



## U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

### Advancing Religious Freedom Within the U.S.-India Bilateral Relationship

#### Panel I



**Dr Fernand de Varennes** is, since 2017, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. As part of his mandate, he is the reference point at the United Nations on the protection of the human rights of national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. He is also Adjunct and Visiting Professor at the National University of Ireland-Galway (Ireland) and Visiting Professor at the Université catholique de Lyon (France) and at the European Regional MA in Democracy and Human Rights in SEE, Global Campus South-East Europe, University of Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina). He completed his law degrees in Canada (LLB, Moncton), the United Kingdom (LLM, London School of Economics and

Political Science), and the Netherlands (Doctorate in Law, Maastricht). The author of some 300 publications in more than 30 languages, he is renowned globally as a leading expert on the human rights of minorities and has been awarded a number of accolades including the 2021 Prize of the Federalist Union of European Nationalities, the 2004 Linguapax Award (Barcelona, Spain), the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland, and the Tip O'Neill Peace Fellowship (Northern Ireland, UK).

#### Panel II



**Tariq Ahmad** is the Foreign Law Specialist for the Law Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. He has provided legal research reports and memos for congressional staff and committees, executive branch agencies, the federal judiciary, and the general public since joining the Law Library of Congress in 2010. His research work covers mostly South Asian jurisdictions, including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. He takes a particular research interest in religion and law issues in South Asia and has drafted reports on the validity of Islamic and Hindu marriages in Pakistan and India, and on blasphemy and anti-conversion laws in the region. Mr. Ahmad holds an LLM degree in International Law from American University's Washington College of Law and an LLB from University College London. He also holds a BA in Political

Science from Ohio State University.



**Sarah Yager** is the Washington Director at Human Rights Watch, and leads the organization's engagement with the United States government on global human rights issues, with a particular focus on national security and foreign policy. Prior to joining Human Rights Watch, she was the first senior advisor on human rights in the Chairman's Office at The Joint Staff of the U.S. Department of Defense and, prior, served as deputy chief of staff for policy at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations under Ambassador Samantha Power. For nearly a decade Ms. Yager was executive director of Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), leading efforts to advise warring parties on civilian protection and responsible use of force. In that role, she worked extensively with the U.S. military and its allies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, CAR, Burma, and elsewhere. Ms. Yager was named in Top 100 Most Influential People in Armed Violence Reduction by Action on Armed Violence and received the Truman National Security Project's award for Extraordinary Impact. She was a senior fellow on security issues at Open Society Foundations and the U.S. Institute of Peace. Sarah holds degrees from Georgetown and Columbia Universities, is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, a senior fellow at New America, a board director at Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and a professor of practice at Arizona State University.



**Sunita Viswanath** is the Executive Director of Hindus for Human Rights. She has worked for over 30 years in women's rights and human rights organizations. Ms. Viswanath co-founded Hindus for Human Rights in June 2019, and also serves as a board member. In 2001, she co-founded the international women's human rights organization, Women for Afghan Women (WAW), and served as Board Chair of WAW until January 2022. She has been an advisory board member to Unfreeze Afghanistan since its inception in September 2021, and cofounded Abaad: Afghan Women Forward in August 2022. Ms. Viswanath has edited "Women for Afghan Women: Shattering Myths and Claiming the Future", a book of essays. For her work with WAW, she was awarded the Feminist Majority Foundation's Global Women's Rights Award in 2011. Ms. Viswanath co-founded Sadhana in 2011 in order to mobilize Hindu Americans to connect their faith to social justice and human rights, and serves on Sadhana's Executive Board. She was honored by President Obama at the White House in 2015 as a "Champion of Change" for her work with Sadhana. In 2021, she was recognized by Center for American Progress as one of 21 "faith leaders to watch." She is an advisory board member of Population Media Center, which uses entertainment-education and mass media to promote social and cultural change. Ms. Viswanath is a board member of Dalit Solidarity Forum. She is one of five Hindus appointed to NYC Mayor-Elect Eric Adams' Faith Transition Team; and the only Hindu in the December 2021 Marquis Who's Who list of faith-based influencers.



**Irfan Nooruddin** is the Hamad bin Khalifa Professor of Indian Politics in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. His books are *The Everyday Crusade: Christian Nationalism in American Politics* (Cambridge, 2022), *Elections in Hard Times: Building Stronger Democracies in the 21st Century* (Cambridge, 2016) and *Coalition Politics and Economic Development: Credibility and the Strength of Weak Governments* (Cambridge, 2011). Dr. Nooruddin studies comparative economic development and policymaking, democratization and democratic institutions, and international institutions. He has been a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., and was formerly the Senior Director for the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center. He has a PhD from the University of Michigan and BA from the Ohio Wesleyan University. He was born and raised in Bombay, India.