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WASHINGTON, D.C. – As tensions continue to rise in China's western province of Xinjiang, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) urges the Obama Administration to raise prominently the repression of Uighur Muslims in future discussions with Chinese officials and to consider targeting officials or security agencies in Xinjiang with sanctions if conditions there do not improve. While Uighur issues were raised during the recent U.S.-China Strategic Dialogue, China's vice foreign minister Wang Guangya thanked the United States for taking a "moderate" line on Xinjiang and for acknowledging that ethnic violence there was an "internal matter."

"Repression of peaceful Uighur Muslim religious and cultural activity is an international concern, not an internal matter," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. "Beijing cannot continue to use the boot to quash peaceful Uighur ethnic and religious identity; such tactics are the cause of resentment and ethnic tension, not the answer. During the holy month of Ramadan, we hope that Beijing will consider lifting all restrictions on peaceful Muslim religious practice as a sign of its intent to seriously address long-standing Uighur concerns. We urge the Obama Administration to raise these issues at the highest level."

Last week, demonstrations by Han Chinese residents for greater security led to the sacking of several local communist party officials. Uighur Muslims continue to face severe repression, arrests, and reprisals after July's ethnic violence. Severe restrictions on peaceful religious practice also continue, including wide-ranging limits on the celebration of Ramadan and other religious activity, particularly of minors.

Religious freedom restrictions are an ongoing source of resentment for Uighurs. Beijing continues to view peaceful Muslim religious activity with suspicion and as a source of "extremism and separatism."

In [June 2009 testimony](#) before the House Foreign Affairs committee, USCIRF outlined severe abuses of religious freedom against Uighur Muslims. Teachers, professors, university students, and other government employees are prohibited from observing Ramadan and engaging in daily religious activities such as reciting prayers, distributing religious materials, and wearing head coverings; they are reportedly subject to fines if they attempt to do so. Uighur Muslim clerics and students have been detained for various "illegal" religious activities, "illegal religious centers" have been closed, and police continue to confiscate large quantities of "illegal religious publications."

"In his remarks at the opening of the U.S.-China Strategic Dialogue, President Obama spoke eloquently about why religious freedom is an American interest, but he needs to make a more

persuasive case about why religious freedom is in China's interest as well as an interest of the international community," said Mr. Leo. "He can make this case boldly during a promised visit to China before the end of the year."

Through religious practice has greatly expanded in China over the past decade, religious freedom abuses continue, including arrests, detentions, mistreatment, fines, confiscation of property and other restrictions. Along with Uighur Muslims, groups facing the most severe persecution include Tibetan Buddhists, unregistered Protestants and Catholics, and folk religionists and spiritual movements, such as the Falun Gong.

[USCIRF's 2009 Annual Report](#) has more information and recommendations for the U.S. government regarding religious freedom protection and promotion in China.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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