Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Worldwide Persecution of Christians: Responding to New Challenges

Wednesday, November 18, 2026
2:30 – 4:30 p.m.
210 Cannon House Office Building

Remarks by Co-Chair James P. McGovern, as delivered

Thank you, Co-Chair Smith, for convening this important hearing, and for all that you do for human rights. And I want to thank the panel of witnesses for being here, as well—this is an important topic.

It is appropriate that this Commission address violations of Christians' right to freedom of religion and belief. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's latest report demonstrates that this right is under threat around the world.

In Myanmar, the military targeted churches in Christian-majority areas with airstrikes alongside Buddhist monasteries and festivals. Rohingya Muslims face ongoing displacement and forced conscription.

In Russia, authorities have fined, designated as "foreign agents," and jailed Christian religious leaders for voicing opposition to Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine. Russian authorities have used the same designation to shut down organizations that support the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals.

And in Nicaragua, the regime stripped Christian religious leaders of their citizenship, alongside human rights activists, journalists, and academics—condemning many to statelessness and exile. They even shut down the Jesuit-run university in Nicaragua.

And as the Chair pointed out, we have numerous examples of atrocities in China, India, and so many other countries around the world. This is a real problem.

Each of these cases that we're talking about here today demonstrates the universality, interdependence, and indivisibility of human rights.

When freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is under threat for any group, *other* rights and *other* groups are threatened, too.

It is no surprise that a global decrease in respect for religious freedom has coincided with a global decline of respect for economic and social rights, as reported by Oxfam, and political rights and civil liberties, as reported by Freedom House. As one of today's witnesses will note, religious freedom is conditioned upon the ability of civil society to operate free of undue restrictions; the prevention of conflict and the cessation of war; and the creation of conditions that prevent religiously motivated violence before it occurs.

Human rights are interconnected and interdependent. This is why we must also oppose attacks on civil society, including anti-NGO laws and politicized prosecutions of rights groups, which undermine fundamental freedoms and weaken democracy; end the illegal war against Iran, where the haze of conflict has given cover for an increase in religiously and politically motivated executions; and re-establish support in Congress and the Executive Branch for the international human rights system.

The Trump Administration talks a lot about defending Christians from persecution. But I fear that its *selective* and *exclusionary* view of human rights has undermined our efforts to protect Christian victims of religious persecution.

Administration policies violate our Founders' commitment to the separation of church and state, and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Trump officials and allies engage in the demonization of Muslims, including sitting and incoming elected representatives in the U.S. Congress.

As one witness will testify, the Administration denied entry into the United States to Christian refugees and asylum seekers—a reversal of a policy with longstanding bipartisan support. Some

Christian victims of religious persecution have been deported by our country to other countries where they may be at risk of torture. I mean, come on—we need to do better than that.

This policy does a great disservice to vulnerable Christians and others around the world who look to the United States as a beacon of hope.

They look to us not only because our country has provided refuge for those who have been unjustly persecuted, but because we have provided a blueprint for expanding equality, justice, and pluralism at home and abroad.

We must not let them down.

Let me close with this: Secretaries Rubio and Hegseth told the international community to "stop quoting laws to men with swords."

I find this statement morally repugnant and dangerous. It shames our country and undermines the cause behind this hearing.

This Commission is chartered to promote international human rights norms. Rubio's speech summarily rejects them. That is offensive to every person who has ever asked this Commission to defend them or their relatives' rights under law. Congress must reject the Secretary of State's position.

As a Christian and as a Catholic, let me quote the Bible: "All those who draw the sword will die by the sword."

We must choose. Will we be a country of men with swords? Or will we be a country of laws?

Our ability to stand in solidarity with Christian victims of persecution—and all those denied their universal rights—depends on our answer to that question.

And with that, I yield back, and I thank the Co-Chair.