



## Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

# Blasphemy Laws and Censorship by States and Non-State Actors: Examining Global Threats to Freedom of Expression

Thursday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
2:00 PM

2322 Rayburn House Office Building

### Witnesses

#### Panel I:



**David N. Saperstein** is the United States State Department Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. He was confirmed by the Senate on December 12, 2014, and was sworn in and assumed his duties on January 6, 2015. The Ambassador at Large is, by law, a principal advisor to the President and Secretary of State and serves as the United States' chief diplomat on issues of religious freedom worldwide. He also heads the Office of International Religious Freedom in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. The President also has designated Ambassador Saperstein to carry out the duties in the Near East and South Central Asia Religious Freedom Act of 2014.

In 1999, Ambassador Saperstein served as the first Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. In 2009 he was appointed by President Obama as a member of the first White House Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. From 2011-2014, he served on the State Department's Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society" as a member of its "Religion and Foreign Policy" working group.

## Panel II:



**Rev. Thomas J. Reese, S.J.**, is the Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Father Reese is a Senior Analyst for the National Catholic Reporter, a position he has held since 2014. Previously, he was a Senior Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center from 2006 to 2013 and from 1988 to 1998. He joined the Center as a Visiting Fellow in 1985. He was Editor-in-Chief of *America* magazine from 1998 to 2005 and an

associate editor from 1978 to 1985. As an associate editor, he covered politics, economics, and the Catholic Church. Father Reese entered the Jesuits in 1962 and was ordained in 1974. He also is the author of *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church*. He received a B.A. and an M.A. from St. Louis University, an M.Div. from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, and a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley.

Father Reese was appointed to the Commission by President Obama on May 15, 2014, and reappointed on May 12, 2016.

## Panel III:



**Vanessa Tucker** is the vice president for analysis at Freedom House. She previously served as the project director of Countries at the Crossroads, Freedom House's annual survey of democratic governance in 70 strategically important countries around the world. In this capacity, she directed research, writing, and administrative operations for the project. Her area of focus is the Middle East. Prior to joining Freedom House, Vanessa managed the Program on Intrastate Conflict at Harvard Kennedy School. She has also worked at the Kennedy School's Women and Public Policy Program, and as

a graduate assistant for the Democracy Program at the Carter Center. She holds a BA in international development from McGill University and an MA in international relations from Yale University.



**Nina Shea** is the director of the Hudson Institute Center for Religious Freedom. Nina has worked as a lawyer specifically focusing on religious freedom in American foreign policy, for thirty years. Joining the Hudson Institute as a Senior Fellow in 2006, she has led the Center for Religious Freedom, which she founded in 1986. Ms. Shea served as a Commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent federal agency, for thirteen years until 2012, and has been appointed to represent the United States on UN human rights bodies by both Republican and Democratic administrations. She has co-authored two recent books on religious persecution today: *Persecuted*, HarperCollins, 2013; and *Silenced*, Oxford University Press, 2011, for which former Indonesia President Abdurrahman Wahid wrote the Foreword. She has authored four studies on violent teachings in official Saudi education materials. Her writings have been featured in *National Review*, *American Interest*, *Fox News*, *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*. Her first client was then-detained Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov. She was a leading advocate in the movements to pass the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 and to achieve a peace agreement in Sudan's north-south conflict. She currently leads a campaign to protect religious minorities facing ISIS genocide.

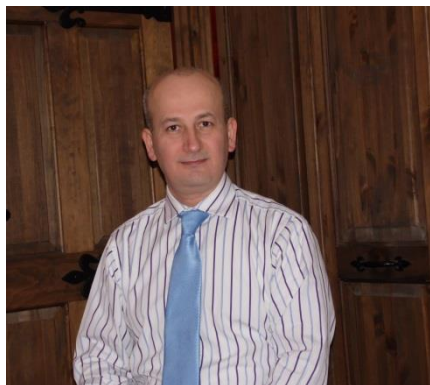


**Dr. Karin Deutsch Karlekar** is the director of Free Expression Programs at PEN America. She focuses on global press freedom, digital rights, and broad freedom of expression issues. Prior to joining PEN, she served from 2001–15 as director of Freedom House's Freedom of the Press project, coordinating the production of a flagship annual report that tracks trends in global media freedom and rates every country in the world. As well as acting as an expert spokesperson on press freedom issues at conferences, meetings, and in media appearances, Dr. Karlekar has developed index methodologies and conducted training sessions on press freedom, internet freedom, freedom of expression, and monitoring dangerous speech; authored a number of special reports and academic papers; and conducted research, assessment, and advocacy missions to Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. She has also worked as an editor at the Economist Intelligence Unit and as a consultant for Human Rights Watch, and is currently a member of the governing council of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) network (and from 2006–09 served as its chair). She holds a Ph.D. in Indian History from Cambridge University and a B.A. from Vassar College.



**Dr. Courtney C. Radsch** is the Advocacy Director at the Committee to Protect Journalists. As a veteran journalist, researcher, and free expression advocate she writes and speaks frequently about the nexus of media, technology, and human rights. She is the author of *Cyberactivism and Citizen Journalism in Egypt: Digital Dissidence & Political Change*, and several other book chapters and articles about the Arab Spring, media, terrorism, and human rights. Her commentaries and articles have been published in the *International Herald Tribune*, *Al Jazeera*, *Oxford Analytica*, and the *Huffington Post*. Dr. Radsch has participated in expert consultations on countering violent extremism, online violence against women, and journalist safety and has led advocacy missions to more than a dozen countries, U.N. bodies, and the Internet Governance Forum.

Prior to CPJ she worked with UNESCO's Section for Freedom of Expression, where she coordinated strategy in the Arab region and edited the flagship publication "World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development." Dr. Radsch previously managed the Global Freedom of Expression Campaign at Freedom House, where she edited *Policing Belief: The Impact of Blasphemy Laws on Human Rights*, and has worked for *The New York Times*, *Al-Arabiya* in Dubai, and the *Daily Star* in Lebanon. Dr. Radsch holds a PhD in international relations from American University, a master's of science in Foreign Service from Georgetown University and a bachelor's degree with highest honors in mass communication from the University of California, Berkeley. She speaks Arabic, French, and Spanish.



**Dr. Wael Aleji** is a Syrian born British doctor and psychologist with a special interest in political psychology and narrative analysis of Political Islam Movements (PIM). He is also the MENA Researcher at Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW): a human rights organization that focuses on freedom of religion and belief in the world.

Dr. Aleji is also the Co-founder and Board Member at Syrian Christians for Peace (SCP): a Christian organization that promotes concepts of democracy and equal citizenship in Syria. SCP focuses on issues such conflict resolution and inter-faith dialogue.

In addition, Dr. Aleji serves as the Spokesperson for the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR): the main organization monitoring human rights situation in Syria.

Dr. Aleji is also a former member of the Syrian National Council, the first body to represent the Syrian Opposition in exile.