Speaking for all of my USCIRF colleagues, I am delighted to join members of Congress, His Holiness, and our gracious Ahmadiyya hosts here in our nation's capital.

Soon you will hear His Holiness speak about his vision of peace and freedom among peoples and nations. This has been the Ahmadiyya message since its founding in 1889, well over a century ago.

Indeed, when it comes to freedom of religion, there is unmistakable evidence that without freedom, there can be no peace. Nations which fail to protect the right to religious freedom fail to achieve peace within their own borders. All too often, they experience hatred and strife, violence and instability.

In many of these countries, people have almost no idea what it's like to feel safe, secure, and truly free to live out their beliefs in peace as their conscience leads.

Today, nearly 70% of the world's people live in such nations. This includes millions of members of the Ahmadiyya community.

Since 1974, Pakistan's constitution has labeled all Ahmadiyya "non-Muslims." For more than a quarter century, Pakistan's government has barred the community from calling its own worship centers "mosques," from publicly uttering the traditional Islamic greeting or quoting from the Qur'an, and from displaying Islam's basic affirmation.

Throughout Pakistan, Ahmadiyya are prohibited from sharing their faith with others or publishing or disseminating their own material. They are restricted from building houses of worship and holding public gatherings. And since they must register as non-Muslims to vote, Ahmadiyya who insist they are Muslims are effectively disenfranchised.

Coupled with Pakistan's blasphemy laws which affect every faith community, these laws have helped foster a climate of violence against Ahmadiyya members. The terrible attack on Lahore mosques in May of 2010 was but one example.

But Pakistan isn't the only country which violates the freedom of religion for Ahmadiyya.

In Indonesia, since June 2008, the government has seriously limited Ahmadiyya activity to private worship and prohibited members from telling others about their faith. Since that time, at least 50 Ahmadiyya mosques have been vandalized and 36 mosques and meeting places shut down. In parts of East and West Java and elsewhere, extremists pressure local officials to close places of worship or ban Ahmadiyya activity altogether.

In Saudi Arabia, Ahmadiyya members have been deported for their beliefs. In Egypt, they have been charged under its blasphemy laws. In 2010, USCIRF's intervention helped a number of members leave Egypt for safety abroad.

Now let's be clear. The message of the Ahmadiyya community is a positive call for world harmony and liberty. It points beyond today's sufferings to tomorrow's hopes and dreams.

Nonetheless, if we are to stand for these principles, we who believe in peace and freedom dare not be silent. We must take a stand for those who face persecution, wherever and whenever it occurs.

So what can we do?

First, we must realize that the same societies that violate the religious freedom of Ahmadiyya also abuse the rights of others. As USCIRF has documented, where Ahmadiyya suffer, Hindus and Christians, Sikhs and Baha'is, Shia and other Muslims, often are persecuted as well.

Second, in order to protect the rights of all, including the Ahmadiyya, and foster peaceful, stable societies, we who are in Washington must make religious freedom a truly compelling foreign policy priority, woven into every aspect of our relationships with other countries.

Finally, the U.S. government should specifically confront governments which target the Ahmadiyya. It should urge Pakistan to amend its constitution and rescind all anti-Ahmadiyya laws. It should urge Indonesia to overturn its 2008 decree and all provincial bans against Ahmadiyya religious practice. It should press both governments to investigate acts of violence thoroughly and prosecute perpetrators vigorously. And until Pakistan proves itself to be serious about reform, USCIRF believes that it qualifies as a “country of particular concern.”

Speaking for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, let me conclude by saying that we will continue to stand for the right of people everywhere to think as they please, believe or not believe as they wish, peacefully practice their beliefs, and express them publicly without fear or intimidation. We are proud to stand with the Ahmadiyya community and proclaim together that these and other freedoms are the birthright of humanity.

Thank you.