



Testimony for the Record
Submitted by Sarah Cook, Senior Research Analyst for East Asia
to the
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
“Tibet: Freedom of Religion”

Co-Chairman Hultgren, Co-Chairman McGovern, distinguished members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record for your hearing on Tibet: Freedom of Religion.

Freedom House earlier this year released a report titled [*The Battle for China’s Spirit: Religious Revival, Repression, and Resistance under Xi Jinping*](#). Attached is the analysis from that report on conditions for [Tibetan Buddhists](#) in China.

I would like to highlight several concrete actions ([among many](#)) that Commission members might take to support religious freedom in Tibet:

- **Champion the imposition of entry and property sanctions on officials who have committed or been complicit in the abuse, torture, or persecution of religious believers.** Penalizing perpetrators through the blocking of visas and freezing of foreign-based assets is an effective way to ensure that these individuals face some measure of justice and to deter future abusers. This is especially important in countries like China and regions like Tibet, where impunity for severe violations is endemic. Under the [*International Religious Freedom Act*](#) (IRFA), for example, foreign government officials who have engaged in “particularly severe violations of religious freedom” and their spouses and children can be denied entry to the United States.
- **Ensure full and robust implementation of the [*Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act*](#)** signed into law in December 2016, which among many other mechanisms, expanded the IRFA to include additional Congressional reporting requirements which were initially due no later than June 24, 2017, and every 180 days thereafter.
- **Retain China’s designation as a country of particular concern (CPC) under the [*International Religious Freedom Act*](#)** and impose additional penalties available under the law. China has been designated as a CPC—a country which “engages in or tolerates systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom.”

- **Highlight the cases of specific individuals imprisoned or persecuted for their faith.** Former political prisoners have consistently reported that when foreign officials raised their cases, their treatment in prison improved; in some instances they were even released after such interventions. Members of Congress should deliver floor speeches, issue press releases, and send open letters to Chinese officials about victims of religious persecution in China, including in Tibet, and adopt prisoners through the Lantos Commission's [Defending Freedoms Project](#).
- **Urge both state and local governments to promptly delay or cancel visits or exchanges to China,** in response to egregious incidents of religious persecution. This should include provinces like Sichuan and Qinghai, which are home to Tibetan prefectures and have been imposing increasing constraints on the practice of Tibetan Buddhism in recent years.
- **Support adequate and robust funding** for democracy, rights, and governance programming.

I commend the Lantos Commission for drawing attention to the ongoing persecution of Tibetan Buddhists and championing religious freedom in China.