

FREEDOM OF BELIEF: COUNTERING RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

HEARING

BEFORE THE

TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

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FREEDOM OF BELIEF: COUNTERING RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,

Washington, D.C.

The commission met, pursuant to call, at 1:30 p.m., in Room 2255 Longworth House Office Building, Hon. James P. McGovern and Hon. Randy Hultgren [co-chairmen of the commission] presiding.

Mr. HULTGREN. Let's go ahead and get started.

Welcome. I apologize that we are a little late. We are just coming from vote, but at least we know the votes won't interrupt us again, we think, for a little while at least. So, welcome. Glad you are all here.

Good afternoon, and I do want to welcome you to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on how U.S. international religious freedom policies can help reduce religious violence.

I would like to thank our witnesses for coming here today to share their expertise with us.

Freedom of belief is perhaps the most foundational human rights because it serves as the basis for every other right that we as human beings claim. Freedom of speech, the right to public assembly, the right to a fair trial, and every other fundamental human right is meaningless without the freedom to believe and think however one chooses. Our defense of religious freedom is a springboard to advocating for every other right because this freedom is an indicator of how well or how poorly human rights are flourishing in a specific context.

According to both the Pew Research Center and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, global restrictions on freedom of belief are increasing dramatically. This includes top-down government repression and bottom-up social hostility from individuals and groups.

Whether persecution comes from governments or from individuals, violence towards a religious group provokes a feeling of injustice and at times even a violent response. Religious groups around the globe are persecuted for their faith, and this kind of persecution can be a catalyst for igniting greater social unrest. Religious violence includes human rights abuses perpetrated against people and communities because of their religious conviction, and it also includes abuses perpetrated in the name of one's religion.

We believe the best way to counter religious violence is by promoting robust religious freedom policies. U.S. policies seek to mitigate the rise of religious extremism and violence by

promoting laws and social norms that bolster freedom of belief and release a pressure valve on social grievances.

With this in mind, we recently introduced H. Res. 319, a resolution reaffirming the commitment of the United States to promoting religious freedom globally in support of persecuted religious minorities around the world. We also seek to remind and encourage nations around the world of their obligation to defend their citizens' freedom of belief, as stated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today we have invited a distinguished company of experts in the field of religious freedom to appear before the Commission. They will enlighten us about the global situation concerning religious freedoms, how U.S. policy is affecting religious freedom around the world, and what the United States can do to encourage and promote religious freedom. I look forward to hearing from our panel on how the United States policy can best serve those around the world suffering under religious violence and persecution.

With that, I would yield to you.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much. And I want to join my esteemed colleague and Commission Co-Chair Randy Hultgren in welcoming all of you here today to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on Freedom of Belief: Countering Religious Violence.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." Article 18 of the International Covenant and Civil and Political Rights, to which 169 of the 197 countries of the world subscribe, includes the same language.

Here in the United States the very fundamental right to believe in God or not has been recognized since the early years of the Republic. Article VI of the Constitution prohibits a religious test for those holding public office. The first clause of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights say that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." The 14th Amendment to the Constitution prohibits discrimination, including on the basis of religion, securing "the equal protection of the laws" for every person.

But, notwithstanding these incredible documents, we Americans have not over our history had a perfect record. We have seen, entering our long history, we have seen anti-Catholic bias here in the United States. We have seen the ugliness of anti-Semitism. We have seen individuals who practice the Mormon faith discriminated against. We have had Native Americans who were subjected to forced conversion in this country during a period of time. And today those who practice Islam are often met with intolerance and worse. So, we have seen hate crimes against Muslims increase dramatically in recent years.

In the end, the way we fight back against religious discrimination is by recalling universal principles. My right to practice my religion is only as safe as my Muslim brother's, my Jewish sister's, my Hindu father's, my Buddhist mother, my agnostic uncle, my atheist aunt.

In order for me to enjoy freedom of religion, everyone else must enjoy it as well. That is the only way it works. The alternative is the risk of discrimination, repression, or even sectarian violence.

With that in mind, I would like to draw your attention to one place where religion, culture, and language are intimately connected and violently repressed, and that is Tibet. I had the privilege of traveling to Tibet in November of 2015 on a congressional delegation led by Leader Pelosi. Less than two weeks ago, I returned from another codel that visited Tibet and communities in Nepal and India, and met for several hours with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I can personally attest to the deeply-held religious believes of Tibetan Buddhists, in spite of the decades of repression they have suffered at the hands of the Chinese government, repression that has worsened during the rule of Xi Jinping.

Hundreds of Tibetan religious have been, and are still, prisoners of conscience in China. Two years ago, the revered monk Tenzin Delek Rinpoche died while in Chinese custody. In fact, he died in prison one day before this Commission held a hearing on the human rights situation in Tibet. I will never forget it.

The 11th Panchen Lama, one of the most revered reincarnated leaders of Tibetan Buddhists, was abducted by the Chinese government when he was just a child of 6, and he has never been seen nor heard of since. Today he is 28, wherever he is. The Chinese have imposed a child of the government's own choosing in his place.

Since last July, the Chinese government has evicted thousands of monks and nuns, lay people and students from the famous Larung Gar Buddhist Institute in Sichuan Province. According to USCIRF's most recent report, some were locked out of their homes before they could collect their belongings or were forced to sign pledges promising never to return. Others were forced to undergo, quote, "patriotic re-education programs". End quote.

Beijing is seeking to eviscerate the teachings and study of Tibetan Buddhism that are integral to the life of Tibetans. But people are desperate to continue their traditions, so much so that some families in China entrust their children to smugglers to take them to India so they can study in Dharamsala. Others are so desperate that they set themselves on fire in protest, something that, sadly, happened yet again just last Friday. That is an incredible testimony to religious belief, but it is also a testimony of the deepest despair at the destruction of one's religion and culture. And it is a matter of deep concern.

So, I worry that this level of repression will only be tolerated for so long. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a man of peace, but he is about to turn 82 and he will not be with us forever. I worry what will happen when he passes on.

Tibet is a place where I have no doubt that true freedom of religion could help prevent future violence. As Members of Congress concerned with preventing violent extremism, we should be working to advance freedom of religion in Tibet with every tool at our disposal.

So, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for organizing this hearing. I look forward to hearing the witnesses. And I yield back.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you, Chairman McGovern.

I can invite our first panelists up. Reverend Thomas Reese, Father Reese is Chair of the United States Committee on International Religious Freedom. We are so glad you are here.

STATEMENT OF REV. THOMAS REESE, CHAIR, UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Rev. REESE. Thank you very much. Thanks to you Commission Co-Chairs for holding this hearing.

Mr. HULTGREN. Excuse me. Make sure your microphone is on. I think it is, but there is a little button there. I don't hear him.

Rev. REESE. There is a green light on.

Mr. HULTGREN. Okay, good.

Rev. REESE. Thank you, Commission Co-Chairs, for having this hearing today and for inviting me to testify.

I am Father Thomas Reese. I am the Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

My written testimony, which I request be submitted for the record, highlights some of the major findings of USCIRF's 2007 Annual Report. This report is a comprehensive look at many of the countries of particular concern and of other countries where religious freedom is oppressed. And we thank you for your support for our Commission.

This report highlights governments' and non-state actors' actions which result in increased violence. It notes encouraging factors, notwithstanding a very dire picture, and reviews available tools that we can use to foster religious freedom.

Today I would like to emphasize three points. First, religious freedom is key to many of U.S. foreign policy concerns for at least four reasons.

First, religious freedom is a conscience right, a core human right. It is the right to peacefully respond to the dictates of one's conscience on matters of faith and belief.

Second, religious freedom matters to most people in the world. Eighty-four percent of the world's population identify with a religious group. Yet, more than three-quarters of the people living in the world are living in countries where government or societal actors significantly restrict this freedom.

And third, many governments and societal actors fear religious freedom as an alternate source of authority.

And fourth, U.S. foreign policy agenda cannot succeed if religion's pivotal role is dismissed.

Now a second point that I want to emphasize is that governments often violently repress religious freedom to maintain control, but, in reality, this repression often breeds violence. Such repression from governments takes different forms.

One form is securitizing religious freedom. This is used by countries, including Russia, Uzbekistan, and China, whereby anti-extremism laws are used to severely limit religious community's activities, stifle peaceful dissent, and imprison people.

Just yesterday in Bahrain, the police raided a peaceful sit-in near the home of the country's leading Shia cleric, Qassim. He had been given a suspended sentence for money-laundering. He was collecting for the poor. Five people were killed and hundreds hurt when the police intervened.

Another form of repression occurs when governments pit groups against each other, as has been done in Iraq and Syria, where the governments have done this.

Equally problematic governments that do little or nothing to protect members of religious communities, as is the case in India and Iran and in Pakistan, due to blasphemy charges and allegation.

Non-state actors such as ISIS also violently repress religious freedom to maintain control and are among the primary perpetrators of egregious abuses, with governments often unable or unwilling to act.

The third point I would like to emphasize in my testimony is the need for us to work with new actors and with the available tools that we have to foster religious freedom. These new actors include the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief. This is an informal network of more than 130 parliamentarians from all over the world, committed to combating religious persecution and advancing freedom of religion or belief.

Another positive sign that we have noted is the Marrakesh Declaration, which resulted from a convocation of Muslim leaders and other clergy to address the rights of minorities living in Muslim majority areas of the world. This is very important because this came from Muslim leaders and is based on their faith in their traditions.

There are also new tools provided by the global Magnitsky Act and the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act. The Magnitsky Act authorizes the President to impose U.S. entry and property sanctions against any foreign person responsible for gross violations of internationally-recognized human rights.

This is, I think, a powerful tool that we can use and we should use more. We have noted, of course, that sanctions are applied to countries and, then, they are waived for various national security purposes or for other reasons. These kinds of sanctions aimed at individuals I think would be easier to implement and to enforce. And so, I think we should make more use of this tool.

The Wolf Act, among other provisions, mandates the designation of entities of particular concern. It also calls for curriculum training on religious freedom for Foreign Service Officers, and it calls for the Designated Persons List for particularly severe violations of religious freedom, and USCIRF's prisoners list whereby USCIRF is required to compile a list of religious prisoners.

USCIRF's prisoners list, this mandate underscores the need to continually raise the case of prisoners of conscience. Their plight makes understandable the impact of unjust laws and violence. They are not just statistics. These prisoners put a face on the violations of religious freedom.

And I want to congratulate the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for the Defending Freedoms Project, whereby representatives are advocating in support of individual prisoners. USCIRF has also created a religious prisoners of conscience project where by our commissioners are advocating on behalf of religious prisoners of conscience.

Another important tool has yet to become law. USCIRF urges the swift passage of H.R. 390, the Iraq and Syria Genocide Emergency Relief Accountability Act, which would promote accountability for ISIS and other organizations, atrocities, and address humanitarian and stabilization and recovery needs for persecuted religious and/or ethnic minorities.

We face an enormously challenging landscape for freedom of religion or belief abroad. We can and will seek constructive change, improving our use of existing tools and creating new tools for a rapidly-changing environment. But, by further integrating this fundamental freedom into our nation's foreign policy, we can bring genuine progress to those who yearn for freedom.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Rev. Reese follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF REV. REESE

Testimony of Father Thomas J. Reese, S.J.
Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
Before the
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
On
Freedom of Belief: Countering Religious Violence
May 24, 2017

Thank you to the Co-Chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Representatives Jim McGovern (D-MA), and Randy Hultgren (R-IL), and Commission members for holding today's hearing on "Freedom of Belief: Countering Religious Violence" and inviting me to testify. I am Father Thomas J. Reese, S.J., Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). The Commission uses international standards to monitor the universal right of religion or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the Congress, President and Secretary of State.

Today's hearing is especially timely given the rise in religious extremism and increased restrictions worldwide on religious freedom that both governments and non-state actors perpetrate. I will explore in my testimony why religious freedom is so important; highlight the violations by governments and non-state actors of the freedom of

religion or belief which result in increased violence; and, notwithstanding this dire picture, note some encouraging factors. I will end my testimony by discussing tools, some of which are new, that the U.S. government can use to support the freedom of religion or belief and help prevent and counter religious violence.

Why Religious Freedom Matters

Religion and religious freedom are important, especially in today's world. In fact, religion is a central factor in many of the major foreign policy issues of the day, and violations of the freedom of religion or belief are the source of instability in nations worldwide. The freedom of religion or belief is a broad, inclusive right that embraces the full range of thought, belief, and behavior. It is a conscience right which is not limited to the right to practice a particular religion. At its heart, it is the right to respond to the dictates of one's own conscience on matters of faith and belief, wherever one's conscience may lead, so long as the rights of others and essential principles of public order are respected. Thus, because freedom of religion involves freedom of conscience, it must include the right to a belief or belief system that differs from the majority or not to believe at all. Responding to the call of conscience is both a right and a duty. It is a right because human authenticity and integrity demand that people be allowed to live on the outside what they truly are on the inside. It is a duty because once people believe something to be true, they have an obligation to act and live peacefully in accordance with that belief.

No government, group, or individual has the right to compel others to act against their conscience or restrain them from answering its call. Religious freedom applies to the holders of all religious beliefs and extends to those who reject religious beliefs altogether, and was overwhelmingly adopted in 1948 in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in subsequent international agreements.

As will be highlighted during this hearing, 84% of the world's population identifies with a specific religious group, and, according to the most recent Pew study – and as we will hear more about at this hearing, 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. Given the centrality of the freedom of religion or belief, it is no wonder that this conscience right matters to many people and is feared by governments and societal actors as a competitor, an alternate source of authority which could challenge their control. Religion also can fuel dangerous conflicts between groups or individuals who hold different beliefs. In both instances, our nation and its diplomats cannot have productive dialogues and satisfactory relations or outcomes if we ignore, downplay, or dismiss religion's pivotal role.

In the just released 2017 Annual Report, USCIRF focused on the governments and non-state actors who most egregiously violated the freedom of religion or belief, and made the following “country of particular concern” (CPC) recommendations and Tier 2 placements:

- **CPC Recommendations:** USCIRF recommends that the State Department again designate these 10 countries as CPCs 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.
- **Tier 2:** USCIRF places these 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.

With regard to non-state actors, or entities of particular concern, USCIRF recommended the designations of: The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Taliban in Afghanistan, and Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

Factors Contributing to the Increased Violations of Religious Freedom and the Resulting Violence:

Nations in turmoil, such as Iraq and Syria, represent a dire situation which contributes to the increase in the violations of religious freedom and religious violence by governments and non-state actors. Religious minorities, and dissenting members of the majority, face the twin threats from governmental and non-governmental oppression, imprisonment, and violence. Religious minorities, including Yazidis, Christians and Shi'a Muslims, are of special

concern. In some countries, persecution and the resultant flight of the persecuted clouds the very future of these communities, some of which have existed for nearly two millennia. Even communities that do not face persecution confront difficult challenges as they try to live out their faiths in conflict-ridden environments.

At its core, many of the increased violations of religious freedom and the resulting violence stem from governments that fear religion as an alternate source of authority and that, through repressive legal systems and laws and also brute force, crack down and imprison members of religious communities whom they view as unwelcome competitors for their absolute power. For example:

- **China:** The Chinese government continues to suppress Tibetans in Tibet and other parts of China. The government claims the power to select the next Dalai Lama with the help of a law that grants the government authority over reincarnations, and vilifies the Dalai Lama, accusing him of “splittism” and “blasphemy.” In July 2016, the Chinese government launched a sweeping operation to demolish significant portions of the Larung Gar Buddhist Institute located in Sichuan Province. Larung Gar is home to about 10,000 to 20,000 monks, nuns, laypeople, and students of Buddhism from all over the world. Local officials instituting the demolition order referred to the project as “construction” or “renovation” to reduce the number of residents to no more than 5,000 by the end of September 2017. As a result, officials have evicted thousands of monastics, laypeople, and students, some of whom reportedly were locked out of their homes before they could collect their belongings, or were forced to sign pledges promising never to return. Many others were forced to undergo so-called “patriotic reeducation programs.” The demolition order contains language governing ideology and future religious activities at Larung Gar and gives government officials—who are largely Han Chinese, not Tibetan—greater control and oversight of the institute, including direct control over laypeople. The order also mandates the separation of the monastery from the institute, running counter to the tradition of one blended encampment with both religious and lay education. The destruction at Larung Gar exemplifies Beijing’s desire to eviscerate the teachings and study of Tibetan Buddhism that are integral to the faith.
- **Sudan:** Since 2011, the Sudanese government has demolished churches, attempted to seize other churches and religious buildings, and arrested pastors of the Sudan Evangelical Presbyterian Church (SEPC) and its denomination the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church. On April 3, 2017, SEPC elder Younan Abdulla was fatally stabbed as he peacefully protested government efforts to seize a Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church school.
- **Turkmenistan:** In 2016, two members of a Muslim study group in Turkmenistan imprisoned since 2013 died in a notorious desert prison; one was said to have weighed only 55 pounds at the time of his death. Apparently fearing a similar fate, a Muslim man accused of radicalism and pressured to become an informant for the secret police hanged himself in December 2016.
- **Vietnam:** In June 2016, Vietnamese public security officials harassed, physically assaulted, and prevented several Hoa Hao Buddhists from participating in celebrations associated with the June 22 anniversary of their faith. Authorities used checkpoints to block access to Quang Minh Pagoda, the only Hoa Hao Buddhist pagoda in the country under the government’s control. Also during 2016, unknown attackers who may have been part of public security beat a Hoa Hao religious leader.

Governments’ use of force take several forms including: “securitizing” religious freedom; pitting groups against each other to enhance power; government impunity; and targeting a group and inciting vigilante groups and others to violence.

“Securitizing” Religious Freedom: Some governments use anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws to severely limit religious communities’ activities, stifle peaceful dissent, and imprison people. The challenges raised by the relative ease of communication in the Internet age further threaten their grip on power. For example:

- **Russia:** With the July 2016 passage of the Yarovaya amendments, those convicted of extremism are now subject to up to six years’ imprisonment, major fines equivalent to several years of average annual wages, and/or bans on professional employment. The anti-extremism law lacks a clear definition of extremism and the use or advocacy of violence is unnecessary for activity to be classified as extremist. Because virtually any speech can be prosecuted, the law is a powerful way to intimidate members of religious and other communities.

Books may be placed by court order on a list of banned materials. Religious and other communities can be financially blacklisted or liquidated, and individuals can be subjected to criminal prosecution for a social media post. The Russian government most recently used its “anti-extremism” law to ban Jehovah’s Witnesses who became the target of a sustained campaign that began in 2016 and which ended in the Witnesses’ permanent elimination of their legal existence in Russia in April 2017.

- In **Uzbekistan**, the government imprisons and often subjects individuals to brutal treatment, including an estimated 12,800 Muslims, who do not conform to officially-prescribed religious practices or whom it claims are extremist. The Uzbek government continues to regard religious activity outside of official channels with deep suspicion and wields a variety of repressive instruments against those who fail to submit to state control of religious practice, including fines, punitive searches, detention, torture, prolonged imprisonment, and the intimidation of family members. In April 2016, Articles 244-1 and 244-2 of the Criminal Code, governing the crimes of having “extremist materials” or taking part in “extremist organizations,” were broadened and the maximum penalties raised from 5 to 8 and from 15 to 20 years’ imprisonment respectively. Many long-term prisoners of conscience are denied due process and are subject to inhumane conditions of confinement.
- In **China**, the government suppresses Uighur Muslims, often under the rubric of countering alleged religious and other violent extremism. An estimated 10 million Uighur Muslims reside in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in northwest China where the government presumes their guilt if they are found practicing “illegal” religious activities, including praying or possessing religious materials in their own homes. Authorities even question schoolchildren to coerce them into revealing that their parents pray at home. To constrain what it claims to be widespread radicalism that breeds violent tendencies among Uighur Muslims, the government imposes manifold regulations and restrictions on religious and other daily practices. For example, in a move critics described as targeting Uighur Muslims, in July 2016 the regional government adopted a new counterterrorism measure, which dovetails with a national law that went into effect January 1, 2016. (The national Counterterrorism Law contains vague definitions of “religious extremism” and “terrorism,” which the government has routinely used to target the freedom to practice religion and peaceful religious expression.)

The Pitting of Groups Against each Other to Enhance Power: In Iraq and Syria, under both the Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad regimes, religious communities were pitted against one another, creating space for all out 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 the Popular Mobilization Forces’ sectarian attacks on Iraq’s Sunni Arab population, or the Shi’a Iranian-backed militias attacks of Sunni Arab communities in Syria, has exacerbated religious tensions between Syria and Iraq’s many religious communities.

Government Impunity: Government inaction to prevent or punish religious freedom violations coupled with efforts to sponsor violent ideologies is a proven recipe for human rights abuses. Instead of enforcing the law and protecting vulnerable populations, an increasing number of countries are turning a blind eye to repression, thereby creating climates of impunity. For example, there continue to be reports that funding 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 or stop Muslim-Christian violence or to hold perpetrators accountable. In 2016, mobs killed two women accused of blasphemy. On June 2 in Kano, Bridget Agbahime was killed after she was accused of insulting a man prior to his prayers. On July 9, Redeemed Christian Church of God Pastor Eunice Elisha was killed while preaching in Abuja. While arrests were made in connection to these incidents, Nigeria officials later released all suspects.

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, six 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, harass and violently attack religious minority communities, especially Christian churches, leaders, and laity. In Iran, during the past year, hundreds of pro-government media articles continued to appear online and in print inciting religious hatred and encouraging violence against Baha’is after various sermons of prayer leaders were delivered. In September 2016, Baha’i Farhang Amiri was stabbed to death by two men outside of his home in Yazd;

the two men later reportedly confessed, saying they killed him because he was an apostate and they wanted to go to heaven.

The implementation of blasphemy laws has incited violence by vigilante groups in many countries. Blasphemy is “the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God.” In more than 70 countries worldwide, laws criminalize acts and expression deemed contemptuous of sacred things, and are actively enforced: Governments justify them 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, which lead to human rights abuses and the destabilization of societies. Blasphemy laws:

- Inappropriately position governments as arbiters of ultimate truths or religious rightness, empowering officials to enforce particular views against individuals, minorities, and dissenters.
- Contradict international human rights standards, as they protect beliefs at the expense of individuals. These standards include Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which assert universal individual rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion and to freedom of expression.
- Are inconsistent with UN resolutions adopted since 2011 that oppose such laws as a remedy for speech directed against religion or a religion.
- Often carry draconian sentences such as life in prison or even death for “crimes” that amount to the mere utterance of words. Under such bans, members of already-vulnerable religious minorities suffer disproportionately, becoming victims of blasphemy allegations and arrests in far higher numbers than their percentage of the population would predict.
- Are ripe for abuse by accusers harboring political or economic grudges. Blasphemy charges often are based on false accusations, often by members of a majority religious group against those from a religious minority community.
- Often embolden religious extremists to commit acts of violence against perceived transgressors. By fueling violence by extremist non-state actors, blasphemy laws make nations and societies profoundly less stable and secure.

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, more than in any other nation. Others have been killed by vigilante mobs just for being accused of blasphemy.

Christian wife and mother Aasia Bibi was convicted and sentenced to death in 2010 after a 2009 dispute with coworkers. In October 2016, the Pakistani Supreme Court delayed Ms. Bibi’s final appeal hearing after a judge recused himself; she remains imprisoned and the hearing has not yet been rescheduled. Others are sentenced to prison. For example, in January 2016, Abdul Shakoor, an optician and store owner in Rabwah, Punjab province, was sentenced to five years in prison on blasphemy charges and three years on terrorism charges, to be served concurrently, for propagating the Ahmadiyya Muslim faith by selling copies of the Qur’an and Ahmadiyya publications. His Shi’a Muslim store manager, Mazhar Sipra, also was sentenced to five years on terrorism charges. Both have appealed their sentences.

USCIRF shortly will be issuing a report that measures blasphemy law’s adherence to international and human rights principles. This report analyzes the content of laws prohibiting blasphemy worldwide against international and human rights law principles to better understand what aspects of these laws adhere to, or deviate from, international and human rights law principles. By analyzing and quantifying the adherence or non-adherence to international and human rights law principles, examined systematically through a point-system assessment tool, this study identifies specific language that may increase blasphemy laws’ risk for abuse, indicating areas where targeted advocacy for reform could potentially lower that risk.

The Rise of Non-State Actors: When IRFA became law in 1998, governments were the principal violators of religious freedom and the law reflected their role. However, since that time, the predations of non-state actors present a major challenge to freedom of religion or belief. In countries around the world, non-state actors are among the primary perpetrators of egregious abuses of religious freedom and other human rights. Governments in these countries either are unable or unwilling to address their violations. Some examples include:

- In the Central African Republic (CAR), militias formed along opposing Muslim and Christian lines in CAR continue to kill individuals based on their religious identity, leading to retaliatory attacks and waves of violence, resulting in thousands of people dead, 2.3 million in need of humanitarian assistance, more than 450,000 refugees, and almost 350,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). Before 2012, 85 percent of CAR's population was Christian and 15 percent was Muslim. By the end of 2014, 80 percent of the country's Muslim population had been driven out of CAR.
- The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) makes little distinction between sects and ethnicities and universally applies its violent, militant interpretation of Islam. In Iraq, more than 3.4 million have been displaced internally due to ISIS's offensives. In Syria, given the actions of both ISIS and the Assad regime, more than 11 million people have been forced to flee their homes: about seven million have been internally displaced and about five million are refugees in neighboring states. At least 13.5 million out of Syria's population of 17 million are in need of humanitarian aid for survival.
- In Nigeria, Boko Haram rejects the secular state and calls for the universal implementation of what it considers "pure" Shari'ah law. It views as morally corrupt Nigeria's federal and northern state governments, political leaders, and religious elites. Since May 2011, according to the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker, Boko Haram and the military campaign against the terrorists have killed more than 28,000 people. The Boko Haram crisis has resulted in more than 1.8 million IDPs. Another 12,000 were killed in fighting between Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces; and
- In Pakistan, the actions of non-state actors, including U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (Pakistani Taliban), continue to threaten all Pakistanis and the country's overall security. Religious minority communities, including Shi'a and Ahmadiyya Muslims, Christians, and Hindus, experience chronic sectarian and religiously-motivated violence from both terrorist organizations and individuals within society.

In many of the worst situations today, transnational or local organizations are the egregious persecutors and governments are incapable of addressing the violations or are, for one reason or another, failing to do so. In these situations, allowing the United States to designate the non-state actors perpetrating particularly severe violations would broaden the U.S. government's ability to engage the actual drivers of persecution and would reflect reality, which should be the core point of the CPC process. The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, P.L. 114-281, includes this important measure.

Some Encouraging Factors

Country-Specific Changes: While the 2017 Annual Report noted negative trajectories for both Russia, recommending for the first time that it be designated a CPC, and Bahrain, for the first time placing it in the Tier 2 category, the report also noted some improvements in government actions on the freedom of religion or belief in:

- **Egypt:** The Egyptian government has made efforts to address religious freedom concerns and despite the government's widespread repression of human rights, some religious freedom conditions have improved. President Sisi consistently condemned sectarian attacks, pressed for assistance for victims and accountability for perpetrators, and pushed for reform in religious discourse. The parliament in August 2016 passed a law on the construction and maintenance of churches and, by early 2017, the government completed rebuilding/restoring more than 50 churches destroyed in 2013 by extremists. Egyptian courts also made some progress bringing to justice perpetrators of past attacks. Because the CPC designation is based on a government's violations,

USCIRF in the 2017 Annual Report recommended that Egypt be placed on the Tier 2 list: USCIRF in past years had recommended that it be designated as a CPC.

At the same time, non-state actors, especially ISIS affiliates, increasingly targeted and killed individuals, especially Coptic Christians, on the basis of religion or belief. ISIS also released a video online vowing to kill all Christians in Egypt. USCIRF is deeply concerned by the deplorable human rights conditions in Egypt and ISIS affiliates target Coptic Christians

- **Iraq:** The Iraqi government has sought to curb sectarian tensions, while ISIS has committed genocide, ruthlessly targeting anyone who does not espouse its extremist ideology: Since 2014, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has sought to reverse former Prime Minister al-Maliki's sectarian policies and curb tensions between the Sunni and Shi'a communities. However, problems remain, including halting the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Forces' (PMF) attacks on Sunni Muslims and defeating ISIS which continued to ruthlessly target anyone who did not espouse its extremist Islamist ideology, including members of the Christian, Yazidi, Shi'a, Turkmen, and Shabak communities, as well as the Sunni community. ISIS is by far the most egregious perpetrator of religious freedom violations in Iraq, causing the displacement of over 3.4 million Iraqis, many of whom fled to the area controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). In March 2016, then Secretary of State Kerry declared that ISIS's persecution of these groups amounted to genocide and crimes against humanity. Based on the efforts of Iraq's government, USCIRF places Iraq on its Tier 2. USCIRF had recommended that Iraq be designated a CPC since 2008. USCIRF finds that ISIS merits designation as an EPC.

The Secularization Theory has been Discredited: Religious freedom historically has been viewed by many as an orphan right, reflecting two views: that this right, if it was to be addressed at all, was best dealt with in the private sphere, and that religion simply did not matter in the modern world. The later view is what commonly has been called the secularization thesis. This thesis held that as societies progress and modernize, religion loses its authority, with secular institutions achieving cultural, social, economic and political supremacy. Others disagree. World events repeatedly have refuted secularization's supposed inevitability as a product of modernization. In country after country, religion remains central in people's hearts and minds even with the advent and spread of the greatest increase in history of urbanization. This conscience right lies at the center of the most consequential issues of the day, and the fate of individuals and nations rest on respecting this right. Accordingly, as a core human right, U.S. foreign policy needs to promote, not ignore, it and give it the priority it merits.

New Organizations Are Focusing on the Issue and Energizing the Field: As noted earlier, religion and religious freedom clearly are central factors in most of the major foreign policy challenges the world faces. This recognition is reinforced by the fact that more attention is being paid to the issue in the public, political, and international spheres. For example:

The International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPP-FoRB). The IPP-FoRB is an informal network of more than 130 parliamentarians and legislators from around the world committed to combatting religious persecution and advancing freedom of religion or belief, as defined by Article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration for Human Rights. All participating parliamentarians agree to the Charter's principles to advance religious freedom for all, including the right to believe or not believe, change faith, and share faith with others.

USCIRF Commissioners and staff has been instrumental in the creation of the IPP-FoRB and has collaborated with them. Working with a group of parliamentarians from Brazil, Canada, Norway, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, USCIRF helped launch this parliamentary network in November 2014, bringing together over 30 parliamentarians from different regions, political parties, and religions who signed a [Charter for Freedom of Religion or Belief](#) pledging to advance religious freedom for all. USCIRF Commissioners and staff also participated in meetings in Brussels, London, and Oxford leading up to the launch, and at subsequent meetings in New York City in September 2015, with more than 100 parliamentarians from over 50 countries participating, and in Berlin in September 2016. Parliamentarians gathered the Second International Parliamentarians Conference, focusing on approaches for parliamentarians to use to promote and protect FoRB in their home countries and abroad. With USCIRF's support and assistance, six parliamentarians from five regions visited Burma in August 2016: this was the first trip by members of the network to a country of concern. Parliamentarians in the network have sent letters to the leaders of the following nations expressing concerns about religious freedom conditions in: Burma, Indonesia, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Vietnam.

The Marrakesh Declaration: In January 2016, Muslim scholars, politicians, activists, and interfaith clergy from around the world gathered in Marrakesh, Morocco, over two days to address the rights of minorities living in Muslim-majority areas of the world. The gathering was a long time in the making, advanced via scholarly and political dialogue and motivated by growing alarm over the brutalization of minorities by violent extremist groups claiming Islamic legitimization. The conference resulted in the Marrakesh Declaration, a call to action grounded in the historic Charter of Medina, which was forged by Prophet Muhammad as a form of contractual citizenship to ensure equal treatment of all in a multicultural society. Those signing on to the Marrakesh Declaration affirmed that minority rights have a precedent in, and are essential to, Islamic law and tradition in accordance with international legal standards. They further called on politicians, scholars, artists, and others in Muslim-majority societies to advance the protection of minority rights based on equal citizenship through legal, political, and social processes, to ensure that minority communities—indigenous for centuries in the present-day Muslim world—can continue to flourish there.

Policies to Prevent and Counter Religious Violence

There are several tools, including some new ones, that the U.S. government can use to counter the violations of religious freedom and the increased religious violence. For these and other efforts, it is vitally important that Congress appropriate ample funding for these and other efforts, exercise its oversight responsibility, tirelessly focus on accountability, and continually to create and refine the tools needed to address new challenges, including accountability for genocide and crimes against humanity. To that end and as an initial step, USCIRF strongly urges Congress to quickly pass H.R. 390, the Iraq and Syria Genocide Emergency Relief and Accountability Act to the Senate for passage. 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.

Current tools available include:

The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, P.L. 114-281: 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, which President Clinton signed into law (P.L. 105-292). The law subsequently was amended several times, but none of these amendments focused on updating the law so that it would reflect the totality of the conditions on the ground and provide needed new tools. P.L. 114-281 amends the law in important ways, including with the following provisions:

- **Entities of Particular Concern**: The law requires the President to identify non-state actors engaged in severe religious freedom abuses 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.” 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 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; 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 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 under Section 301 this legislation, 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.

Focus 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 is vitally needed to make concrete and understandable the impact of unjust laws: people often are numbed by large numbers and cataclysmic events which are beyond their control and understanding. To address this concern, as you well know, 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. Representative McGovern is working on behalf of Nabeel Rajab, unjustly imprisoned in Bahrain; and Representative Hultgren is advocating for Zhu Yufu, unjustly imprisoned in China.

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

- Burma: Zaw Latt and Pwint Phyu Latt – Vice Chairman Daniel Mark
- China: Gulmira Imin – Commissioner Sandra Jolley
- China: Panchen Lama – Commissioner Tenzin Dorjee
- Eritrea: Patriarch Abune Antonios – Chair Thomas J. Reese, S.J.
- Iran: Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi – Commissioner Kristina Arriaga
- Iran: Maryam Naghash Zargaran – Commissioner Cliff May
- Russia: Bagir Kazikhanov – Commissioner John Ruskay
- Saudi Arabia: Raif Badawi – Commissioner Cliff May
- Vietnam: Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh and his wife Tran Thi Hong – Commissioner Wolcott

Conclusion

We face an enormously challenging landscape for freedom of religion or belief abroad. We can and will see constructive change by improving our use of existing tools and creating new tools for a rapidly changing environment. By further integrating this fundamental freedom into our nation's foreign policy, we can bring genuine progress to those who yearn for freedom.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you, Father Reese. We appreciate your testimony and also your services as Chairman of USCIRF.

I am going to recognize myself for some questions and, then, yield to my co-chairman.

You noted that USCIRF only designated three entities of particular concern, ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and al-Shabaab in Somalia. However, USCIRF did not recommend groups like Boko Haram and ISIS affiliates in other countries besides Iraq and Syria. I wonder if you could explain why you did not recommend these groups and what the U.S. Government needs to do to help address the religious violence these groups perpetrate.

Rev. REESE. That is a very good question, and I am glad you asked it. It was the same question I asked our staff when this issue came up.

And the Wolf Act is very specific in how it defines entities of particular concern. The key point that distinguishes the groups that we pointed out and the groups that we did not list as entities of particular concern is that they have to control some territory.

I think if we had had this legislation two or three years ago, Boko Haram would have qualified as an entity of particular concern. But, now that it has been pushed back and it is no longer in control of territory in Nigeria, it no longer qualifies under the legislative language of the Act. So, that is why we picked the three entities of particular concern that we mentioned in our report, and not the others. Even though those others are terrible organizations, they simply don't qualify under the legislative language.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thanks. That helps.

You mentioned in your testimony how religious freedom has been securitized to repress religious minorities and others. I wonder if you could elaborate on that a little bit with any examples.

Rev. REESE. Yes. What we have seen is that many governments have passed anti-terrorism laws, anti-extremism laws, and, then, they use these laws as excuses to persecute religious minorities and to oppress people who want to speak out on issues.

For example, in Russia we have seen these anti-extremism laws applied to curtailing the religious freedom of organizations like the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Jehovah's Witnesses are pacifists. They are not terrorists. You know, this is a group of people that don't want to be involved in politics. They want to just be left alone. And yet, the Russian government has, for all practical purposes, made them illegal and is persecuting them.

This is happening, also, in Uzbekistan. The government there has persecuted and brutally treated Muslims who don't conform to the officially-designated and prescribed religious practices. There is an estimated 12,000 Muslims in prison there.

So, this is the way in which these laws are being abused, and not being really used to deal with terrorism, but, rather, being used to persecute people.

Mr. HULTGREN. Just a couple more questions, if I may. In the Annual Report, the USCIRF report highlighted religious freedom conditions, I think it was in 37 different countries around the world. I wonder if you could just quickly highlight two or three that you see as the best opportunity for America to make a difference for some of these where religious freedom is being abused or taken away.

Rev. REESE. You know, I think that there are two countries I would focus on, Vietnam and Burma. Vietnam is very concerned about how the United States perceives it. They have recently enacted a law dealing with religious organizations registration and that sort of thing. We are very concerned about how it is implemented, and that is what we want to watch.

There are parts of Vietnam, mostly in the cities, where religious groups are pretty well left alone. But there are other parts of Vietnam where the government officials really persecute and give religious groups a bad time. You have gangs beating up on pastors and things like that. So, I think that Vietnam is a country that wishes to be in dialog and conversation with the United States. And so, I think we have an opportunity there.

The second would be Burma. Again, in Burma we have a terrible situation with the Rohingya Muslims, the persecution and the terrible treatment of these Muslims by Buddhist radicals. This is a very, very serious issue.

However, we have seen just recently in Burma where a large number of religious prisoners have been released. I think the government of Burma is open to conversation on this. But, as we know, the military call the shots in a lot of areas in Burma, not necessarily the elected government.

So, these are two countries that I think we could focus on and maybe make some progress with.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thanks, Father.

The last question -- I have got a lot more questions -- but the last one I will ask --

Rev. REESE. Sure.

Mr. HULTGREN. -- today is, I wonder if you could talk briefly just about current relationship with the State Department, how things are going there with USCIRF. But, then, also, I wanted to just get your thoughts on the dissenting statements published in the 2017 USCIRF Annual Report which suggested that USCIRF is underresourced and should refocus its efforts from producing broad-end reports and other traditional activities to carrying out an in-depth study for a few targeted countries. I wonder if you could just talk briefly if you believe USCIRF is underresourced, and does it need to rethink its approach or priorities and, if so, why?

Rev. REESE. Sure. I think that we can always use more resources, especially because of the fact that Congress has mandated that we develop this prisoners list. This is a project that is going to take staff time and resources to do, because we don't want to have a person put on the list who really shouldn't be on the list. And so, that is something that we will be coming to Congress to ask for more resources in order to do that.

The Commission every year goes through a process of prioritizing of strategic planning to decide how we want to focus our efforts and attention for the year. And we will be beginning that process in June, which is our normal cycle for doing that. We are eager to listen to all suggestions from all sources, and we always do that.

But, for the most part, I think we have found very positive responses from people for the work that we have been doing. We find, for example, in the State Department they find our report very useful. Ambassador Saperstein told us that, when he goes to a country, that is what he has on the top of his pile of papers, is the chapter from our report.

The last thing I would say is, in terms of our relationship with the State Department, I think we have a very positive relationship with the State Department, but we would encourage the administration to appoint as soon as possible a new ambassador for religious freedom. This position cannot go empty. It has gone empty in the past for over a year, and we have to show the world that religious freedom is a priority. It is a priority of our country. It is a priority of this administration.

Mr. HULTGREN. Okay. Thanks, Father.

I recognize Chair McGovern.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you, Father Reese. I appreciate your leadership and your commitment. We appreciate USCIRF because we, too, refer to it often when we are now in hearings, but when we are traveling to other places around the world. You should know that you

are effective, because it drives human rights violator crazy. So, you know you are effective, and that is a good thing.

[Laughter.]

I don't want to miss this opportunity. Judy Golub, who is one of your senior policy analysts, is incredible, and we all benefit from her advice, counsel, and gentle powers of persuasion. So, I want to let you know how effective she is as well.

I don't know how many hearings we have had since at least I have come onboard as Co-Chair, but I am always puzzled that this kind of oppression against people based on their religion or, quite frankly, on a whole bunch of other things, even occurs. I used to think the older I got, the more like everything would be clearer to me, and it is getting older, the more confused I am getting as to why people act in a certain way. I don't understand why governments, peoples, entities work so hard at highlighting their differences with other people who may believe something different than they do. It is such a waste of time and energy, and it is so destructive. We have a big enough world where people can believe whatever they want to believe.

The one kind of common tie that all religions have is they are all based on promoting tolerance and love and understanding. And yet, people are losing their lives because of what they believe in. And countries who are even our allies are responsible for some of the discrimination and some of the human rights violations against people because of their beliefs.

So, if I could just get your opinion? I mean, I get it; we are responding to crisis after crisis after crisis. If you could maybe kind of reflect a little bit on the issue of prevention? I mean, we are all concerned about how to respond to religious violence, but I am also concerned on how we prevent it. Are you able to comment on like the warning signs we should be watching for in places where violence has not yet broken out? So that maybe there could be preventative measures or actions that we could take.

Rev. REESE. That is a really excellent question. I think there is a number of things we can and should do. One thing is to get the religious groups to talk to one another. Interreligious dialog is extremely important because it is much harder to burn down somebody's home if you know them, if you have had them over to your house for dinner and you have had a conversation with them. I think this kind of interreligious dialog is extremely important, but it has to be at the grassroots level. It has to be parish to mosque. It has to be very local.

The problem is, when people live in segregated communities and only talk to their own, then, you know, we develop these stereotypes. We develop these images of the other, which can be exploited for political or economic reasons.

And I think this is the other thing. It is the use of religion as a political tool. It is almost the prostitution of religion for political or economic purposes that is so divisive that we see.

Often, we have situations where there is a conflict, and religion is, then, poured into that conflict, and it is like putting gasoline on a fire. But, if there are relationships built beforehand, relationships where the imam and the pastor can get on the phone and talk to each other and walk

down the street and calm people together, then I think we have a better opportunity and situation to prevent these kinds of situations blowing up. That would be one suggestion on my part.

Mr. McGOVERN. Yes, I am trying to think of an example where we may have been on the verge of, there may have been a risk of religious violence breaking out; and yet, through intervention, it was avoided. I mean, I am looking for like the test case that we could say this is the way you should do it before things get out of hand. I don't know if you know of one off the top of your head.

Rev. REESE. Those kinds of things never make the news.

Mr. McGovern. Right.

Rev. REESE. I mean, what we tend to hear about is situations like in the Central African Republic --

Mr. McGOVERN. Right, yes.

Rev. REESE. -- where all hell broke loose because what was started as a political conflict then turned into a religious war. I fear that the same kinds of problems could arise in Nigeria.

Mr. McGOVERN. Right.

Rev. REESE. It is a country that I am very concerned about the conflicts between Muslims and Christians, especially in the middle belt where the cattle rangers and the farmers are competing over land and water and resources, and where the cattlemen are Muslims and the farmers are Christians. I mean, this is like the Old Wild West --

Mr. McGOVERN. Right.

Rev. REESE. -- where there is no law and order. There is no sheriff to bring peace and to keep order.

So, a lot of these problems could be -- they are all interrelated. I mean, there is the corruption in government that doesn't allow law and order to apply. There is the lack of training and police to deal with these kinds of issues. All of these escalate together to make these problems explode and become quickly out of control.

Mr. McGOVERN. But it seems that that is a case where, I mean, we ought to be planning now trying to get these means together. It becomes sometimes challenging in countries where some of the violence is against religious violence where they only constitute a relatively small number of the population. And so oftentimes, getting those kinds of understandings and those agreements together becomes a little bit more challenging. Trying to think of ways to promote tolerance is also a challenge.

I began my remarks by referencing Tibet. I have had these conversations with the Chinese government over and over and over again. I don't understand what the big deal is. I

mean, the Tibetans want to go home or just be who they are. Nobody is talking about creating a separate country. It is not a separatist movement. I mean, His Holiness has said that over and over and over and over and over again. But they just want to be who they are.

And China is this great big, giant country, right, with all these resources and riches and this mighty military. And yet, they are like paranoid over this monk who only talks about peace, love, truth, justice; I mean, not talking about overthrowing the Chinese government. It is a faith that he and his people want to practice, and it is a beautiful faith. It is inspiring. Any of us who have ever met with His Holiness, I mean, you can't help but feel uplifted after listening to him. It is beautiful.

And yet, it has become almost impossible to get the Chinese government to think that this is anything other than some kind of conspiracy or plot to undo their entire system. I mean, they have even ceased the dialog that they had with the Tibetans. It doesn't happen anymore. And so, trying to get them talking is almost impossible.

As I said, also, too, I know that there are some people in the Tibetan community who are kind of frustrated that it has been so long, that nothing seems to be happening. And those are the people that I worry about when we talk about sowing the seeds of extremism or even violent counteractions, which go so contrary to what the Dalai Lama is preaching. But, after a while, I mean, people get oppressed for so long and, then, they say that the way we have been doing it isn't working. And then, they look to other things.

I mean, those are some of the challenges I think we -- I wish we had concrete processes in place to help force these discussions.

Rev. REESE. Yes, China is certainly one of the most serious examples of the persecution of religion and the lack of religious freedom. We have listed them as a country of particular concern from the very beginning. Their treatment of the Buddhists in Tibet has been awful; also, of the Uighur Muslims --

Mr. McGOVERN. Yes, the Uighurs.

Rev. REESE. --and the Christian churches --

Mr. McGOVERN. Right, yes.

Rev. REESE. -- that have been attacked. There just seems to be this inability to realize that religious believers can be good citizens and that you don't have to fear them. In fact, more of these kinds of religious believers are less likely to go to violence than others. And yet, you are absolutely right, the way they are pushing and pushing and pushing against these groups, it may have the very counterproductive result.

Mr. McGOVERN. Right. Just one final question. Some of the solutions that you gave, I mean the Magnitsky Act and all that kind of stuff, I think we need to make sure we utilize these tools that our government has and not just have them and not utilize them.

But, beyond governments, I am becoming more and more convinced that the business community has a major role to play here. And yet, when I talk to business leaders, they say, well, human rights, that is the government's business; that is not our business; you know, we are in the business of doing business, basically, making money and creating jobs, and all that kind of stuff.

But, I mean, I think we need to figure out a strategy to remind our business leaders, especially those who know what is happening, to not raise these issues. We are not expecting them to solve everything, but I think the mere raising of these issues time and time again could have an impact. Knowing what is going on and not raising it, you become complicit. And so, any suggestions along the way about how we can gently and constructively push our business community into doing more, and I think the faith-based community here in the United States could probably have a better impact on businesses than people like me. It is harder to say no to you when you walk into a room than it is to me. So, anyway, just a suggestion.

Rev. REESE. I think it is a good plan. I think there was a belief at one time that, once free market capitalism came to China, freedom and democracy and human rights would follow. It hasn't happened.

Mr. McGOVERN. Right.

Rev. REESE. And so, I think you are absolutely right, we need to get everybody onboard

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Mr. McGOVERN. Right.

Rev. REESE. -- the business community, the religious community, political leaders, in defense and support of religious freedom.

Mr. McGOVERN. I appreciate it. Thank you again for your leadership.

Rev. REESE. Thank you.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you, Father. I appreciate your chairmanship and your leadership and look forward to working with you some more. We are going to make a switch to the second panel now. So, thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. One of these days we will have enough money for air conditioning.

[Laughter.]

Mr. McGOVERN. We will see. We will try to leave the doors open a little bit to get some air in here, and, hopefully, things will kick in.

So, at least the beeping stopped. Thank you. Good job. I thought that was just me, but I think we all were hearing that same beeping. So, thank you.

Well, we are going to move on to our second panel. Welcome. So glad you are here, and we are going to have each of you give your testimony and, then, we will open it up to some questions here.

But, first, we are grateful to have Alan Cooperman. Alan Cooperman is Director of Religious Research at the Pew Research Center. Thanks for being here.

We are also very grateful to have Robert P. George who is a McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University. So glad to have you. Thank you.

And then, also, Dr. Kamran Bokhari is a Senior Analyst with the intelligence firm Geopolitical Futures and a Senior Fellow with the Center for Global Policy.

To each one of you, we are grateful for your time and look forward to hearing your testimony.

Mr. Cooperman, I will recognize you first. Thank you.

STATEMENTS OF ALAN COOPERMAN, DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS RESEARCH, PEW RESEARCH CENTER; ROBERT P. GEORGE, MCCORMICK PROFESSOR OF JURISPRUDENCE, AND DIRECTOR, JAMES MADISON PROGRAM IN AMERICAN IDEALS AND INSTITUTIONS, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, AND KAMRAN BOKHARI, SENIOR ANALYST, GEOPOLITICAL FUTURES, AND SENIOR FELLOW, CENTER FOR GLOBAL POLICY

STATEMENT OF ALAN COOPERMAN

Mr. COOPERMAN. Thank you.

And I believe my microphone is on.

Chairman McGovern, Chairman Hultgren, Members of the Commission, thank you very much for holding this hearing on international religious freedom and countering religious violence, and for inviting me to speak.

Like Father Tom Reese, I also have some prepared remarks that I would like to submit for the record. I am going to give a truncated version for you.

This hearing comes at a time when religiously-motivated violence, as well as violence targeting members of certain religions, appears to be on the rise around the world. The Pew Research Center and its experts do not promote policy positions or offer recommendations for policy changes. But, nonetheless, I hope my testimony today can provide some useful context for you.

At the Center we have been tracking changes in both government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion across 198 countries on an annual basis for nearly a decade. Our latest report, which covers events in 2015, found that restrictions on religion were

once again on the rise after two back-to-back years of decline. Our research showed a modest increase in government-imposed religious restrictions, which are defined as laws, policies, or official actions that restrict religious beliefs and practices. A total of 50 governments had high or very high levels of restrictions on religion in 2015, up from 47 the previous year.

Separately, we also track social hostilities involving religion, which are defined as acts by private individuals, organizations, or groups in society that either are motivated by religion or that target adherence of particular religions. And we found high or very high levels of social hostilities in 53 countries in 2015, up from 45 the prior year.

Now a few countries have very high levels of both government restrictions and social hostilities. In 2015, these countries were Egypt, Iraq, Russia, and Syria. In 2014, only Syria had scored very high in both categories.

Now I cannot offer any simple explanation for the rise of restrictions on religion, but I would like to focus on two of the more than 30 individual indicators that we monitor each year: government harassment of religious groups and government use of force against religious groups. Now, in 2015, there were increases in both of these measures, harassment and use of physical force, in almost all major regions of the globe, including Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa, the Asia-Pacific Region, and Europe.

In fact, government harassment of religious groups was the most widespread in 2015 that has been since 2007, which is the first year for which we have data. In 2015, more than 150 governments engaged in some form of harassment, which includes discriminatory actions or policies against religious groups. And officials in more than 100 countries sanctioned physical acts of repression, ranging from detentions to displacements, assaults, and killings.

One striking development was an increase in harassment and use of force by European governments. More than half of the 45 countries across the continent, from the United Kingdom in the west to Russia in the east, engaged in increased levels of harassment or physical force against some religious groups in 2015.

A number of the incidents in Europe involved refugees from Syria and other Muslim majority countries. Government officials in multiple European countries sought to block the construction of mosques or minarets, tried to ban the wearing of head scarves in certain circumstances, or targeted Muslims in law enforcement actions that were later ruled unjustified.

In addition to government actions, Europe also saw a rise in acts of social hostility related to religion in 2015, with Jews and Muslims being the primary targets. All told, hostilities against Jews, ranging from vandalism and destruction of property to physical assaults, were reported in 33 European countries in 2015, about the same as in 2014. And hostilities against Muslims were reported in 32 European countries in 2015, up from 26 the prior year.

Now, despite these trends in Europe, the highest average levels of restrictions on religion continue to be found in the Middle East and North Africa. In 2015, governments across that region targeted religious minorities, including both Christian and Muslim minorities, as well as atheists and others.

In 2015, in Saudi Arabia, for example, the poet Ashraf Fayadh was sentenced to death for apostasy and publicly promoting atheism, though his sentence was later reduced to eight years in prison and 800 lashes.

The Middle East/North Africa region also had the highest level of social hostilities involving religion in our tracking in 2015. Now, although we try to distinguish government actions from social hostilities, the distinction can be muddy.

In many countries where government policies seek to ban or ostracize certain religious groups, we also find societal harassment of those groups. In Russia, for example, the government has harassed Jehovah's Witnesses for many years, and in 2015 Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia were the subject of numerous physical attacks and incidents of property damage.

In general, around the globe we find that government restrictions and social hostilities tend to go hand-in-hand, rising or falling together. In the language of social science, they are positively correlated. But there are exceptions to this relationship. Government restrictions on religion are not always accompanied by social hostilities. For example, in China, China had some of the world's highest levels of government restrictions on religion in 2015, but levels of social hostilities involving religion remained moderate in China by our measures.

I should also note that, even when government actions and social hostilities appear to be rising or falling in tandem, the causal connections are often difficult to discern. This is an area where generalizations are fraught with peril, and the unique characteristics of various countries, including their demographic profiles and political histories, can contribute to understanding the relationship between governmental and societal actions.

While it is too soon to know whether the modest rise in government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion that took place in 2015 constituted a long-term trend, we hope that our continuing research on this issue can provide helpful context and may be useful to policymakers seeking to prevent and counter religious violence.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cooperman follows:]

Testimony for Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
Freedom of Belief: Countering Religious Violence
Alan Cooperman, Director of Religion Research, Pew Research Center
May 24, 2017

Chairman McGovern, Chairman Hultgren, members of the commission: Thank you for holding this important hearing on international religious freedom and countering religious violence. This hearing comes at a time when religiously motivated violence – as well as violence targeting members of certain religions – is on the rise around the world.

Pew Research Center and its experts do not promote specific policy positions or offer recommendations for policy changes. Nonetheless, I hope my testimony today can provide some useful context. At the Center, we have been tracking changes in both government restrictions on religion and social hostilities involving religion across 198 countries for nearly a decade. Our latest report, which covers events in 2015, found that restrictions on religion were once again on the rise after two, back-to-back years of decline.

Our research showed a modest increase in government-imposed religious restrictions, defined as laws, policies or official actions that restrict religious beliefs and practices. A total of 50 governments had high or very high levels of restrictions on religion in 2015, up from 47 the prior year.

Separately, we also track social hostilities involving religion, defined as acts by private individuals, organizations or groups in society that either are motivated by religion or that target adherents of particular religions. We found high or very high levels of social hostilities in 53 countries, up from 45 in 2014.

A few countries have very high levels of both government restrictions and social hostilities. In 2015, these countries were Egypt, Iraq, Russia and Syria. In 2014, only Syria had scored very high in both categories.

I cannot offer any simple explanation for the overall rise of restrictions on religion, but I would like to focus on two of the more than 30 indicators that we monitor each year: government harassment or discrimination against specific religious groups, and government use of force against religious groups, ranging from detentions to displacements, assaults and killings.

In 2015, there were increases in these two measures – harassment and use of physical force – in almost all major regions of the globe, including sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, and Europe. In fact, government harassment of religious groups was the most widespread it has been since 2007, the first year for which we have data. One hundred fifty-seven governments engaged in some form of harassment or discrimination against religious groups in 2015, up from 129 countries the year before. And more governments also used force: officials in 106 countries sanctioned various physical acts of repression, compared with 81 countries in 2014.

One striking development was an increase in harassment and use of force by European governments. More than half of the 45 countries across the whole of the continent, from the United Kingdom in the west to Russia in the east, engaged in increased levels of harassment or physical force against some religious groups in 2015.

Some of the incidents in Europe involved refugees from Syria and other Muslim-majority countries. Government officials in multiple European countries made derogatory statements about Muslim refugees, sought to block the construction of mosques or minarets, tried to ban the wearing of headscarves in certain circumstances, or targeted Muslims in law enforcement actions, some of which were later ruled unjustified. In Bremen, Germany, for example, police raided an Islamic Cultural Center, saying they suspected that a person associated with the mosque was distributing automatic weapons for a terror attack. Police broke down the front door of the mosque, handcuffed worshippers and forced some to lie on the floor for hours. No weapons were found, and a court later ruled that the search was unlawful.

In addition to government actions, Europe also saw a rise in acts of social hostility in 2015, with Muslims and Jews as the primary targets. All told, hostilities ranging from vandalism and destruction of property to physical assaults against Jews were reported in 33 European countries, about the same as in 2014. Over the same period, hostilities against Muslims increased dramatically, from 26 countries in 2014 to 32 countries in 2015.

European Muslims were targeted particularly after the Charlie Hebdo shootings in January and the Bataclan shootings in the fall of 2015. There were reports of vandalism at mosques, protests by far-right groups against Muslim immigrants and Islam in general, and hate speech and violence against Muslim individuals throughout the year.

Meanwhile, the Middle East-North Africa region continued to have the highest average levels of government restrictions on religion. Governments across the region targeted religious minorities, atheists and political groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. In Egypt, authorities used tear gas and live ammunition on Islamist demonstrators on the anniversary of the 2011 uprisings, resulting in 23 deaths and 516 arrests, according to the government. In Saudi Arabia, Palestinian poet Ashraf Fayadh was sentenced to death for apostasy and publicly promoting atheism. His sentence was later reduced to an eight-year prison sentence and 800 lashes.

The Middle East-North Africa region also had the highest levels of social hostilities involving religion in 2015. In Iraq, for example, Sunni Muslims were frequently targeted for abduction. In February 2015, the prominent Sunni tribal leader Sheikh Qassem Sweidan al-Janabi was kidnapped and killed by unidentified militants. He had recently called for the return of 70,000 displaced Sunnis.

Elsewhere, sub-Saharan Africa saw the largest *increase* in social hostilities involving religion in 2015. Twenty-five countries across the region experienced violence or the threat of violence to enforce religious norms, up from nine countries in 2014. For example, Boko Haram fighters engaged in attacks in Nigeria and Niger while also killing over 200 civilians in Chad during the year. And across sub-Saharan Africa there were numerous incidents of violence involving allegations of witchcraft or occult rituals. In the Republic of Congo, two elderly men were killed after

being accused of witchcraft, and in Burkina Faso elderly women were barred from their villages after being accused of witchcraft.

Worldwide, religion-related terrorism was somewhat less widespread in 2015 than in 2014, according to our data. Acts of terror motivated by religion or targeting religious groups were reported in 50 countries, down from 60 countries the year before. Similarly, fewer countries were engaged in religion-related armed conflicts. But while these types of religion-related violence were on the decline, the number of displaced persons resulting from them remained high. We estimate that religion-related terrorism and armed conflict contributed to the displacement of approximately 9 million new refugees and internally displaced people in 2015.

The types of religious restrictions we track can sometimes muddy the distinction between government and social actions. For example, government policies that ban or ostracize certain religious groups often coincide with the societal harassment of those groups. In Russia, the government has harassed Jehovah's Witnesses for years, and, in 2015, followers of the religion were the subject of numerous physical attacks and incidents of property damage by private groups or individuals.

However, government restrictions on religion are not always accompanied by social hostilities. For example, China had some of the world's highest levels of government restrictions on religion in 2015. But levels of social hostilities involving religion remain moderate in China, by our measures.

In general, around the globe, we find that government restrictions and social hostilities tend to go hand-in-hand, rising or falling together. In the language of social science, they are positively correlated. But there are exceptions to this relationship – as in China. And I should note that even when government actions and social hostilities appear to be rising or falling in tandem, the causal connections are often difficult to discern. This is an area where generalizations are fraught with peril, and the unique characteristics of various countries, including their demographic profiles and political histories, can contribute to understanding the relationship between government and social actions.

While it is too soon to know whether the modest uptick in government restrictions and social hostilities involving religion that took place in 2015 constitutes a long-term trend, we hope that our continuing research on this issue can provide helpful context and may be useful to policymakers seeking to prevent and counter religious violence. Thank you.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you, Mr. Cooperman.

Professor George, it is great to have you here. I recognize Professor George.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT P. GEORGE

Mr. GEORGE. Thank you very much, Chairman Hultgren. Thank you, Chairman McGovern.

I am honored to be appearing again before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. My terms as a member and as Chairman of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom ended about a year ago, and I handed on the baton to my friend and very capable colleague, Father Thomas Reese.

After my rather ferocious criticisms of both major party candidates in the last election, I did not expect to be invited back to Washington very often.

[Laughter.]

But it is good to be here on this occasion.

I am not a person who flatters idly or offers false praise, but I do want to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank both of you, Chairman Hultgren and Chairman McGovern, for the work and witness that you do for religious freedom and other human rights. It is heartwarming to me, especially in light of what I know from my work on the Commission and what has been reiterated by Mr. Cooperman, it is especially heartwarming for me to know that we still have a strong, bipartisan, Democrat and Republican alliance working, cooperating, for religious freedom. The two of you are very much in the tradition of Tom Lantos and Frank Wolf, working arm-in-arm in this period of intense polarization across so many other issues. But it is just wonderful that you are working together the way you are, and may the Tom Lantos Commission continue to flourish.

In the time I have, I want to begin by pointing to the growing threat that extremism poses, both to religious freedom and to the security of the world. I will, then, highlight the deeply disturbing and wrongheaded ways that some nations have responded to this extremism. I want to suggest that embracing and strengthening religious freedom is the way for nations to respond to the challenges of radicalism and violence.

And finally, I will argue that, if we believe religious freedom is important and valuable in this cause, we need to renew our commitment to the two main vehicles that the Congress and the President brought into being in 1998 to promote religious liberty in our foreign and diplomatic policy. And, of course, I mean the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the Ambassador-at-Large position in the State Department for religious freedom.

Now, like everyone else who is participating in this hearing, I have watched the horrific rise in recent years of violent extremism in the form of entities such as ISIL in Iraq and Syria. I have been sickened by the same events that have sickened everyone in this room today and to all men and women of goodwill, the kidnappings, the sexual enslavement, the beheadings, the crucifixions, the refugee crises, the genocide.

The Yazidis and Christians continue to be targets of a campaign of genocide. Muslims who reject extremist ideology, and especially those who assist in the fight against it, have also

been targeted. Those Muslims are victims of retaliation from violent radicals. No one, irrespective of faith, who resists in any way is spared the rampages of extremism in the areas that it has conquered or where it is able to operate.

I have also seen how the plague of violent religious and ideological extremism is not limited to Syria and Iraq, but continues to spread across oceans and continents. In Afghanistan, assaults by the Taliban and like-minded groups against anyone daring to contradict their extremist interpretation of the Quran continues unabated. And the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was right to mark them as an entity of particular concern.

In Burma, as Father Reese pointed out, Rohingya Muslims and Christians continue to suffer assaults from extremists claiming to act in Buddhism's name.

In the Central African Republic, militias reporting to act in Christianity's name, have driven hundreds of thousands of Muslim civilians out of the country, and nearly all of the nation's mosques have been destroyed.

In Egypt, Coptic Christians and other minorities continue to fear for their lives and safety at the hands of extremists proclaiming to act in Islam's name.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram, although it no longer controls territory, continues to attack both Christians and those Muslims who dare to counter its radical interpretations of Islam.

In Pakistan, a country that I continue to be extremely worried about, extremists continue to launch horrific attacks against religious minorities ranging from Christians to Ahmadiyyas, to Shia.

In Iran and elsewhere, Baha'is are among the persecuted.

No one is immune from this. There is perhaps no more visible testament to the scope of these atrocities than the millions of people who have been forced to feel their homes. In Iraq, millions are now internally displaced as a result of ISIL's offensive. Millions among Syria's pre-civil war population have suffered a similar fate, and millions more are, as we know, refugees in neighboring states and in Europe.

In Burma, 140,000 Rohingya Muslims and at least 100,000 Christians remain internally displaced.

In the Central African Republic, more than a million people, mostly Muslims, have been driven out of their homes.

And in Nigeria, Boko Haram's rampages are responsible for the displacement, again, of more than a million people.

Clearly, the unchecked rise of such extremism has unleashed humanitarian crises that are nothing short of horrifying.

Now how have nations responded to these challenges to this religious extremism? In some countries, governments themselves embody the extremism. It is part of their governing ideology, and it has got to be faced up to.

In Saudi Arabia, for example, the Kingdom bans churches and any public expression that contradicts its own interpretations of Sunni Islam while inflicting barbaric punishments on transgressors, as we have seen with the brutal flogging and imprisonment of Raif Badawi and the mistreatment of Ahmadiyya Muslims and others.

For decades, Saudi Arabia has exported its extremist religious interpretations, largely through poisonous, often grotesquely anti-Semitic literature, including curricular material for school children sent across much of the world.

And in Iran, another exporter of extremism, from Christians to other religious minorities such as Baha'is and Sunni Muslims and to dissident Shia, the regime subjects those who contradict its brand of Shia Islam to arrests, imprisonment, torture, and even death.

Now, while Saudi Arabia and Iran embody religious extremism, in other countries governments enable it, or at the very least tolerate it.

In Pakistan, the government enforces the country's blasphemy law vigorously with dozens of Pakistanis, Ahmadiyya, Christian, dissenting Muslims, on death row or serving life sentences for violating this law. The weight of the blasphemy laws falls disproportionately on religious minority communities such as Christians, Hindus, Ahmadiyyas, and, in turn, emboldens religious extremists to assault these minorities. And while the government continues to enforce the blasphemy law zealously, it lacks any corresponding zeal in bringing to justice those private individuals, the mobs and the thugs and the terrorists who are responsible for these assaults.

While some governments embody religious extremism and violence, others enable it; still others seek to manage such extremism by granting or withholding favors from sectarian and religious groups based on whether or not they support the government's policies.

When massive numbers of Christians or massive numbers of Syrians of different faiths took to the streets in 2011 demanding their rights of citizens, the Assad regime fired on them while turning sectarian groups against one another. That is the origins of this civil war. And as we have seen, that civil war has opened the door to unimaginable horrors which ISIL and other violent extremists have perpetrated.

In still other cases, governments respond to the violence and extremism by turning their sights on entire religions, or at least a critical mass of their adherents. For example, both China and Russia apparently have decided that the way to fight extremism of some Muslims is by repressing all or most Muslims. Often, the fight in extremism is merely a transparent pretext for oppression. And Father Tom I was glad mentioned this. China has taken this approach with the Uighur Muslim community while Russia has done it with Muslims in the North Caucasus region. And by the way, this is one of several reasons I commend USCIRF for its most recent recommendations to the State Department designating Russia as a CPC, Country of Particular Concern, as it has long done with China.

Now, unfortunately, we in Western societies have had our own difficulties dealing with religious extremism. For decades, our foreign policy bureaucracies largely accepting the thesis, now fully falsified, that modernization produces secularization, seem to have forgotten the following critical fact: that is, for the vast majority of people around the world, as Father Tom said, faith matters. According to the Pew poll, 84 percent of the world's population identifies with a specific religious group, as Father Tom noted. And for many of these people, religion is not just one among several affiliations; it is central, often the central thing in their lives.

And yet, for generations, this simple fact somehow managed to confound foreign policy experts across the West, including our own. Recall the shock and disbelief which followed the fall of the Shah of Iran in 1978 and his replacement by the radical regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, despite numerous indicators that Khomeini's movement was on the rise.

Recall the astonishment of foreign policy elites a decade later during the stunningly swift succession of events leading to the Soviet Union's demise. They just wouldn't believe that Pope John Paul II's standing up to Soviet tyranny beginning in Poland would propel religion-based freedom movements across the Soviet Empire, helping to destroy its dictatorial reign.

And, of course, the brutal reality behind the 9/11 massacres confounded the experts, as 19 hijackers killed 3,000 Americans and themselves, in the belief that they were somehow pleasing God.

Time and again throughout most of our lifetime, my lifetime, Western elites have missed the boat on religion. We thought, people thought, educated people thought, sophisticated people thought it would fade away. It is like the belief Father Tom mentioned that free market capitalism would necessarily bring with it freedom of speech and other civil liberties, freedom of religion. It didn't happen, and modernization did not produce secularization throughout the world.

You cannot conduct foreign policy with the rest of the world if you are clueless or dismissive about religion's central role in most people's lives. You can't have a successful strategy against your foes if you are clueless or dismissive of their motives.

And as a result, our own people, along with leaders and governments from other parts of the world, have failed to develop over time a coherent or consistent strategy against violent religious extremism. So, how do we counter violent extremism?

Well, we do it through ideas and beliefs that are neither violent nor extremist. What Chairman McGovern said a moment ago I think is absolutely right. How do we combat expressions of faith that dishonor some people? Well, we affirm those while honor all people. There is only one way for this to happen. We have to stand unabashedly for universal, fundamental human rights, including the right to religious freedom. We need to exemplify it in our domestic policy and promote it in our foreign policy. And as Father Tom said in responding to Chairman McGovern, it has got to be everyone. It has got to be everyone's job.

Yes, the politicians. Yes, you have a job to do; no question about that, but, also, religious leaders. Civil society has a crucial role to play here. So, does business. Chairman McGovern is right about that. We all have a role to play. We have to stand firmly for the notion that the way to defeat bad religious ideas is with good religious and philosophical ideas, ideas about justice and human rights and the common good, operating in a free marketplace of ideas.

And again, governments can't do this alone. Religious leaders, especially leaders of majority or dominant faiths, must sign onto the project and follow through with it. The cases that Father Tom has mentioned that he promoted, the case where an imam and a priest would walk together to try to calm a situation of potential violence, those kinds of things have to happen.

Chairman McGovern, when you asked for an example of something like that happening, the one that came to my mind was the series of hunger strikes that Mahatma Gandhi engaged in try to quell the sectarian violence between Hindus and Muslims in the leadup to Partition in India and after Partition.

Mr. HULTGREN. I hate to do this. Are you almost done?

Mr. GEORGE. Oh, sorry.

Mr. HULTGREN. No, you can keep going.

Mr. GEORGE. I am, indeed. I am indeed.

Mr. HULTGREN. Your microphone is cut down. And I am sorry, you sound good to us, but I am hearing some of the people in the back -- so, I won't say start over.

[Laughter.]

And I think if you just finish with it --

Mr. GEORGE. Can you hear me now?

Mr. HULTGREN. We can, and go ahead and continue. I am sorry to interrupt.

Mr. GEORGE. So, finally, governments that crack down on religious freedom across the board in the name of fighting extremists are unwittingly, I think unwittingly, but they are certainly strengthening the extremists that they are fighting against and weakening moderate, less resilient competitors.

So, we need to counter religious violence with religious freedom. We need to understand religious freedom is valuable not only for its own sake, but as a tool in the fight against religious violence.

And with that, I will conclude, Mr. Chairman, and submit my written testimony to the committee.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you. Yes, all written testimony will be made part of the record.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you again, Professor George. Thank you for your service with USCIRF as well.

Next, we are grateful to have Dr. Bokhari here, and we will recognize you for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF KAMRAN BOKHARI

Mr. BOKHARI. Thank you.

Mr. HULTGREN. Make sure your microphone is on as well.

Mr. BOKHARI. Honorable Co-Chairmen James McGovern and Randy Hultgren, distinguished representatives of the Commission, and staff members, thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts on how promoting freedom of belief can help the efforts to confront religious violence. I am honored to be speaking with you on the issue of countering violent extremist, which is perhaps the biggest challenge of our age.

We are gathered at a time when our enemies have carried out yet another horrific attack, this time deliberately targeting children, teenaged children. Our thoughts and prayers are with our British friends as they move to neutralize this latest attempt to destroy innocent and precious lives.

The United States, in conjunction with its allies around the world, will be battling the scourge of terrorism for many years to come. In keeping with our new paradigm of countering violent extremism, we have been focusing our energies on thwarting those who have moved beyond the realm of extremist ideas and have taken to violence. While the priority should be to stop those perpetrating acts of violence, it is essential that we concentrate on the wider environment in which they take shape.

I am referring to the broader landscape of extremism where a far larger number of people serve as enablers of religiously-inspired violence, even though they are themselves not the ones carrying out these horrendous acts of violence. Here is where the line between political extremism and religious intolerance becomes blurry. While extremists do not necessarily go on to become terrorists, terrorism is the violent manifestation of extremism.

We cannot succeed in stopping terrorists if we ignore the wider pool of extremists. However, extremism itself emerges out of intolerance for religious differences, which, unfortunately, has increased in the recent decades.

Rolling back this trend through the promotion of religious tolerance, however, is an extremely delicate matter. More often than not, our sincere efforts at cultivating diversity of ideas and practices is seen around the world as an attempt at imposing our values on other people's. Such perceptions end up exacerbating the problem that we seek to rectify. This is why I think that in his speech last Sunday at the Arab Islamic American Summit, President Trump made an extremely important point when he said, quote, "We are not here to lecture. We are not here to tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship." End quote.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is vital we not be seen as tampering with beliefs of other people. This is exactly the misperception that groups like ISIS, al-Qaeda, and others are working to exploit. We cannot afford to even inadvertently engage in actions which end up strengthening the narratives of our enemies. We lose hearts and minds to these vile actors when the idea that the United States and its allies are waging a war against Islam and Muslims gains traction.

Therefore, the conundrum we face is, how do we advance the cause of human rights, especially in the promotion of the religious freedom, without making matters worse? We firmly believe that our most cherished ideals are universal in nature. What we think, however, in the larger scheme of things does not really matter is of little consequence. What really matters is whether or not our target audience embraces the plurality of views as an ethic.

So, how do we go about advancing freedom of belief and not have it seen as a call to blasphemy? It is obvious that we need partners on the ground and those partners need to be credible. But we must be careful that our proximity to them does not undermine their legitimacy and authenticity. We should steer clear of religious discourse, especially on a controversial topic such as Sharia or Islamic law. Instead, we should emphasize the rule of law, which very few people would disagree with.

A key aspect of strengthening the rule of law entails protecting free speech which is where we should expend the bulk of our energies. Radical and extremist ideas continue to percolate in societies because they are not being effectively challenging with opposing perspectives. A key obstacle preventing the emergency of counter-narratives is that they are deemed blasphemous. Not only does it undermine debate, but also endangers the lives of those seeking to intellectually deconstruct religious bigotry.

In such an environment there is very little incentive for open discussion. In fact, it is in the interest of people to avoid candid public debates. As a result, the situation allows religious extremists to have a monopoly over the discourse. It is this monopoly, I will argue, that we need to break.

The way around this is to foster safe spaces for public dialog on contentious issues. Ultimately, the free flow of ideas is the only effective weapon against extremism. Extremist ideas tend to be very simplistic and cannot compete in an arena where rigorous and nuanced discussions are taking place. It is only because of the dearth of such public debates that the extremists have the upper hand in terms of the narrative. By promoting free speech, we can put the extremists on the defensive, a process which when it matures can eventually render their ideas inert.

Such safe spaces enabling free speech, however, can only exist if governments around the world commit to their protection. Now this may seem extremely difficult to realize. States around the world usually employ coercive instruments of power to suppress dissent. However, those same instruments can be utilized to protect free speech if these governments are convinced that it is in their interest to do so.

Considering the growing menace of religious extremism that they are plagued with, that these foreign governments are plagued with, they can be encouraged to actively protect the right of people to debate religious ideas. On their own, however, they are unlikely to embark upon this process. This is where the United States, through skillful diplomacy, will need to steer them towards creating the atmosphere in which debating religious ideas can become a norm.

There are any number of means through which we can incentivize them. Financial assistance can be made contingent upon the efforts of foreign governments towards promoting free speech and protecting it. For far too long, such initiatives have been stymied because of the threat of being perceived as an attempt to imposing Western values.

Certainly this effort, like everything else, entails challenges, but they are not insurmountable. Free speech can be promoted by framing it in the local traditions and cultures of dialog and consultation.

In closing, I would like to recommend that the United States Government should, No. 1, place emphasis on addressing extremism in general and not simply restrict itself to countering its violent forms.

No. 2, promote religious tolerance while steering clear of actions that strengthen the narratives of our enemies.

No. 3, avoid getting entangled in religious debates and, instead, frame the discourse towards rule of law as a human right and a much-needed value.

No. 4, prioritize the protection of free speech as a critical path towards tackling the menace of religious violence.

No. 5, support efforts toward greater public discussion on religious issues in foreign countries.

No. 6, allocate funding towards in-depth research on how advancing the cause of human rights can mechanistically counteract religious extremism.

Finally, craft policies that can help encourage foreign governments to create and protect a safe environment conducive to the free exchange of ideas on religion.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bokhari follows:]

**Freedom of Belief:
Countering Religious Violence
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Testimony of Kamran Bokhari
Senior Fellow, Center for Global Policy
May 24, 2017**

Honorable Co-Chairmen James McGovern and Randy Hultgreen, distinguished representatives of the commission and staff members thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts on how promoting freedom of belief can help the efforts to confront religious violence. I am honored to be speaking with you on the issue of countering violent extremism, which is perhaps the biggest challenge of our age. We are gathered at a time when our enemies have carried out yet another horrific attack – this time deliberately targeting teenage children. Our thoughts and prayers are with our British friends as they move to neutralize this latest attempt to destroy innocent and precious lives.

The United States, in conjunction with its allies around the world, continues to battle the scourge of terrorism. In keeping with the paradigm of countering violent extremism (CVE) we have been focusing our energies on thwarting those who have moved beyond the realm of extremist ideas and have taken to violence. While the priority should be to stop those perpetrating acts of violence it is essential that we concentrate on the wider environment in which they take shape. I am referring to the broader landscape of extremism where a far larger number of people serve as enablers of religiously inspired violence even though they themselves are not the ones carrying out these horrendous acts of violence.

Here is where the line between political extremism and religious intolerance becomes blurry. While extremists do not necessarily go on to become terrorists, terrorism is the violent manifestation of extremism. We cannot succeed in stopping terrorists if we ignore the wider pool of extremists. However, extremism itself emerges out of intolerance for religious differences, which unfortunately has increased greatly in recent decades.

Rolling back this trend through the promotion of religious tolerance, however, is an extremely delicate matter. More often than not our sincere efforts at cultivating diversity of ideas and practices is seen around the world as an attempt at imposing our values on other peoples. Such perceptions end up exacerbating the problems we seek to rectify. This is why I think that in his speech last Sunday at the Arab-Islamic-American Summit in Saudi Arabia, President Trump made an extremely important point when he said: “We are not here to lecture—we are not here to tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship.”

Ladies and gentlemen: it is vital that we not be seen as tampering with the beliefs of other people. This is exactly the misperception that groups like ISIS, al-Qaeda and others are working to exploit. We cannot afford to even inadvertently engage in actions, which end up strengthening the narratives of our enemies. We lose hearts and minds to these vile actors when the idea that the United States and its allies are waging a war against Islam and Muslims gains traction.

Therefore, the conundrum we face is how do we advance the cause of human rights, especially the promotion of religious freedom without making matters worse. We firmly believe that our most cherished ideals are universal in nature. What we think, however, in the larger scheme of things, is of little consequence. Instead, what really matters is whether or not our target audience embraces the plurality of views as an ethic.

So, how do we go about advancing freedom of belief and not have it seen as a call to blasphemy? It is obvious that we need partners on the ground who are seen as credible. But we must be careful that our proximity to them does not undermine their religious legitimacy and authenticity. We should steer clear of religious discourse, especially on a controversial topic such as shariah (Islamic law); instead, we should emphasize the rule of law, which very few people would disagree with.

A key aspect of strengthening the rule of law entails protecting free speech, which is where we should expend the bulk of energies. Radical and extremist ideas continue to percolate in societies because they are not being effectively challenged with opposing perspectives. A key obstacle preventing the emergence of counter-narratives is that they

are deemed blasphemous. Not only does it undermine debate but also endangers the lives of those seeking to intellectually deconstruct religious bigotry.

In such an environment there is very little incentive for open discussion. In fact, it is in the interest of people to avoid candid public debates. As a result, the situation allows religious extremists a monopoly over the discourse. The way around this is to foster safe spaces for public dialogue on contentious issues.

Ultimately the free flow of ideas is the only effective weapon against extremism. Extremist ideas tend to be very simplistic and cannot compete in an arena where rigorous and nuanced discussions are taking place. It is only because of the dearth of such public debates that the extremists have the upper hand in terms of the narrative. By promoting free speech we can put the extremists on the defensive - a process, which when it matures, can eventually render their ideas inert.

Such safe spaces enabling free speech, however, can only exist if governments commit to their protection. Now this may seem extremely difficult to realize. States around the world usually employ coercive instruments of power to suppress dissent. However, those same instruments can be utilized to protect free speech, if they can be convinced that it is in their interest to do so.

Considering the growing menace of religious extremism that they are plagued with these governments can be encouraged to actively protect the right of people to debate religious ideas. On their own, however, they are unlikely to embark upon this process. The United States, through skillful diplomacy, will need to steer them towards creating the atmosphere in which debating religious ideas can become a norm. There are any number of means through which we can incentivize them.

Financial assistance can be made contingent upon the efforts of foreign governments towards promoting free speech. For too long such initiatives have been stymied because of the threat of being perceived as an attempt at imposing western values. Certainly this effort like everything else entails challenges but they are not insurmountable. Free speech can be promoted by framing it in the local traditions and culture of dialogue and consultation.

In closing, I would like to recommend that the U.S. government should:

- **Place emphasis** on addressing extremism in general and not simply restrict itself to countering its violent forms.
- **Promote** religious tolerance while steering clear of actions that strengthen the narratives of the extremists.
- **Avoid** getting entangled in religious debates and instead frame the discourse towards 'rule of law' as a human right and a much-needed value.
- **Prioritize** the protection of free speech as a critical path towards tackling the menace of religious violence.
- **Support** efforts towards greater public discussion on religious issues in foreign countries.
- **Allocate** funding towards in-depth research on how advancing the cause of human rights can help us counteract religious extremism.
- **Craft** policies that can help encourage foreign governments to create and protect a safe environment conducive to the free exchange of ideas on religion.

Thank you.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you, Dr. Bokhari. Thank you all for your testimony.

I apologize, Co-Chair McGovern got called to the House Floor, so he had to leave. So, I apologize for that.

But we are very grateful to have a wonderful colleague and friend, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee from Texas, who is part of our Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. She

is also here just for a few minutes in between markup or committee work that she is doing. So, I am going to yield to her for a statement and any questions she may have.

Ms. Jackson Lee. Mr. Chairman, thank you so very much for your courtesy.

To all of you, thank you again. I can say that I really am a stakeholder in the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission because I worked extensively with the late Tom Lantos and would consider my training on the question of human rights to be extensive through his leadership.

I am delighted to work with you, Chairman, and my good friend, the Co-Chair, Mr. McGovern, for his leadership.

Let me just say that one of our charges today, of course, is to improve the United States religious freedom diplomacy, particularly within the context of enforcing the International Religious Freedom Act. The IRF Act, which passed on a bipartisan basis, mandates the provision of advice and recommendation to us here in Congress, as well as to the administration, on global religious conditions, challenges, and successes.

I introduced, with the former Congressman Pitts, which I am going to ask my two Co-Chairs to join me on reintroducing, and that is H. Res 290. And it calls for the global repeal of blasphemy laws.

Now I want to answer the doctor on his comment about balancing our beliefs and ensuring our respect for other beliefs. And you are absolutely right. The opening provision of this resolution says that, under Article 18 of the International Declaration of Human Rights, it affirms "that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion"; whereas, "this right includes freedom to change one's religion or belief in freedom, either alone or in community with others, in public or private, to manifest one's religious or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

We do know that there are some religious beliefs that many of us would disagree with. And I think the way that you handle that is acknowledge that disagreement and work through for the greater good. For example, some religious beliefs that demean women, I just cannot find comfort in and would be concerned about that as religious freedom. But blasphemy, of course, sometimes results in the loss of life.

So, Doctor, help me. Comment on my balance in this legislation which I am going to be working on to introduce and to secure my chairmen's support. Is that a good place? Blasphemy, of course, as you well know, is threatening and may be deadly.

And as I do that, I apologize, there may be a vote in committee. So, I yield to you, and after that, I will be yielding back. I may be stepping back as you answer, but I will have the record. Thank you.

Mr. BOKHARI. Thank you, Representative Lee.

I agree, it is difficult to balance, but I will say that, when it comes to blasphemy, I think that we should not tolerate that because it is directly linked to violence. Because if you look at

how blasphemy translates into action in these countries, if someone is condemned as a blasphemer, either authorities will go and apply the law, if you will, or people will take matters into their own hands.

The former deceased Governor of the Province of Punjab in Pakistan, Salmaan Taseer, was gunned down by his own bodyguard who had sworn to protect him. So, I think that blasphemy is something that we shouldn't tolerate and we should take a very hard line on.

There are other issues. You know, we can discuss them in detail. But where we can concede, we can go ahead and say, all right, you know, maybe there is a give-and-take. But, when an idea is promoting directly or fostering violence, we should not tolerate that at all and we should make it clear to these governments that there are consequences of pursuing that kind of policy.

I understand and I am empathetic that many governments, their hands are tied. Either they can't get parliament to vote, as is the case in Pakistan, to repeal the blasphemy laws, or in the case of Saudi Arabia where the Saudi monarchy is so indebted to the religious establishment that they don't have the political will to actually roll that back. But I think that we have come to a point in time, given the scale of violence, that we really need to put our foot down.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thanks.

I also had questions about the blasphemy laws and what the U.S. policy, what our response ought to be. So, I would ask maybe if either of the other two witnesses had any thoughts on that as well.

Mr. GEORGE. Yes, I agree with Dr. --

Mr. HULTGREN. If you could, just make sure your microphone is on.

Mr. GEORGE. Yes. I agree with Dr. Bokhari's comments on blasphemy laws. Let me say this, though: I don't think we want to and want to be perceived as attacking the concept of blasphemy. That has a place, but that place is not in the civil and criminal law of the state. The place for blasphemy law is within the religious community, and we shouldn't communicate -- it would be striking the wrong balance if we communicated the idea that we are against blasphemy laws in principle.

The other thing I would say is that, if you asked me to draft a blasphemy law for the state that somehow threaded the needle and was consistent with religious freedom on its face, I could probably do that, but I wouldn't have the slightest doubt that that law would be abused immediately, and not only by governments, but it would become the occasion for private violence against dissenting people and religious minorities, which is why I think we are entirely justified, as a matter of our own government's policy, of opposing blasphemy laws where those are criminal laws of the state.

Mr. COOPERMAN. I would like to just widen slightly away from just the concept of blasphemy to the broader concept of efforts to try to reduce religious violence and increase religious freedom. And I would note that these efforts are actually very widespread. And I

enjoyed Professor George's dichotomy or categorization of governments that try to or that embody religious extremism, those that enable or tolerate it and those that fight it. I would just note that in the real world we also have some that do all of those things at once, and governments are not any more consistent in some ways than we, as individuals, are. And we all know that we are inconsistent.

So, since 2011, the Pew Research Center has been trying to track efforts to, let's say, ameliorate or address restrictions on religion. We do this in the same kind of impartial, non-normative way that we track the actual restrictions.

And I will just note a couple of things. The number of countries that have various kinds of interfaith dialogs has actually been declining. So, back in 2011, we had 110 countries that had officially-sponsored interreligious or interfaith dialogs. Today we have 55 countries in which governments officially promote interreligious dialogs.

On the other hand, some efforts to address religious discrimination have increased. Nigeria was mentioned a couple of times. And I will note, for example, that in 2015 the Governor of Kaduna State created a commission to try to address religiously-motivated violence. Now we don't have a method to measure the efficacy of these efforts, but I do want to point out that these efforts are going on, and we have some numbers and some categorization of them, if that is ever useful to you.

Thank you.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you.

We have got about 15 more minutes. I want to make sure that you all are okay for that period of time. We have gone over a little bit. Is that okay? I am going to have some questions for each of you and, then, we will wrap up in about 15 minutes, if that is all right.

I am going to start, Mr. Cooperman, again, follow up with you a little bit, and you have touched on this I think briefly, but just maybe wanted to go a little bit deeper.

You talked about and concluded that both governments' restrictions on religious groups and social hostilities involving religion have increased. I just wonder from the research if you can identify any broad factors across regions and countries that may have led to this increase, maybe some of the key drivers that have led to that increase. And then, on the other side you mentioned maybe a few little positive things out there. Was it Nigeria, I think, that you mentioned and the commission there? Any other bright spots, I guess, and anything that we could look to for encouragement?

Mr. COOPERMAN. Yes. The question of causes is really a difficult one, and it is really difficult -- again, this is a social science effort, and causality is really one of the most difficult issues in social science. So, we can see some correlations or connections, but we are not always able to talk about causes.

So, one of the things that is interesting, a number of folks had mentioned one of our better known numbers, which today is that more than three-quarters of the world's population

lives in countries with either high or very high restrictions on religion. What is sometimes not mentioned, but we do say it repeatedly, and I will say it now, is that, actually, a very large, a larger number of countries have low or moderate government restrictions on religion or social hostilities involving religion.

It is just that some of the biggest countries, the most populous countries in the world, are also the ones with the highest levels of religious restriction. So, places like China, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and so on, are places that are very high.

And one of the questions one might ask is whether countries that are larger and have greater difficulty governing themselves as a result of their large and diverse populations are, then, more likely to impose various kinds of government restrictions and whether those government restrictions might lead to more social hostilities. I would pose that as a question. I do not have a position on that, and I don't think our data can address that.

One other quick point that I will make is we are often asked whether it is the case that there is some sort of tipping point and the size of a religious minority is important, and whether it is clear that places that have larger religious groups or more religious groups have more restrictions on religion or more social hostilities.

And I will say, interestingly, if there is such a pattern, I have not been able, we, my colleagues and I, have not been able to detect it in a clear way. I will you know, you probably have heard this phrase, anti-Semitism without Jews. Well, it exists and there are places in the world where there are very few Jews, and yet, there is a lot of anti-Semitism. There are also places in the world where Christians and Muslims live close together in large numbers, and there are a lot of restrictions and a lot of hostilities. Nigeria would be an example of that.

I don't think there is a clear moment at which the size of a religious group, for example, or the size of a minority is clearly correlated with how much restrictions or how much hostilities that minority faces.

Thank you.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thanks.

I would be interested in getting your thoughts on that. I am going to have it a little bit more targeted, if I may, Professor George.

You have written about how religious violence is motivated by ideology, by extremist world views that justify mass violence in the name of making a more perfect world. I wondered how religious freedom policies undermine these ideologies and even prevent groups from forcing their ideologies on others. And then, also, maybe I would look to you of things that you have seen in your work of trends or factors that we should be aware of.

Mr. GEORGE. Well, once again here, I want to take the opportunity to put some emphasis on civil society because Congress is a governmental entity, because you serve as a governmental agency, because we are concerned about policy, because of the IRFA Act, we're

here. We tend to focus on what the government can do. But, again, there are limits to what the government can do.

If we are really going to promote religious freedom for its own sake and for its benefits as far as tamping-down violence and extremism, we really need people in civil society taking the lead. And here, I want to put the emphasis on the need for religious leaders.

Nothing sends as powerful a message to people who are tempted to demonize each other than to see their leaders clasping hands or working arm-in-arm in some cause where there are shared values. People don't realize across the religious how much they actually share. And when the leaders will exemplify that by reaching out to others, that can only have a powerful, good effect, both for people's freedom and for peace.

Now, Chairman Hultgren, you ask about bright spots. And right on that note about civil society, there is an important that Father Reese was able to mention, but only briefly. So, let me put some emphasis on that, the Marrakesh Declaration, where Muslim leaders from across Muslims traditions gathered to hammer out some principles for the fair treatment of non-Muslim in Muslim majority countries. That was a bold and brave, a courageous thing for them to do, and they deserve praise and support.

I mean, largely, that was met with silence here in the U.S. because we didn't take note of it. The media didn't cover it. Our political leaders didn't even know that it happened. Many of our religious leaders didn't know that it happened.

But I applaud the leadership of people like Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah and Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, who made that happen. And I think that is an important step. If you ask me what in the past year the best thing to happen for religious liberty was, it was that, and I would like to see more of it. And to see more of it, I think we need to encourage it.

Mr. HULTGREN. That's great.

I would ask, as you see those types of things, and if we are not responding, to let us know.

Mr. GEORGE. Yes.

Mr. HULTGREN. I think there are many of us, both sides of the aisle, both sides of the Capitol, that would love to celebrate those types of things. So, yes.

I will just stick with you, again, Professor George, if I may. And tapping back in with what my co-chairman started with of kind of this frustration where a lot of the violators of religious freedom in the USCIRF and the Pew research as well have been designated for such a long period of time of offenders. It feels like the story is just over and over and over again. It just doesn't change.

Some suggest that the United States needs to rethink the means through which it seeks to promote religious freedom and counter religious violence throughout the world. I wonder, do

you agree with that? Are there things we can do differently to have some breakthrough here and, if so, what changes would you recommend?

Mr. GEORGE. I think the updating of the Act was important and the moves that were made there are valuable ones, permitting USCIRF to designate entities and not simply countries of a particular concern.

When I was appearing in my official role before you over the past few years as Chairman of the Commission myself, I made the point that, while I do not oppose waivers for countries of particular concern in principle, I am opposed to waivers being unconditional and for unlimited periods of time. So, if I were in a position to wave a magic wand to get some reforms to the Act, I would stress the need for conditionality on those waivers and for limits.

What has happened in certain cases, of course, trade considerations, geostrategic concerns, other admittedly important matters have led to what is basically a giving away with the left hand what the right hand has taken. We designate a country of political, a country as a country of particular concern because of its grotesque violations of religious freedom, but, then, we have a waiver in place that basically negates it. So, I think that is an area that I would encourage you to look at, you and your colleagues in Congress, Chairman Hultgren, to look at.

Now I think this can work. We have some experience, for example, with Vietnam from about 10 years ago or 12 years ago. Vietnam was designated a CPC. Vietnam didn't want to be - Father Tom was right; they care about their relationship with us -- so, they didn't want to be designated as a CPC. They wanted to be removed from the list.

They implemented some genuine reforms. Our country responded to those reforms by removing them from the list, but we removed them prematurely and they backslipped right back into the old practices. And then, it was a long time before we could get them designated again and start to put some pressure on them.

So, I think we need to be careful when it comes to removing countries from lists. We need to encourage, but not let people off the hook too easily.

Mr. HULTGREN. Yes, that is good.

Dr. Bokhari, if I could shift to you for a question or two, programs aimed at countering violent extremism have so far had mixed results, as we have talked about. You spoke about how CVE programs should do more to support freedom of speech and rule of law. Are there ways that the language of religious freedom can better be incorporated into CVE programs and policies for this purpose?

Mr. BOKHARI. Mr. Chairman, I think it can be done. One of the things that we need to get better at is to appear as not coming with a foreign solution. And that foreign solution just sort of, you know, throws everybody off. I think that what needs to be done, as I mentioned in my testimony, that we don't need to look far. I mean, there are traditions within these countries, whether they are customs, local customs, or whether they are religious-based, where we can get them to sign onto the value and ethic of religious freedom. It is not going to be easy. You can't

do that in Saudi Arabia and hope that they will allow for religious freedom. Even many Sunni sects have limited freedoms, even though they are fellow Sunnis.

So, it is on a case-by-case basis, but I think that there needs to be work done to explore those local conditions that we can latch onto and, then, make our recommendations and, then, pursue our policies.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thank you.

Also, Dr. Bokhari, you mentioned how solutions to religious extremism really must come from within the faith. Specifically, I think you were talking about Islam. Do you see any concrete ways that people from different faiths can dialog about their different beliefs and possibly increase moderation in the way that challenges radical violent ideas and, if so, are there ways the U.S. Government maybe can support this more effectively?

Mr. BOKHARI. I have come across many such programs. I am part of one with the Shalom Hartman Institute in Israel, where we are having a dialog between American Muslims and Jews in the United States and Israel as well. So, there are good signs, encouraging signs.

But, again, you know, it is easy for us to see this take place in a Western context. In the context inside Muslim majority countries it is a completely different ball game. And again, it is going to be a case-by-case basis. Even within a country, there will be areas where you will be able to find reception. Minority communities amongst Muslims tend to be more receptive; whereas, the Sunni majority tends to be less. And then, there is gradation within the Sunni communities.

So, I think that there are ways in which that interfaith dialog can help, but I think that what the United States Government needs to do -- and this is going to be tricky because we don't want it to look like we are trying to sort of tamper with religion. I mean, that creates a very poisonous atmosphere. Already groups like ISIS are ready to pounce upon that and say, "Look, we told you so."

So, it is going to be very tricky, but I still think that the United States Government, working with civil society groups, as Professor George mentioned, can make a difference.

Mr. HULTGREN. Great.

Well, again, we just have maybe a couple of minutes left. But I want to thank you all so much for what you have done, your involvement here.

I would close with just one last question, if I may. If you need to go, I totally understand. But, with so many domestic and international concerns dominating the news today and other foreign policy concerns oftentimes taking precedence, at least on the front pages, over religious freedom and other human rights, I wonder if you would give a suggestion or two to myself and other Members of Congress of maybe one or two best ways for us to promote freedom of religion or belief in our roles as a Member of Congress.

Mr. GEORGE. One thing I would like to see every Member of Congress do is adopt a prisoner of conscience. Many of you have done that, and I applaud you --

Mr. HULTGREN. Yes, it has impacted me.

Mr. GEORGE. Yes. So, let's do that. Let's be more outspoken. Members of Congress can do a lot of good, I think, with the bully pulpit.

Those on the Republican side, if I may say, bring some pressure on the administration. You know, there are many different concerns, so there are going to be many different interests pressing on any administration. Let's make sure that the interest of religious freedom gets heard. And obviously, people in the political party of the President can do that more effectively than those in the other party.

So, those are some concrete things that I think will make a difference.

Mr. HULTGREN. Great. It is helpful. Thank you.

Any other thoughts?

Mr. BOKHARI. Yes. We -- and you mentioned this earlier -- that we tend to, and Professor George mentioned the waivers -- we tend to make exceptions and compromise on our values of human rights and religious freedoms. I think it is high time we try to roll back on that.

Why? Because now religious freedom is not just some ideal, some lofty goal that we will achieve in some future moment in time. This is now core national security, and I think that

looking at national security from one lens and saying, "Okay, you know what? We need to make an exception," I think that paradigm needs to be revisited and, in my opinion, changed.

Mr. HULTGREN. Thanks. The last word?

Thank you all so much. I appreciate you being here. And obviously, all the testimony will be incorporated in the record. And again, we are grateful for your involvement today. Thank you all for being here. We will adjourn.

[Whereupon, at 3:39 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing
Freedom of Belief: Countering Religious Violence

May 24, 2017

1:30 – 3:00 PM

2255 Rayburn House Office Building

Please join the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for a **hearing** on United States' policies on International Religious Freedom as a means for countering religious violence.

Global restrictions on freedom of belief, including both government repression and hostile acts from individuals and groups in society, are on the rise. A recent Pew Research Center report found that 40% of countries in 2015 have high or very high levels of restrictions, as compared to 34% of countries in 2014.

Religious groups around the globe are persecuted for their faith, a catalyst that can ignite greater societal unrest. U.S. policies seek to mitigate the rise of religious extremism and violence by promoting laws and social norms that bolster freedom of belief and release a pressure valve on social grievances.

Why are global restrictions on religion increasing, and how can U.S. international religious freedom policies prevent and counter religious violence? Are current U.S. policies on religious freedom achieving their desired outcomes? Witnesses will present testimony informed by their work on freedom of belief, and will discuss which policies are effective and which need to be reevaluated.

Panel I

- **Rev. Thomas Reese**, Chair, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

Panel II

- **Alan Cooperman**, Director of Religion Research, The Pew Research Center

- **Robert George**, Professor of Jurisprudence, Princeton University
- **Dr. Kamran Bokhari**, Senior Analyst, Center for Global Policy

This hearing is open to Members of Congress, congressional staff, the interested public, and the media. The hearing will be livestreamed via YouTube on the Commission website, <https://humanrightscommission.house.gov/>. For any questions, please contact Jamie Staley (for Mr. Hultgren) at (202-226-1516) or Jamie.Staley@mail.house.gov or Kimberly Stanton (for Mr. McGovern) at 202-226-6379 or Kimberly.Stanton@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

Randy Hultgren, M.C.
Co-Chair, TLHRC

James P. McGovern, M.C.
Co-Chair, TLHRC