that important? Is that a magic wand? No, it's not. It, in fact, however, improves the status of the Ambassador-at-Large in the office, in my opinion, for the governments out there and, just as importantly, for American diplomats, who have seen historically this position as sort of a, you know, just below a high level—let me put it that way—within the State Department. I think it's very important, and Congress should, in my view, insist that the Ambassador report to the Secretary of State.

But the final thing, the third thing, Mr. Gowdy, is the subject of my testimony today, and that is that the International Religious Freedom policy of the United States is not yet aligned with our national security policy. It's not an all-of-government thing. It is still focused in a single office, with not enough oomph to do this.

This may be changing under this administration. There may be something in the national security strategy of the United States, when it's produced, that draws religious freedom in, as I think it should be. But that is a major, major remaining step to take, in my opinion.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. GOWDY. Yes, sir.

You touched upon what I find to be a fascinating dualism in your opening statement, that our national security interests are actually advanced when countries have more enlightened policies with respect to religious liberty.

I like to anticipate arguments on the other side, and sometimes the other side—I don't mean Democrats. I mean the other side of this issue. Sometimes folks on the other side, which are both Republicans and Democrats, will make the argument that we need to be more patient with the following countries because they are of such significant national security interest that we should overlook the following things.

You made the exact opposite argument, and I want to give you a chance to extrapolate on that.

Mr. FARR. Well, thank you. It's pretty broad without focusing on a particular country, but the ones where this happens, such as Saudi Arabia—that's a very good example of where we need the support of the Saudis. We need cooperation, intelligence, military, and otherwise. And yet it is the mother lode of Islamist extremism. It is the place where the ideology that energizes Islamist extremism begins.

We need to do both. There is no simple answer to any foreign policy question, let alone one that has to do with religion.

I think we are deficient in providing to the Saudis reasons why it's in their interest to begin—not to adopt the First Amendment or move toward religious freedom in the broad way that we view it here, but toward religious tolerance, because it can begin to benefit them.

And, in fact, we have opportunities. The regime itself talks a very good line internationally when it talks about its approach to their own religion. We should be working—and we are working, but I think we treat this almost as a boutique issue. We don't have enough resources working with the Saudis behind the scenes to convince them it's in their interest.

The same would be true of Iran. It would be true of China. It would be true of any country where I believe we can make this an all-of-government effort to convince them it's in their interest.

That's a broad answer to a broad question. I hope I'm being responsive.

Mr. GOWDY. You did. Thank you, Dr. Farr.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your indulgence.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The chair now recognize Mrs. Demings for 5 minutes.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and to our ranking member as well.

And to our witnesses, thank you for being with us.

According to a United Nations official, the Burmese Government has been carrying out a, quote, "ethnic cleansing" of the Rohingya, an ethnic group, as you all know, that primarily belong to the Muslim faith. According to the United Nations, 500,000 civilians have fled from Burma to Bangladesh since August 25th, 2017, alone.

Commissioner, can you please speak to how the Burmese Government is essentially attempting to erase the Rohingya from Burma?

Ms. ARRIAGA. We at USCIRF have monitored that situation with great concern. We received reports that some of the Rohingya Muslims were even walking barefoot over barbed wire to try to get to Bangladesh and flee. And, in fact, USCIRF is planning to have a delegation go to Burma and Bangladesh in the next few weeks precisely to address this issue. It is, without a doubt, an incident of ethnic cleansing without precedent in that country.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Burma has been listed as a country of particular concern by the State Department for over a decade.

Commissioner, again, has Burma's appearance on the State Department's countries-of-particular-concern list had any affect on the regime's persecution of religious minorities?

Ms. ARRIAGA. It's hard to tell. The developments in the last few weeks have, again, been unprecedented. We have watched them with great concern, and every single voice needs to rise to defend the Rohingya Muslims.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Dr. Farr, what do you believe the United States can do to stop the, quote, "ethnic cleansing" that is occurring?

Mr. FARR. Well, I, frankly, prefer to call it religious cleansing. I mean, these are Muslims, and this is religious persecution of the first order.

And you're quite right, they've been on the list for over 10 years. I was in the Office of Religious Freedom when these lists were created by the law and began to implement them, so I think it's actually been longer than 10 years. And while I would never suggest that these lists are not important—I said in my testimony they are vitally important—they're just lists. They're just pieces of paper that list a bunch of countries on them.

And we say we're looking at economic sanctions. As far as I know, there's only been one set of economic sanctions—I could be wrong about this, and Ambassador Kozak can correct me. But the last time I paid attention to this, there was only one country in the world that we had ever imposed new economic sanctions on because of the 20-year-old International Religious Freedom Act, and that, as I recall, was Eritrea. And, to say the very least, it didn't work. And that was part of my reason for arguing in my testimony that we need more than words and we need more than sanctions.

So whatever we've tried in Burma has not worked. I think we have an opportunity now not only to condemn them, which we should be—we should be speaking out. We need Ambassador Brownback in that position so that he can go to Burma and speak about this, which I think he will. But we also need to begin to work with the Burmese to get in front of this problem, because it will happen again. And the fact that they're on this list won't make a bit of difference in the world, in my opinion.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Last week, while addressing the United Nations Security Council, the U.N. Secretary-General said this, and I quote: "The situation has spiraled into the world's fastest-developing refugee emergency, a humanitarian and human rights nightmare."

Mr. Berschinski, should the United States enter into negotiations with Bangladesh to allow for a certain percentage of displaced Rohingya to resettle in America?

Mr. BERSCHINSKI. Well, I wouldn't want to get out front of the United States' overall refugee resettlement program. As I under-

stand it—and Ambassador Kozak can speak to this in more depth—there are, among other things, related to U.S. efforts on resolving the crisis, intensive talks going on right now with the Government of Bangladesh.

But I think, to your larger point, perhaps, this speaks to the cap on refugee resettlement overall that the Trump administration has put in place. I would say that, were I able to respond to Chairman Gowdy's question along the lines of what three things could this administration do to improve the plight of persecuted religious minorities of all kinds, raising that cap would improve the lives of Christians, Muslims, and others.

Mrs. DEMINGS. Thank you so much.

I yield back.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Palmer, for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for allowing me to participate in this very important hearing.

Ambassador Kozak, the State Department's most recent report discusses a number of countries' failings on religious freedom. Many of those countries are a source of threats to the United States. But that list doesn't include non-state actors, does it?

Mr. KOZAK. The current list does not include non-state actors because they—those were added by the Wolf Act, which will kick in this year. So the list that will come out next month, I guess, at this point, will also include non-state actors.

Mr. PALMER. So the list will? Does the State Department have any concern about including them on the list?

Mr. KOZAK. No, sir. It was simply that we were responding to the earlier mandate from Congress, and this has now broadened. In some ways, it actually helps to provide context, because, in many of these places, the worst atrocities are being committed by non-state actors. Witness the genocide committed by ISIS in Iraq and Syria. And it just didn't fit within the reporting mandate before, and now it does, and we're happy for it.

Mr. PALMER. And you have the same thing with the Taliban and Boko Haram and those groups.

Mr. KOZAK. Right, any group that we find is a group of particular concern with respect to committing the most serious acts of countering religious freedom.

Mr. PALMER. Those are the hard, extreme cases of the violation of religious freedom. Would you agree with that?

Mr. KOZAK. Yes, sir. The way it's defined in the act is it's particularly severe violations, such as torture, extrajudicial killings, long-term imprisonment without charges, use of rape against people. So it's not, you know, the unfortunately run-of-the-mill thing, like refusing to register or provide legal status to a particular group or even the bans on allowing groups to worship. This is where it gets violent and people are being killed or—

Mr. PALMER. There's softer forms of religious persecution or violation of religious freedom that would include discriminating against who they could hire or who they could associate with. Would you agree that happens as well?

Mr. KOZAK. Oh, absolutely, sir.

Mr. PALMER. Would you agree that that happens in the United States? We had one of our colleagues make some—

Mr. KOZAK. Yeah.

Mr. PALMER. —allegations along those lines. I'd just like to point out that, you know—and we're really focused on what goes on internationally, and I think appropriately so, but there's also violations that have occurred in the United States that violate an individual or a particular denomination or religion's right to free exercise.

Mr. KOZAK. Well, what we tend to say, sir, on violations internationally is that every country violates human rights, including the human right of international religious freedom, because countries are made up of humans. But the question is what does a country do about it when that happens. Do we have appropriate laws? Do we have appropriate enforcement mechanisms?

Mr. PALMER. Well, I just want to point out—

Mr. KOZAK. And I think that's where we're proud of our own mechanisms.

Mr. PALMER. —that here in the United States we're not immune to that.

Dr. Farr, we've seen that, where Catholic Charities and nonprofit groups and other groups have been taken to court over their refusing to hire people who don't practice their faith or who don't believe the things that they believe. Does that concern you?

Mr. FARR. It does.

And to return to something that Mr. Gomez had said—and I completely agree with him, although I may not apply the same principle as he did—and that is that, if we don't understand what free exercise of religion is and what it means in this country, how can we convince other people abroad that it's of value to them?

And you're quite right; in my view, the free exercise of religion is what this means. It means the full equality of all religious groups and citizens in our country and certainly the right of religious groups of all kinds to adhere to their most fundamental values and not be forced by government, whether at the State, local, or national level, to violate their consciences.

So we do have a problem. We need to solve it.

Mr. PALMER. And I think that's particularly true considering that it is in our Constitution as the First Amendment that our government will make no law prohibiting the free exercise.

And I just want to point out, Mr. Chairman, that we're not immune to this. And there was a particular example of this, a Supreme Court decision that was a unanimous decision against the United States Government, the previous administration, *Hosanna-Tabor v. EEOC*, in which members of the Supreme Court—again, 9–0 decision. This was a case in which our government argued that a religious organization or denomination could not have the freedom to hire who they wanted to, who practiced their religion, shared their beliefs. And in a 9–0 decision—you even had a couple of justices call it extraordinary or amazing, including Justice Kagan. I just think we need to be aware of that as well.

I yield back. And I thank you again for allowing me to participate.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Welch for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I thank the panel for your testimony.

In 2016, the U.S. Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation helped get this passed, the Marrakech Declaration, which, as you know, affirmed the support of over 250 Muslim leaders for defending the rights of religious minorities in predominantly Muslim communities.

Dr. Farr, what's your view of the Marrakech Declaration as far as enhancing the national security of the U.S.?

Mr. FARR. Thank you for that question, Mr. Welch.

I think the Marrakech Declaration is a major step forward. It's realistic. It's not some pie-in-the-sky declaration of something that does not emerge from the heart of Islam. Sheikh bin Bayyah and the others who are behind this declaration, in my view, have constructed a modest but realistic declaration from the heart of Islam, which many Muslims agree with, that Islam is not a religion that has to put others at a disadvantage.

Again, I want to—this is not a declaration of religious freedom as we would have it. But it does no good to have people put words out there that don't mean anything. So I am a big supporter of this because I think it is, in fact, precisely the kind of thing that our government should be behind, my religious freedom institute is behind, and we are, in fact, working with these very people—

Mr. WELCH. Thank you.

Mr. FARR. If I could just get—

Mr. WELCH. Go ahead.

Mr. FARR. —this one more—I know we've run out of time.

Mr. WELCH. Yeah.

Mr. FARR. This is—they recognize they have a problem.

Mr. WELCH. Right.

Mr. FARR. And we need to help them solve that problem, not by wagging our finger or putting them on a list, but by helping them see and perform the duty that they already see for themselves. Put it that way.

Mr. WELCH. Right. And that's called diplomatic engagement. And I know Secretary Tillerson, among other things, is focusing on a reorganization of the State Department. And I think it's a fair concern for any new Secretary of State to try to figure out how best to organize the Department and allocate its limited resources. But my understanding is that one of the proposals is eliminating the U.S. Special Envoy to the OIC.

Ambassador Kozak, what's your view about the implications of that recommendation?

Mr. KOZAK. Well, first, let me say that I've worked very closely with our previous ambassadors, representatives to the OIC, who have been housed in different places in the State Department over the last couple of administrations and even some switches during the last administration.

You know, I'm not going to predict where the Secretary is going to come out on the reorg plan, but my understanding is—or the re-design plan—but my understanding is that he wants to fold that function into the Office of Religious Freedom. It's currently part of the Office of Religion and Global Affairs, which in his letter—which

is a straw man that he put out there for consultation with Members—would merge.

So I think the function of having somebody engaged with the OIC is one that is intended to continue; it's a question of how you place it bureaucratically. And that's a fair thing to be juggling.

Mr. WELCH. Yeah. You know, you've had so much practical experience in this. There's a tension always in our foreign policy and in our State Department responsibilities, the realpolitik concerns of our engagement with another country. Sometimes they're in conflict with our advocacy for basic values like religious freedom. And it would seem to me that the job of the Secretary, among other things, is to try to balance those so that there's an ongoing engagement and outreach to protect the religious liberty of citizens around the world.

So how would you recommend that we maintain that State Department commitment? It's got to be real. It's got to be people who are empowered. But it also has to coexist with other challenges that this country faces.

Mr. KOZAK. Yes. Well, I think as many of the witnesses have said and the chairman and other chairman alluded to, the respect for human rights, including religious freedom, is vital to getting countries to where they can stand on their own and not generate giant security problems for the United States. And we've seen that over and over again.

And, as Dr. Farr points out, it's a question of how do you persuade them. Very difficult to persuade the leaders of a country that are bound and determined, who think their own status in power requires them to do repressive things.

But that's where we try to, first, work with the society writ large. Our bureau, almost all of our programming goes to working with nongovernmental organizations to try to change societal attitudes and, through that, to try to convince governments.

You also have to get—it's great to have specialty offices, like our own bureau, like the Office of Religious Freedom, that can develop the arguments and so on, but you do need to spread those out so that they're being made—and this, I think, is the case in this area—that they're being made by our military officers when they're talking to their counterparts to say, hey, there's a smarter way to fight this insurgency than the way you're doing it. You need to, you know, show greater respect for people's rights, you don't want to alienate people, and so on.

So it's pulling that all together. Both within the Department and interagency, it's absolutely crucial.

Mr. WELCH. All right. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky for 5 minutes.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My first question is to Mr. Berschinski.

In your testimony, you raised the important issue of rising anti-Semitism in Europe that is contributing to a climate of violence towards Jewish people in these countries.

Do you believe that this trend has been exacerbated by the continued opposition to the state of Israel that we see at various international organizations, particularly the United Nations? And how do anti-Israel campaigns, such as the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions, BDS, movement, play into the current climate of anti-Semitism?

Mr. BERSCHINSKI. Thank you, Congressman, for that question and for raising the issue of anti-Semitism.

I think there are a lot of different factors involved in what we're seeing in terms of anti-Semitism. My written testimony goes into this in some depth.

I think that some of it is a matter of extreme governments that are coming into power and are interested in rolling back rights across the board in countries with histories of anti-Semitism, to include mass deportation and killing during the Holocaust.

I think that there are elements related to Muslim communities in Europe and some of the anti-Semitic feelings that they bring.

And to speak to your question directly, I also do think that there is a dynamic in which people are confusing opposition to Israeli Government policies with it being appropriate to harbor discriminatory views against the Jewish population. So, just like here in the United States, we can agree to disagree on various governmental policies, but one should never hold that against a religious or ethnic group.

Mr. COMER. Thank you.

Next question. Ambassador, does the State Department have any concerns with making non-state designations? And do you expect to declare non-state actors as EPCs going forward?

Mr. KOZAK. As to the first part of your question—and thank you for it—no, we have no problem with it. I had mentioned earlier, I think, actually, it helps us, because it's been difficult in the past to give context when some of the worse violations have been committed by non-state actors but the report was only focused on state actors. So, in that sense, it's helpful, and we look forward to it.

As to, you know, whether and which organizations will be designated, I would say: Stay tuned. That's the Secretary's decision and one that he involves himself in very personally, so we'll see that in due course.

Mr. COMER. Okay. Thank you.

Let me follow up with this. The IRFA also outlines 15 Presidential actions that may be initiated toward any country found responsible for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. How many times since 1998 has the State Department recommended a Presidential action be taken against a particularly bad religious freedom violator?

Mr. KOZAK. Thank you.

I think we've had 11 countries over time that have been on the CPC list. The current 10, and Vietnam was on at one time. I believe in all but three of those countries we have applied Presidential actions. In some cases, they were waived. I'm thinking Saudi, in particular.

As Dr. Farr alluded, though, oftentimes these are countries that have committed so many bad acts that we already have a wide array of sanctions against them. So sometimes putting them on the

CPC list doesn't add an additional sanction; it double-hats an existing sanction.

But that can become important, because when you go to start taking sanctions off in response to improvements in other areas, if they haven't improved on religious freedom, we're in the position of saying, look, we can't revoke that one until you make some improvements in this area.

So the actions have been taken, but it is complicated by the fact that there are so many other aspects of the relationship that are also problematical.

Mr. COMER. Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. DESANTIS. The gentleman yields back.

I want to thank our witnesses again for appearing before us today. I thought it was a good hearing, and there was a lot of good stuff put on the record.

The record for the hearing will remain open for 2 weeks for any member to submit a written opening statement or questions for the record.

If there is no further business, without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:37 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

