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WASHINGTON, D.C. –The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a federal government commission that monitors global religious freedom, today released its 2012 Annual Report and recommended that the Secretary of State name the following nations “countries of particular concern” or CPCs: Burma, China, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.* The report can be found at: <http://www.uscirf.gov/reports-and-briefs/annual-report/3706-2012-annual-report.html>

“It’s no coincidence that many of the nations we recommend to be designated as CPCs are among the most dangerous and destabilizing places on earth,” said USCIRF Chair [Leonard Leo](#) “Nations that trample upon basic rights, including freedom of religion, provide fertile ground for poverty and insecurity, war and terror, and violent, radical movements and activities.”

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requires that the United States designate annually as CPCs countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief. IRFA also tasked USCIRF with assessing conditions in these and other nations and providing policy prescriptions for ways the U.S. government can constructively engage.

“In addition, some of the countries we recommend for CPC designation maintain intricate webs of discriminatory rules, requirements and edicts that can impose tremendous burdens for members of religious minority communities, making it difficult for them to function and grow from one generation to the next, potentially threatening their existence,” added Leo.

In Egypt, the transitional government has failed to protect religious minorities, especially Coptic Christians, from violent attacks at a time when minority communities have been increasingly vulnerable.

“These governments too often stand idly by in the face of violent attacks against religious minorities and dissenting members of majority faiths,” says Leo. “Inseparable from freedom of expression and association, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief often is the first human right threatened by tyranny.”

Iran and China remain gross abusers of human rights and among the world's worst religious freedom violators. Iran continues to detain, torture, and execute its citizens, and in the past year, Baha'is, Christians, and Sufi Muslims have been subjected to intensified attacks, harassment, detention, and imprisonment.

In China -- the only CPC designee with a seat on the United Nations Security Council --

conditions for Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims are the worst in decades and in the past year, Beijing has stepped up its crackdown on Protestants and Catholics. Dozens of unregistered Catholic clergy, for example, remain in detention or have disappeared.

USCIRF's Annual Report highlights the mistreatment of Ahmadis, Hindus and Christians in Pakistan, Buddhists in Vietnam and China, and Baha'is in Iran and Egypt. The report repeatedly notes the brutal assaults endured by Christians seeking to practice their faith peacefully. Muslims, too, suffer in Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan, and non-Muslim nations like Russia and Burma. The Annual Report also calls attention to the promotion of anti-Semitic bigotry in countries as diverse as Saudi Arabia and Venezuela.

USCIRF also announced that the following countries are on its 2012 Watch List: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Laos, Russia, Somalia, and Venezuela. While not rising to the statutory level set forth in the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requiring CPC designation, Watch List countries require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of religious freedom violations these governments have engaged in or tolerated.

Due to the provisions of P.L. 112-75, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Reform and Reauthorization Act of 2011, USCIRF this year felt compelled to accelerate and compress its process of preparing its Annual Report. The new law that reauthorized the Commission calls for five of the nine Commissioners to terminate their service on March 21, 2012, leaving the possibility of no quorum after that date. Faced with the strong possibility of a substantially delayed Annual Report or none at all, the Commission opted to issue the Annual Report in March rather than just prior to May 1. With a marked deterioration of conditions for religious freedom around the world, the Commission believes it would have been unsatisfactory to countenance a significant delay, or to skip a report for 2012 altogether. Too much is at stake for international religious freedom.

*Four Commissioners dissented from the recommendation that Turkey be designated a CPC. Their views are contained in the Annual Report.

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