

**Ambassador at Large Rashad Hussain's**  
**Testimony for Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**  
**on Human Rights of Muslims Around the World**  
**June 30, 2022, 10:00 a.m.**

Thank you, Co-Chair McGovern, Co-Chair Smith, Representative Omar, and Members of the Commission for inviting me to speak with you today and share how we advance respect for the freedom of religion or belief around the globe.

I am grateful to serve in this role as Ambassador at Large, working on behalf of the American people to effect change in people's lives. My personal story is what shapes my connection and love for this work. My own parents came to the United States from India to seek the great opportunities that our country and its freedoms provide. I am grateful to President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Secretary Blinken for demonstrating in the highest seats of power in this country, that we recognize, honor, and celebrate America's wonderful diversity. My opportunity to serve reflects a respect for that diversity and the commitment to advocating for the freedom of religion or belief, for the acceptance and respect for all that is shared across American society.

I stand on the shoulders of my predecessors. I believe it sends a powerful signal to the world that the last four Ambassadors with the mission of protecting international religious freedom have been a Muslim, a Catholic politician, a Jewish rabbi, and an African American Protestant minister, all advocates for this right for every individual. And the fact that we continue to work together says a lot about America and about the nonpartisan, enduring commitment we have to promote freedom of religion or belief.

Injustices abound globally, and we see religious adherents sometimes facing spurious charges, wrongfully sentenced, and unjustly imprisoned on account of their beliefs. Many people live under governments that prevent them from observing their faith traditions. The United States

calls for freedom of religion or belief for every individual. That includes Muslim victims of genocide and crimes against humanity, including Uyghurs in the People's Republic of China and Rohingya in Burma. And it even includes my own family members overseas who aspire to practice their faith with dignity.

My early days in this position have been dedicated to addressing these issues.

In April, I traveled to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh to visit Rohingya refugee camps. I learned first-hand about the challenges Rohingya have faced since fleeing brutal violence and persecution in Burma and how the United States can support them.

Earlier this month, Secretary Blinken released the more than 2,000-page report on International Religious Freedom. The Secretary highlighted that "China continues its genocide and repression of predominately Muslim Uyghurs and other religious minority groups." Sadly, these are only the most recent genocides of our time. Not too long ago, Secretary Kerry determined ISIS committed genocide and other atrocities against Yezidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims. We continue to assist all victims and the world can never forget these crimes and efforts to erase communities through sexual violence, mass executions, forced conversion and other crimes.

Our commitment to freedom of religion or belief includes combatting religious violence, intolerance, and discrimination in its unique manifestations, as well as advocating for change in discriminatory laws and policies. Religious nationalism, antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, and xenophobia are on the rise in many countries around the world. And technology—including social media platforms—has been used to spread hate speech and to incite violence by vilifying and threatening members of religious minority groups. We see governments use counterterrorism laws, under the pretense of security or stability, to limit freedom of expression and freedom of association. Governments at times use these

laws to suppress peaceful dissent and to persecute members of religious minority groups or others who don't conform to the majority views. Too often, this discrimination results in increased resentment and fear that leads to unrest or violence as people express their beliefs.

Our office and our colleagues in the Department are working diligently to address these issues. I recently met with members of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation to discuss their recent report on anti-Muslim sentiment around the world. I also met with the French Ambassador to discuss these rising trends and I look forward to collaborating with other like-minded partners to address critical issues.

As I close, I'd like to speak finally about our essential collaboration with civil society. Civil society, including women and youth, are the everyday, in-country experts working to promote change on the ground. Youth represent the emerging leaders of tomorrow and in their zeal, they help to change status quos, push societies forward, and solidify new norms. Women everywhere have been essential in promoting more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just societies that ensure the freedom of religion or belief for all. We are grateful for their efforts. At the same time, we recognize the need to equip all civil society actors with more resources to help them advocate for the freedom of religion or belief in their countries.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak on these issues today.