

**Testimony of
Ambassador At Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
”Violations of the International Right to Freedom of Religion: Christians”**

June 27, 2019

Co-Chairman McGovern, Co-Chairman Smith, distinguished Members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me to discuss the state of religious freedom around the world, with a particular focus on Christians globally. The depravation of this fundamental human right is unconscionable. But this Administration continues to prove that we will not stand idly by and watch the increasing violence toward practitioners of all faiths—or no faith at all – continue.

Just last week, we released our annual International Religious Freedom Report. These reports are the go-to guides – or as Secretary Pompeo called them, report cards – chronicling religious freedom abuses, discrimination, and persecution, in almost 200 countries and territories. These reports include narratives and hard data to describe the attacks on people of all faith around the world, including Christians.

According to a recent study by Pew, Christians face the most wide-spread harassment of any religious group, targeted in 144 countries globally¹. Religious persecution is a defining challenge of the 21st century, and the United States will proudly lead the charge to protect religious freedom wherever it is under attack. Looking around the world, many places cry out for attention.

Throughout **the Middle East**, Christian communities are dwindling due to harsh persecution, unjust imprisonments, and religiously motivated violence. In **Iran**, many languish in jail simply for exercising their fundamental freedom to worship, observe, practice, and teach their faiths. Courts such as the notorious Tehran Revolutionary Court use charges of “enmity against God,” “corruption on earth,” and “disturbing national security” to target people who dissent from state-sanctioned policy and beliefs.

In **Nicaragua**, religious leaders report constant surveillance, intimidation, and threats. The National Police assaults priests in full daylight, revealing the government’s contempt for any religious leaders they view as a threat to their

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/06/21/key-findings-on-the-global-rise-in-religious-restrictions/>

authority. At last year's pioneering Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, the State Department hosted two Catholic priests whose parishes came under gunfire, highlighting their courage in the face of aggression.

Finally I turn to **China**. In addition to its systematic and well-documented repression of Muslims in Xinjiang, Buddhists in Tibet, and Falun Gong practitioners throughout the country, the government has recently accelerated efforts to repress Christians. Last year, mainland China began enforcing amended regulations for religious affairs. Those regulations give the government more power to control where people worship, with whom they worship, and the content of their worship. Since those regulations came into force the crackdown on Christianity has increased dramatically.

Through all of our efforts, we are chasing a simple but important dream: that one day all peoples around the world will be able to exercise their fundamental freedoms, including the right to religious freedom—allowing individuals the liberty and dignity to do with their own soul as they wish. To those countries who deny their citizens this fundamental human right, the United States is watching, ready to take action. The war against faith is one no government—no matter how repressive—can ever win.

One of those efforts will take place next month, when Secretary Pompeo will host the second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom. As civil society groups, religious leaders, and foreign governments come together, we will discuss both the nature of religious freedom as a fundamental freedom and the benefits that come with greater degrees of religious freedom, including less terrorism and greater economic growth. As we look around the world, there is much work to be done.

The Department commends the Lantos Commission for working to combat a wide range of international religious freedom violations, and highlighting religious freedom challenges for many diverse faiths.

Thank you. I look forward to our discussion.