

2015 ANNUAL REPORT OVERVIEW

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) as an entity separate and distinct from the State Department, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. government advisory body that monitors religious freedom worldwide and makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. USCIRF bases these recommendations on its statutory mandate and the standards in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international documents. The 2015 Annual Report represents the culmination of a year's work by Commissioners and professional staff to document abuses on the ground and make independent policy recommendations to the U.S. government.

The 2015 Annual Report covers the period from January 31, 2014 through January 31, 2015, although in some cases significant events that occurred after the reporting period are mentioned. The Annual Report addresses 33 countries around the world and is divided into four sections.

The first section focuses on the U.S. government's implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act. It provides recommendations for specific actions that the Administration can take to bolster current efforts to advance freedom of religion or belief abroad. It also recommends legislative activity by Congress to provide additional tools to equip U.S. diplomats to better advocate for religious freedom.

The second section highlights countries that USCIRF concludes meet IRFA's standard for "countries of particular concern," or CPCs, and recommends for designation as such. IRFA requires the U.S. government to designate as a CPC any country whose government engages in or tolerates particularly severe violations of religious freedom that are systematic, ongoing and egregious. In its most recent designations in July 2014, the State Department designated nine countries as CPCs. In 2015, USCIRF has concluded that 17 countries meet this standard.

In 2015, USCIRF recommends that the Secretary of State re-designate the following nine countries as CPCs: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. USCIRF also finds that eight other countries meet the CPC standard and should be so designated: Central African Republic, Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria, Tajikistan, and Vietnam.

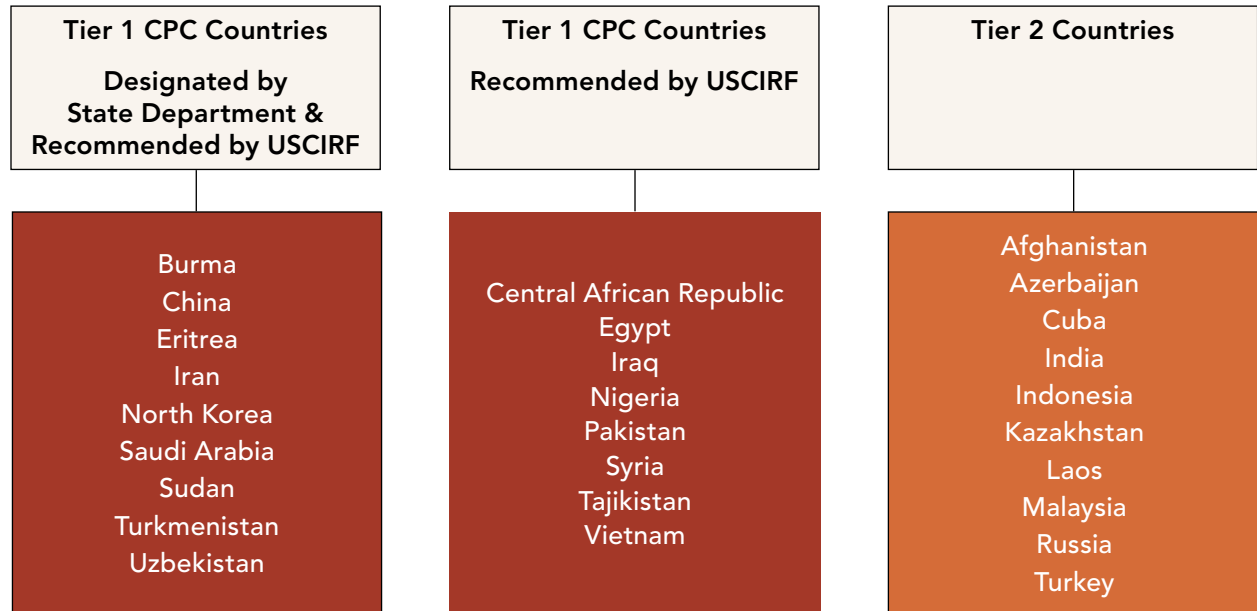
The 2015 Annual Report recognizes that non-state actors, such as transnational or local organizations, are some of the most egregious violators of religious freedom. For example, in the Central African Republic and areas of Iraq and Syria, the governments are either non-existent or incapable of addressing violations committed by non-state actors. USCIRF has concluded that the CPC classification should be expanded to allow for the designation of countries such as these, where particularly severe violations of religious freedom are occurring but a government does not exist or does not control its territory. Accordingly, USCIRF's CPC recommendations reflect that approach.

The third section highlights countries USCIRF categorized as Tier 2, which includes countries where the violations engaged in or tolerated by the government are serious and are characterized by at least one of the elements of the "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" standard, but do not fully meet the CPC standard.

In 2015, USCIRF places the following ten countries on Tier 2: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malaysia, Russia, and Turkey.

Lastly, there are brief descriptions of other countries that USCIRF monitored during the year: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan, and Sri Lanka.

USCIRF TIER 1 & TIER 2 COUNTRIES



IRFA IMPLEMENTATION

IRFA's History

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 was a landmark piece of legislation, seeking to make religious freedom an important priority in U.S. foreign policy. Congress passed the Act unanimously in October 1998 and it was signed into law by President Bill Clinton that same month. Members of Congress believed that this core human right was being ignored and that a greater emphasis would make for smarter diplomacy and reflect the unique role that religious freedom played in the formation of the United States. Rather than creating a hierarchy of rights as some critics have argued, IRFA established parity – it ensured religious freedom would be considered by U.S. policymakers alongside the other pressing issues of the day, and not be forgotten or ignored.

To accomplish this, the Act did several things. First, it created special mechanisms inside and outside the executive branch. Inside the executive branch, the law created the position of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom (a political appointee nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate), to head an Office of International Religious Freedom at the State Department (the IRF Office). It also urged the appointment of a Special Adviser for this issue on the

recommendations for U.S. policy to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

Second, IRFA required monitoring and reporting. It mandated that the State Department prepare an annual report on religious freedom conditions in each foreign country (the IRF Report), in addition to the Department's annual human rights report. The law also required the State Department to maintain a religious freedom Internet site, as well as lists of religious prisoners in foreign countries. And it required that USCIRF issue its own annual report setting forth its findings on the worst violators of religious freedom and providing independent recommendations for U.S. policy.

Third, IRFA established consequences for the worst violators. The law requires the President – who has delegated this power to the Secretary of State – to designate annually “countries of particular concern,” or CPCs, and to take action designed to encourage improvements in those countries. Under IRFA, CPCs are defined as countries whose governments either engage in or tolerate “particularly severe” violations of religious freedom. A menu of possible actions is available, ranging from negotiating a bilateral agreement, to imposing sanctions, to taking a “commensurate action,” to issuing a waiver. While a CPC designation

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remains in effect until removed, sanctions tied to a CPC action expire after two years, if not renewed.

Fourth, IRFA included religious freedom as an element of U.S. foreign assistance, cultural exchange, and international broadcasting programs.

IRFA defines “particularly severe” violations of religious freedom as “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom, including violations such as—(A) torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; (B) prolonged detention without charges; (C) causing the disappearance of persons by the abduction or clandestine detention of those persons; or (D) other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of persons.”

Fifth, IRFA sought to address perceived deficiencies in U.S. government officials’ knowledge and understanding of the issue. It mandated that State Department Foreign Service Officers and U.S. immigration officials receive training on religious freedom and religious persecution. It also required immigration officials to use the State Department’s annual IRF Report as a resource in adjudicating asylum and refugee claims involving religious persecution.

Finally, IRFA sought assessments of whether recently-enacted immigration law reforms were being implemented consistent with the United States’ obligations to protect individuals fleeing persecution, including but not limited to religious persecution. The law authorized USCIRF to appoint experts to examine whether asylum seekers subject to the process of Expedited Removal were being erroneously returned to countries where they could face persecution or detained under inappropriate conditions. Expedited Removal is a mechanism enacted in 1996 whereby foreign nationals arriving in the United States without proper documentation can be returned to their countries of origin without delay, but also without the safeguard of review by an immigration judge, unless they can establish that they have a “credible fear” of persecution.

Religious Freedom Violations under IRFA

IRFA brought an international approach to U.S. religious freedom advocacy. The Act did not use the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to measure other countries’ activities, but rather looked to international instruments. IRFA specifically defined violations of religious freedom as “violations of the internationally recognized right to freedom of religion and religious belief and practice” as articulated in the UN Universal

Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (ICCPR), the Helsinki Accords, and other international instruments and regional agreements.

IRFA also did not limit violations to government actions. It recognized that religious freedom violations also can occur through government inaction against abuses by private actors. The 1998 statute does not, however, adequately address one of the 21st century’s major challenges to freedom of religion or belief: the actions of non-state actors in failing or failed states. IRFA focused on government action or inaction, but in many of the most pressing situations today, transnational or local organizations are the egregious persecutors and governments are either incapable of addressing the violations or non-existent. In these situations, allowing the United States to designate the non-state actors perpetrating particularly severe violators of religious freedom would broaden the U.S. government’s ability to engage the actual drivers of persecution. Such a step was taken with the Taliban, which was in effect named a CPC from 1999-2003 despite the United States’ not recognizing its control of Afghanistan. Naming these countries or groups would reflect reality, which should be the core point of the CPC process.

The Act also allows the United States to take certain actions against specific foreign officials who are responsible for or directly carried out particularly severe religious freedom violations. IRFA bars the entry of such individuals to the United States, but the provision has been invoked only once: in March 2005, it was used to exclude then-Chief Minister Narendra Modi of Gujarat state in India due to his complicity in riots in his state in 2002 that resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1,100 to 2,000 Muslims. USCIRF continues to urge the Departments of State and Homeland Security to develop a lookout list of aliens who are inadmissible to the United States on this basis. The IRF Office has worked to identify people inadmissible under U.S. law for religious freedom violations, and USCIRF has provided information about several such individuals to the State Department.

Separate from the IRFA framework, in 2014 the State Department explicitly and publicly tied entry into the United States to concerns about violent activity. Secretary of State John Kerry announced during a visit to Nigeria that the United States would deny entry to any

persons responsible for engaging in or inciting violence during Nigeria's election, including by declaring them ineligible for American visas. He said specifically that, "perpetrators of such violence would not be welcome in the United States of America." While not mandated by IRFA, USCIRF supports this approach.

Directly related to identifying and barring from entry severe religious freedom violators, IRFA also requires the President to determine the specific officials responsible for violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by governments of CPC countries, and, "when applicable and to the extent practicable," publish the names of these officials in the Federal Register. Despite these requirements, no names of individual officials from any CPC countries responsible for particularly severe religious freedom violations have been published to date.

Apart from the inadmissibility provision discussed above, Congress at times has imposed targeted sanctions on specific individuals for severe religious freedom violations. Based on a USCIRF recommendation, Congress included sanctions on human rights and religious freedom violators in the 2010 Iran sanctions act, the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions and Divestment Act (CISADA, P.L. 111-195). This was the first time Iran sanctions specifically included human rights violators. President Obama has now imposed such sanctions (visa bans and asset freezes) by executive order on 16 Iranian officials and entities, including eight identified as egregious religious freedom violators by USCIRF. Also based on a USCIRF recommendation, the Senate included Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov on the list of gross human rights violators in the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act (P.L. 112-208), which imposes U.S. visa bans and asset freezes on designated Russian officials. Kadyrov has engaged in abuses against Muslims and has been linked to politically-motivated killings.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that the State Department:

- Make greater efforts to ensure foreign government officials are denied entry into the United States due to their inadmissibility under U.S. law for their responsibility for religious freedom violations abroad;

- Train consular sections of all embassies on this entry requirement, and direct them that the application of this provision is mandatory; and
- Announce a policy that all individuals applying for entry to the United States will be denied entry if they are involved in or incite violence against members of religious communities.

USCIRF recommends that Congress:

- Expand the CPC classification to allow for the designation of countries where particularly severe violations of religious freedom are occurring but a government does not exist or does not control its territory; and
- Expand the CPC classification to allow the naming of non-state actors who are perpetrating particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Institutional Issues

IRFA intended the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom to be the highest-ranking U.S. official on religious freedom abroad, coordinating and developing U.S. policy regarding freedom of religion or belief, while also serving as an *ex officio* member of USCIRF. There have been four Ambassadors-at-Large since IRFA's enactment: Robert Seiple (May 1999 to September 2000); John Hanford (May 2002 to January 2009); Suzan Johnson Cook (May 2011 to October 2013); and David Saperstein (January 2015 to the present).

Under IRFA, the Ambassador-at-Large is to be a "principal adviser to the President and the Secretary of State regarding matters affecting religious freedom abroad." However, since the position was established, every administration, including the current one, has situated the Ambassador-at-Large in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) and thus under its Assistant Secretary, even though the State Department's organizational guidelines consider an Ambassador-at-Large to be of higher rank than an Assistant Secretary. Other Ambassadors-at-Large report to the Secretary, such as those for Global Women's Issues, Counterterrorism, and War Crime Issues, as well as the AIDS Coordinator.

Religious freedom advocates, including USCIRF, have long been concerned about the low placement of

the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom within the State Department hierarchy. Secretary of State Kerry committed to Congress at a public hearing that the Ambassador-at-Large will have direct and regular access to him, which would fulfill IRFA's intention that the Ambassador be "a principal advisor to the President and Secretary of State" on matters relating to religious freedom. In addition, the Office of International Religious Freedom should be strengthened, including by enlarging its staff, deepening its expertise, and providing dedicated programmatic funds for religious freedom promotion and protection.

The Ambassador-at-Large now sits among a crowded field of officials whose mandates overlap. Issues of religious freedom play a part in other U.S. government efforts to engage religious communities and to promote human rights more generally. This has become more apparent as various administrations created special State Department positions to focus on particular countries or issues where religious freedom is implicated, such as a Special Envoy for Sudan, a Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, a Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and a Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In addition, Congress created the position of Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism. In 2014, Congress passed, and President Obama signed into law, a bill creating the position of Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia at the State Department.

In addition, the State Department during the Obama Administration took steps to improve its ability to engage with religious actors. The IRF Office staff oversaw initial efforts to track U.S. government religious engagement globally, and the IRF Office co-chaired a special working group with civil society on religion and global affairs. From this process, the working group issued a white paper recommending, among other things, the creation of a special State Department office for religious engagement, modeled on similar offices in other agencies like USAID. In August 2013, the State Department created a new Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, headed by a Special Advisor, Shaun Casey. (The position and office titles have since been changed to Special Representative and Office for Religion and Global Affairs.) According

to the announcement, the Office will "set Department policy on engagement with faith-based communities and . . . work in conjunction with bureaus and posts to reach out to those communities to advance the Department's diplomacy and development objectives," and will "collaborate regularly with other government officials and offices focused on religious issues, including the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and the Department's Office of International Religious Freedom." The Special Representative for Muslim Communities and the Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation were moved into the Office for Religion and Global Affairs, as was the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, who formerly was situated in the DRL Bureau.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that the Secretary of State:

- Per IRFA's mandate that the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom be "a principal adviser" to the President and the Secretary of State on religious freedom issues, and considering the proliferation of related positions and offices, task the Ambassador-at-Large with chairing an inter-bureau working group with all the religiously-oriented positions and programs to ensure consistency in message and strategy;
- Move under the leadership of the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom the positions of Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism and Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia (should the latter be filled); and
- Provide the Office of International Religious Freedom with resources and staff similar to other offices with global mandates, as well as with increased programmatic funds for religious freedom promotion and protection.

USCIRF recommends that Congress:

- Annually specify that funds from the State Department's Human Rights Democracy Fund (HRDF) be allocated for religious freedom programming managed by the Office of International Religious Freedom.

Annual Reports

IRFA requires that the State Department submit the IRF Report “on September 1 of each year or the first day thereafter on which the appropriate House of Congress is in session.” It also requires that USCIRF, based on its review of the IRF Report and other sources, submit its Annual Report by May 1.

However, a recent change by the State Department in its reporting calendar and release date has affected USCIRF’s ability to review the IRF Report and still meet the mandated May 1 deadline. In 2010, the State Department decided to consolidate the reporting periods of its various reports on different human rights issues, in order to minimize the impact on limited staff resources. As a result, the period covered in each IRF Report was shifted from a mid-year (July 1 to June 30) to a calendar-year (January 1 to December 31) cycle. It also decided to release the IRF Report in March or April, rather than comply with the September timeframe established in IRFA.

It should be noted that, although IRFA mandated both the State Department and USCIRF to report annually on international religious freedom, the two entities’ annual reports are significantly different. The State Department reports on every country in the world, while USCIRF reports on selected countries, generally those exhibiting the worst conditions. Further, the State Department’s reports focus primarily on religious freedom conditions, while USCIRF’s country chapters discuss conditions, analyze U.S. policy, and

when issuing their reports. As discussed above, however, the State Department’s change of the reporting period to harmonize the timing of various human reports changed the release date of the IRF Report.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that:

- In light of the State Department’s change in the release date of its report, USCIRF and the State Department meet to discuss the timing of their reports.

The CPC Mechanism

In IRFA’s 16-year existence, the State Department has made CPC designations on 10 occasions: October 1999, September 2000, October 2001, March 2003, September 2004, November 2005, November 2006, January 2009, August 2011, and July 2014. As is evident from these dates, for a number of years the designations generally were made annually, but after 2006, designations became infrequent. While IRFA does not set a specific deadline, the Act indicates that CPC designations should occur soon after the State Department releases its annual IRF Report, as the decisions are to be based on that review and on USCIRF recommendations. In August 2011 and July 2014, the Obama Administration made CPC designations in conjunction with the IRF Report. Ambassador-at-Large Saperstein has also stated his commitment to have an annual CPC designation process.

State Department and USCIRF reports “are significantly different” as “USCIRF’s country chapters discuss conditions, analyze U.S. policy, and make policy recommendations.”

make policy recommendations. USCIRF’s Annual Reports also assess the executive branch’s implementation of IRFA and discuss religious freedom issues in multilateral organizations.

IRFA created a system in which the State Department’s and USCIRF’s annual reports would be issued approximately four months apart, and the State Department and USCIRF would consider each other’s findings

As noted earlier, while a CPC designation remains in effect until it is removed, associated Presidential actions expire after two years if not renewed. The last three CPC designations occurred after the two-year mark from the previous designations had passed.

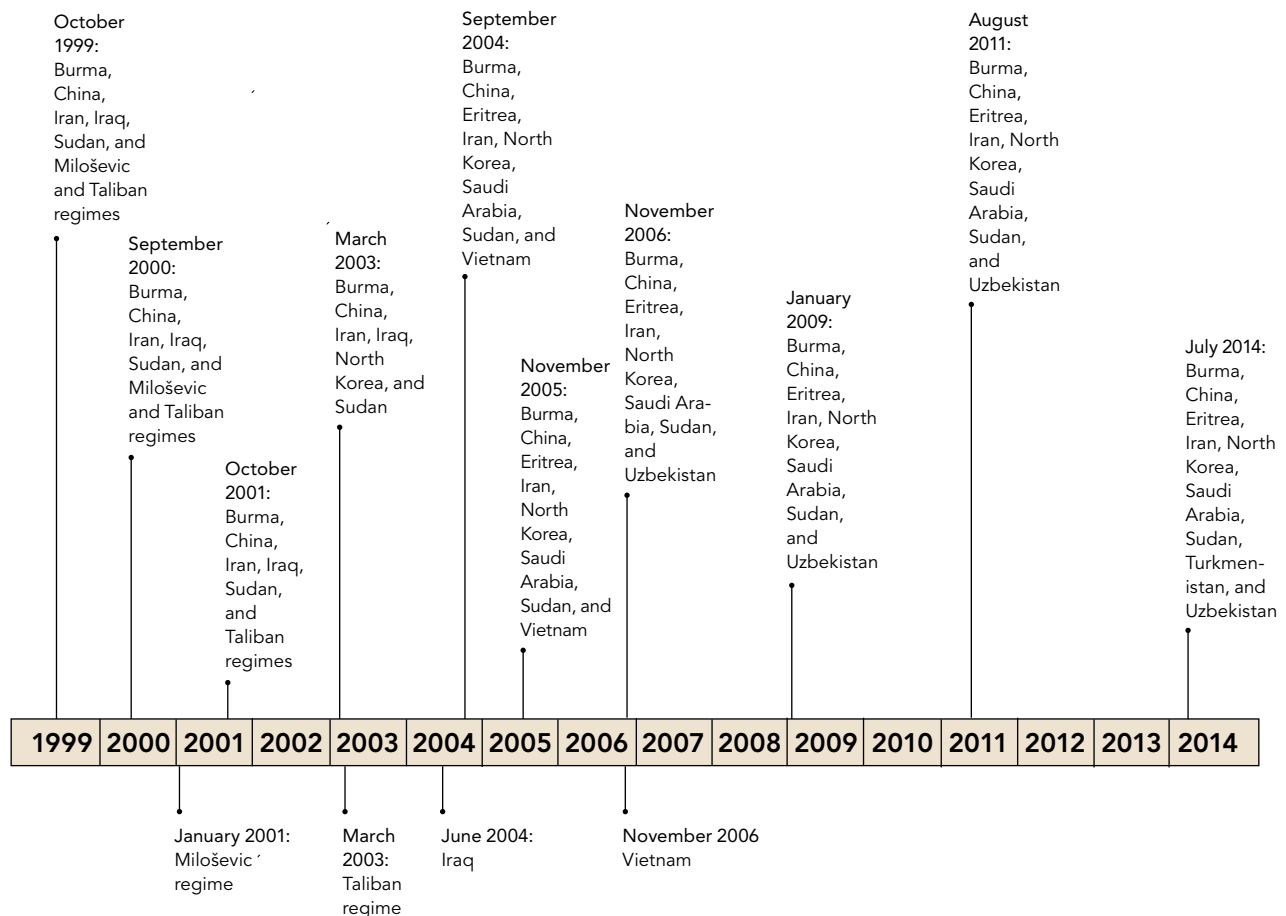
In addition to CPC designations being infrequent, the list has been largely unchanged. Of the nine countries designated as CPCs in July 2014, most had been

named as CPCs for over a decade: Burma, China, Iran, and Sudan for 15 years; North Korea for 13 years; Eritrea and Saudi Arabia for 10 years; and Uzbekistan for eight years. Additionally, removal from the CPC list has been rare. Since IRFA's inception, only one country has been removed from the State Department's CPC list due to diplomatic activity: Vietnam (a CPC from 2004 to 2006). Three other CPC designees were removed, but only after military intervention led to the fall of those regimes: Iraq (a CPC from 1999 to 2004), the Taliban regime of Afghanistan (a "particularly severe violator" from 1999 to 2003), and the Milosevic regime of the Serbian Republic of Yugoslavia (a "particularly severe violator" from 1999 to 2001).

Besides requiring the naming of violators, IRFA provides the Secretary of State with a unique toolbox to

promote religious freedom effectively. The Act includes a menu of options for countries designated as CPCs and a list of actions to encourage improvements in countries that violate religious freedom but do not meet the CPC threshold. The specific policy options to address severe violations of religious freedom in CPC countries include sanctions (referred to as Presidential actions in IRFA) that are not automatically imposed. Rather, the Secretary of State is empowered to enter into direct consultations with a government to bring about improvements in religious freedom. IRFA also permits the development of either a binding agreement with a CPC-designated government on specific actions it will take to end the violations giving rise to the designation or the taking of a "commensurate action." The Secretary may further determine that pre-existing sanctions are adequate

STATE'S DESIGNATIONS OF COUNTRIES AND REGIMES AS CPCs



STATE'S REMOVALS OF COUNTRIES AND REGIMES FROM CPC LIST

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State information

or waive the requirement of taking action to advance the purposes of the Act or the national interests of the United States.

However, in addition to designating the same countries for years, administrations generally have not levied new Presidential actions in accordance with CPC designations, with the State Department instead relying on pre-existing sanctions. While the statute permits such reliance, relying on pre-existing sanctions – or “double hatting” – has provided little incentive for CPC-designated governments to reduce or halt egregious violations of religious freedom.

The Presidential actions for the nine currently-designated CPC countries are shown in the table immediately below. Because of the indefinite waivers for Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, the United States has not implemented a unique policy response tied to the CPC designation and particularly severe

violations of religious freedom.

USCIRF welcomes Ambassador-at-Large Saperstein’s commitment to have an annual CPC process. The CPC list should also expand and retract as conditions warrant, and the use of Presidential actions should be more dynamic. Of the current nine countries designated as CPCs, six have “double-hatted” sanctions, and three have indefinite waivers. The “double hatting” of sanctions can be the appropriate action in some circumstances. Yet specifically tailored actions can be more precise, either broadly structured or narrowly crafted to target specific government officials or provinces, if acute situations are highly localized. Indefinite waivers of penalties undermine the effectiveness of efforts to advance religious freedom, as they signal a lack of U.S. interest and communicate to the designated country that there never will be consequences for its religious freedom abuses.

Federal Register Notices / Vol. 79, No. 185 / Wednesday, September 24, 2014

Pursuant to section 408(a) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (Pub. L. 105–292), as amended (the Act), notice is hereby given that, on July 18, 2014, the Secretary of State, under authority delegated by the President, has designated each of the following as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under section 402(b) of the Act, for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom: **Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.**

The Secretary simultaneously designated the following Presidential Actions for these CPCs:

- For **Burma**, the existing ongoing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(a) pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act;
- For **China**, the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991(Public Law 101–246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act;
- For **Eritrea**, the existing ongoing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(a) pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act;
- For **Iran**, the existing ongoing travel restrictions based on serious human rights abuses under section 221(a)(1)(C) of the Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act;
- For **North Korea**, the existing ongoing restrictions to which North Korea is subject, pursuant to sections 402 and 409 of the Trade Act of 1974 (the Jackson-Vanik Amendment) pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act;
- For **Saudi Arabia**, a waiver as required in the “important national interest of the United States,” pursuant to section 407 of the Act;
- For **Sudan**, the restriction on making certain appropriated funds available for assistance to the Government of Sudan in the annual Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, currently set forth in section 7042(j) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2014 (Div. K, Pub.L. 113–76), and any provision of law that is the same or substantially the same as this provision, pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act;
- For **Turkmenistan**, a waiver as required in the “important national interest of the United States,” pursuant to section 407 of the Act; and
- For **Uzbekistan**, a waiver as required in the “important national interest of the United States,” pursuant to section 407 of the Act.

Along with an annual CPC process, the IRFA toolbox provides many options for diplomatic action. U.S. diplomatic engagement cannot and should not solely rely on naming CPCs, but rather use a concert of action including: diplomatic engagement; consultations about possible CPC action; CPC designations; binding agreement negotiations; presidential actions; and/or a waiver for the narrowest of circumstances. Past practice provides only a few

- Hold annual oversight hearings on IRFA implementation in the House and Senate.

Guidance

With multiple offices and positions dealing with issues that relate to or overlap with religious freedom, crafting a specific strategy outlining the need to promote

The CPC list should also expand and retract as conditions warrant, and the use of Presidential actions should be more dynamic.

examples of these tools being used together to bring about change in a country of concern. An annual CPC designation process should be the center of all IRF-related work, driving and energizing other areas of U.S. diplomacy, but should not be the sum total of all activity.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that the State Department:

- Use all of IRFA's tools, including "country of particular concern" designations, in a continuity of action;
- Publicly declare the results of its annual review of religious freedom conditions and make annual designations of "countries of particular concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom;
- Ensure that the CPC list expands and contracts as conditions warrant;
- Wherever possible, when Presidential Actions or commensurate actions are taken as a consequence of CPC designations, undertake specific efforts to emphasize the importance of religious freedom to the United States, and in particular avoid "double-hatted" sanctions; and
- Limit the use of waivers to a set period of time and subject them to review for renewal.

USCIRF recommends that Congress:

- Take steps through legislative action to require the State Department to make annual CPC designations, should the State Department fail to do so; and

freedom of religion or belief internationally across U.S. government agencies would set an important tone and give direction to U.S. efforts.

In February 2015, the President issued his second National Security Strategy, which touched on religious freedom. In a section entitled "Advance Equality," the Strategy said:

American values are reflective of the universal values we champion all around the world—including the freedoms of speech, worship, and peaceful assembly; the ability to choose leaders democratically; and the right to due process and equal administration of justice. We will be a champion for communities that are too frequently vulnerable to violence, abuse, and neglect—such as ethnic and religious minorities; people with disabilities; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals; displaced persons; and migrant workers.

The National Security Council issued a more specific strategy about religious engagement in July 2013, which includes a component on religious freedom and human rights. This positive initiative, on which USCIRF staff informally advised, connected religious freedom work to other related issues of conflict prevention and to engaging religious leaders on development goals. A document specifically tailored to the issue of religious freedom would further this effort.

In addition to a national strategy to guide U.S. efforts, elected leaders and U.S. officials need to communicate

clearly and regularly that religious freedom is a foreign policy priority for the United States. For instance, during his January 2015 visit to India, President Obama gave a major speech highlighting the need for religious tolerance and freedom, and he reiterated the point at the February 2015 National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC. Notably, the Prime Minister of India subsequently gave a major address about these concerns. As this example demonstrates, one of the most direct ways to stress the importance of religious freedom is in high-profile

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that:

- Each administration issue a strategy to guide U.S. government efforts to protect and promote religious freedom abroad and set up a process to oversee its implementation;
- The President, the Secretary of State, Members of Congress, and other U.S. officials consistently stress the importance of international religious freedom in

Crafting a specific strategy outlining the need to promote freedom of religion or belief internationally across U.S. government agencies would set an important tone and give direction to U.S. efforts.

public events. Both the U.S. government bureaucracy and foreign governments will notice such presentations by the President, the Secretary of State, Congressional leaders, and other high-ranking U.S. officials.

Action also is needed after communication. Public advocacy should be tied to a country-specific action plan or strategy for advancing religious freedom. This is especially important for countries designated as CPCs, as well as those recommended by USCIRF for CPC designation or on USCIRF's Tier 2 list. Such actions would include scheduling trips for embassy officials, including the U.S. ambassador, to visit oppressed religious communities or sites of violence. The United States should also insist that discussions on freedom of religion or belief and religious tolerance be included in various bilateral strategic dialogues and summits, such as the strategic dialogues with Russia, Pakistan, or Indonesia, or the meetings of the U.S.-Nigeria Bi-National Commission. Concerns about freedom of religion or belief should also be interwoven into negotiations over trade agreements, like the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

It is also essential to ensure that U.S. officials and elected leaders raise religious freedom issues during visits to key countries of concern. It is important for foreign leaders to hear directly from visiting delegations that restrictions on religious freedom are hindering bilateral cooperation and the overall relationship.

their public statements as well as in public and private meetings in the United States and abroad; and

- In consultation with USCIRF, the State Department develop and implement country-specific strategies for advancing religious freedom, interfaith harmony, mutual respect, and reconciliation, to ensure that official statements are followed by concrete actions.

Training

Training is needed to equip U.S. officials to speak on these issues and develop action plans. IRFA calls for American diplomats to receive training on how to promote religious freedom effectively around the world. In the past few years, training for Foreign Service Officers on issues of religious freedom has increased, but remains voluntary. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) continued to offer a multi-day Religion and Foreign Policy course. USCIRF staff has been repeatedly invited to speak about the role of the Commission, but the overall focus could include a greater emphasis on promoting freedom of religion or belief. USCIRF also regularly speaks to regional studies classes to discuss the Commission's findings on countries of interest.

By contrast, DHS has made training on religious persecution and IRFA mandatory for all new refu-

gee and asylum officers, and USCIRF and IRF Office representatives regularly speak to these classes. Over the years, USCIRF also has participated in, as well as submitted materials for, training sessions on religious freedom and religious persecution for Department of Justice immigration judges. Training on religious freedom issues in the military education system remains minimal, despite the many schools, military service colleges, and universities providing professional military education. With American service members increasingly engaging governments and societal leaders in religious contexts, training on international standards of freedom of religion or belief would better equip them to carry out their mission.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that the U.S. government:

- Make training on international religious freedom mandatory for State Department officials, including education on what it is, its importance, and how to advance it; Require such training at three intervals in each diplomat's career – the "A-100" class for incoming diplomats, Area Studies for midcareer officials, and a class for all ambassadors and deputy chiefs of missions; and
- Train relevant members of the military on the importance of religious freedom and practical ways to best promote it as an aspect of U.S. foreign policy.

USCIRF recommends that Congress:

- If necessary, require the Foreign Service Institute and the military to provide training on international religious freedom and on the best practices to promote it as an aspect of U.S. foreign policy, so that Foreign Service Officers, U.S. service members, and military chaplains can use globally recognized religious freedom standards when engaging in-country with religious leaders and government and military officials.

Ensuring Funding for Religious Freedom Programming

IRFA also envisaged the funding of religious freedom programs, authorizing foreign assistance to promote and develop "legal protections and cultural respect for religious freedom." In Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, for the first

time, \$4 million was carved out from the Human Rights Democracy Fund (HRDF) for specific DRL grants on religious freedom programming. While no specific earmark or carve-out was made in subsequent years, the IRF Office has continued to receive HRDF funds. In March 2015, Ambassador Saperstein reported to Congress that the IRF Office receives approximately five percent of DRL's HRDF funding (approximately \$3.5 million) annually. These funds support religious freedom programs currently operating in 16 countries. Ambassador Saperstein also reported in March 2015 that five new programs using FY 2014 funds would soon begin operations.

While IRFA authorizes the expenditures of funds for grant making to promote religious freedom, there is no annual appropriation of funds specifically for this purpose. Funding for religious freedom work need not come solely from the human rights bureau. Other potential funding sources include the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and the U.S. Agency

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for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance. Appropriation measures have signaled the importance of such funding. For instance, the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 (P.L. 113-325) directed that appropriated funds for democracy programs "shall be made available to support freedom of religion, including in the Middle East and North Africa."

In statute, report language, and discussions, Congress has at times tasked USCIRF to develop recommendations for challenging issues. In addition to the Expedited Removal Study, one such congressional tasking resulted in USCIRF's study about what Pakistan's education system teaches about religious minorities in that country. Another example was the special fellowship program that was funded for two years to enable scholars to focus on freedom of religion or belief.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that the State Department:

- Continue to designate specific HRDF funds to the IRF Office for grant making.

USCIRF recommends that Congress:

- Support State Department grants related to religious freedom programming, and call for entities that receive federal funds, including MEPI, USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy, and U.S. Institute of Peace, to devote resources for religious freedom programming;
- Encourage USAID to prioritize programs that develop and disseminate, especially in countries of concern, educational and teacher training materials that focus on international human rights standards and religious freedom and the centrality of interfaith understanding to achieving development objectives; and
- Urge that the National Endowment for Democracy and other entities that receive federal funding solicit competitive proposals on specific international religious freedom programming.

The Treatment of Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal

As authorized by IRFA, USCIRF conducted a major research study in 2003 and 2004 on the U.S. government's treatment of asylum seekers in Expedited Removal. The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Justice (DOJ) cooperated with the Commission, whose designated experts had unrestricted access to the internal workings of Expedited Removal.

USCIRF's February 2005 report, *The Treatment of Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal (the Study)*, found serious flaws placing legitimate asylum seekers at risk of being returned to countries where they could face persecution. It also found that asylum seekers were being inappropriately detained under prison-like conditions and in actual jails. To address these problems, the Study made a series of recommendations, none requiring Congressional action, to the responsible agencies within DHS and DOJ. The recommendations were geared to help protect U.S. borders and ensure fair

and humane treatment for bona fide asylum seekers, mirroring the two goals of the 1996 immigration reform law that established Expedited Removal.

USCIRF has continued to monitor the implementation of these recommendations and has issued several follow-up reports finding progress in some areas but no changes in others. Moreover, since the time of the Study, DHS has expanded Expedited Removal from a port-of-entry program to one that covers the entire land and sea border of the United States. In addition, over the past several fiscal years, the number of individuals claiming a fear of return in Expedited Removal has increased sharply. As a result, the continuing flaws in the system now potentially affect even more asylum seekers.

In 2014, in anticipation of the 10th anniversary of the 2005 Study's release, USCIRF has been reviewing the current situation of asylum seekers in expedited removal, as an update to the original study. USCIRF staff has visited ports of entry, border posts, asylum offices, and immigration detention facilities in southern California (July 2014), New York and New Jersey (September 2014), Florida and Puerto Rico (November 2014) and south Texas (February 2015) to tour facilities, meet with officials and detainees, and observe processing. In addition, USCIRF staff has met with DHS officials in Washington, DC, and with non-governmental experts. USCIRF anticipates issuing in 2015 a special report assessing implementation of the study's recommendations and discussing the changes in expedited removal over the past decade.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice

- Implement the recommendations from the 2005 Expedited Removal Study that remain either wholly or partly unimplemented, including by:
 - addressing the serious flaws identified in the initial interviews of arriving aliens;
 - allowing asylum officers to grant asylum at the credible fear stage in appropriate cases;
 - not detaining asylum seekers after credible fear has been found unless absolutely necessary and, if asylum seekers must be detained, doing so only in civil conditions;
 - codifying the existing parole policy into regulations; and

- increasing detainees' access to legal representation and in-person hearings.

USCIRF recommends that Congress:

- In light of Expedited Removal's expansion since the Study and the recent increase in claims of fear, consider authorizing and funding USCIRF to conduct another comprehensive study on the treatment of asylum seekers in Expedited Removal.

Multilateral Efforts

IRFA specifically cites U.S. participation in multilateral organizations as an avenue for advancing religious freedom. Both the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have conventions and agreements that protect freedom of religion or belief and related rights, including assembly and expression. UN and OSCE mechanisms can be used to advance religious freedom or call attention to violations, on which USCIRF has engaged over the years.

United Nations

At the UN Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process allows states to assess the human rights performance of every UN member state, and thereby provides an opportunity for the United States and other like-minded countries to ask questions and make recommendations about religious freedom. This is particularly important when countries designated as "countries of particular concern" under IRFA are reviewed. Country-specific resolutions in the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly

focuses on religious freedom as a thematic issue. That position was created in 1986, at the initiative of the United States. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief – currently Professor Heiner Bielefeldt of Germany – monitors freedom of religion or belief worldwide, communicates with governments about alleged violations, conducts country visits, and issues reports and statements. Some of the Council's country-specific Special Procedures also have drawn attention to religious freedom violations in the countries they cover, such as the current UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Iran, Ahmed Shaheed. In addition, the specially-created Commissions of Inquiry on North Korea and on Eritrea focused on the severe religious freedom abuses in those nations.

For a number of years, the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly were the centers of a problematic effort by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and some of its members to seek an international legal norm restricting speech that defamed religions, particularly Islam. In a welcome change, the OIC no longer is sponsoring the flawed and divisive defamation-of-religions resolutions. They were replaced in 2011 by a new, consensus approach (often referred to as the Resolution 16/18 approach, after the first such resolution) that focuses on positive measures to counter religious intolerance and protect individuals from discrimination or violence, rather than on criminalizing expression.

Nevertheless, USCIRF remains concerned that some OIC members continue to support a global anti-blasphemy law. Many OIC member states continue to have and enforce repressive domestic blasphemy and religious defamation laws. These laws result in gross human rights abuses and exacerbate

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provide other opportunities to highlight religious freedom concerns.

The Human Rights Council's system of independent experts, or Special Procedures, is another important mechanism, particularly the Special Rapporteur who

religious intolerance, discrimination, and violence, the very problems that the OIC claims it is trying to address. In addition, some OIC countries continue to refer publicly to the defamation-of-religions concept

and call for international laws against it, including in the context of the “Istanbul Process,” a series of international meetings launched in 2011 to discuss the implementation of the Resolution 16/18 approach. The Arab League also has been considering a regional model law against the defamation of religions.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that the State Department:

- Continue to use the UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review process, as well as country-specific resolutions in both the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly, to shine a light on religious freedom violations in specific countries, especially those designated as CPCs under IRFA;
- Continue its vigorous support of the mandate and work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, including by working to secure sufficient assistance to support the Rapporteur in carrying out this volunteer position;
- Work for the creation of additional country-specific Special Rapporteur positions, especially for CPC countries;
- Remain vigilant against any renewed efforts at the UN to seek legal limitations on offensive or controversial speech about religion that does not constitute incitement to violence, and continue to press countries to adhere to the Resolution 16/18 approach, including by repealing blasphemy laws.

OSCE

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), comprised of 57 participating States from Europe, the former Soviet Union, Mongolia, the United States, and Canada, continues to be an important forum for holding those states to extensive international standards on freedom of religion or belief and to combat hate crimes, discrimination, xenophobia, intolerance, and anti-Semitism. In recent years, however, some OSCE-participating States, led by Russia, have sought to curtail the OSCE’s human rights activities in favor of a security focus and have tried to limit the participation of NGOs, particularly in the annual Human Dimension (HDim) meeting in Warsaw, Europe’s largest

human rights conference.

In 2012, the OSCE’s Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) re-launched its Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The Panel reviews proposed or enacted legislation against international and OSCE commitments, and provides expert opinions and guidelines. The Panel previously was composed of 60 persons nominated by OSCE countries, including a 15-member Advisory Council appointed by the ODIHR Director. The restructuring resulted in a much smaller panel with 12 members. In 2014, ODIHR issued guidelines, on which the Panel advised, about OSCE norms on recognizing religious or belief communities. As part of its continuing cooperation with other international organizations, the ODIHR Director and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights signed a joint declaration in June 2014 to increase their combined work to promote and protect human rights, democracy, the rule of law, tolerance, non-discrimination, and gender equality.

In early 2015, ODIHR hired a new advisor on freedom of religion or belief for its staff, filling a position vacant for some years. The advisor will be placed in the Human Rights Section, instead of the Tolerance Unit. USCIRF had recommended this move, as religious freedom is not merely an issue of tolerance but also encompasses a full range of human rights concerns, such as the freedoms of assembly, association, and expression.

Since their inception in 1992, OSCE Field Operations have become a key feature of the organization, including in the human rights sphere. Each has its own mandate drawn up with the host government, but more recent mandates provide decreased scope for human rights activities. At present, there are six field offices in South East Europe, two in Eastern Europe, three in the South Caucasus and five in Central Asia. The OSCE office in Tajikistan worked with the host country government and civil society to build local human rights capacity. In May 2014, the OSCE office in Turkmenistan held a training session for government officials by British specialists on international religious freedom standards. Freedom of religion or belief was also the focus of training courses for lawyers, human rights defenders, and journalists in Armenia in April and May of 2014. Despite Azerbaijan’s sharply deteriorating record on freedom of religion or belief, the

OSCE office in Baku cooperated with the Azerbaijani government to co-sponsor a 2014 religious tolerance conference. The head of the OSCE Baku office also has made public statements supporting the government of Azerbaijan's positions on religious tolerance and religious freedom. ODIHR should make greater efforts to ensure consistency on issues of religious freedom and related human rights, including by providing training for staff.

The OSCE recently has also become more involved in efforts to counter violent extremism and terrorism in the name of religion. For example, in 2008, the ODIHR issued a manual to familiarize states' senior policy makers with basic international human rights standards to which they must adhere in efforts to combat terrorism and extremism. In 2014, the OSCE held regional anti-terrorism training meetings in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, while in November 2014 ODIHR organized a training session for police in combating terrorism. In March

Working with Like-Minded Nations

There are increasing opportunities for the U.S. government to work in concert with like-minded nations around freedom of religion or belief. The United States is no longer the only player in this field. The United Kingdom's foreign ministry and parliament have increased their focus, the European Union issued guidelines for its diplomats in the field on promoting freedom of religion or belief, and the European Parliament established a working group on the subject. Canada also created an ambassadorial position on religious freedom. The Austrians, Dutch, Italians, Norwegians, and Germans also have focused specifically on religious freedom over the past five years. Recently, USCIRF has taken the lead in fostering increased collaboration between the United States, Canada, and a number of European countries in promoting freedom of religion or belief. This effort is now expanding to other parts of the world.

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2015, ODIHR held a "train-the-trainer" session on respecting human rights in combating violent extremism, as well as an experts' meeting on human rights and responding to foreign fighters.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that the State Department:

- Urge ODIHR to empower the new Advisory Panel to act independently and issue reports or critiques and conduct activities without undue interference by ODIHR or participating States;
- Request that the new advisor on freedom of religion or belief be adequately resourced to effectively monitor religious freedom abuses across the OSCE area and to provide training for staff of OSCE field offices; and
- Encourage OSCE missions to fully integrate religious freedom and related human rights into counter-terrorism training and other relevant programs.

In early 2014, USCIRF Commissioners and staff met with members of the British All Parties Parliamentary Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief in London and cosponsored with the European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief (EPWG) an unprecedented joint event in the European Parliament. In Brussels, the event USCIRF cosponsored with the EPWG filled the room to its maximum capacity of 200 people. In November 2014, USCIRF, working alongside a group of parliamentarians from Brazil, Canada, Norway, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, helped launch a new parliamentary network, the Inter-Parliamentary Platform for Freedom of Religion or Belief, at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo, Norway. Over 30 MPs signed the Charter for Freedom of Religion or Belief, pledging to advance religious freedom for all. A direct outcome of the meeting was the creation of a caucus in the Brazilian Congress to promote international religious freedom. In addition, the parliamentary group has sent

letters to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the President of Burma, and the North Korean ambassador to the United Nations relating to religious freedom issues in those countries.

Paired with any parliamentary effort should be coordinated inter-governmental activities. Officials from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the EU External Action Service have recognized this need. Efforts are beginning to coordinate joint demarches on countries of common concern, as well as to share information about how governments fund religious freedom work in the field. While coordinating government action may pose challenges, the power of many voices is sure to have greater impact.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that the State Department:

- Continue to work with other governments and parliaments interested in promoting international religious freedom to share information and coordinate activities.

The Role of Congress

Congress has an important role to play to ensure that religious freedom remains a priority to the U.S. government. Hearings are a particularly useful tool, as they signal Congressional interest in international religious freedom. For example, subcommittees of the House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs have held hearings focusing on holding accountable countries of particular concern, the issuance of the

protecting religious freedom abroad. The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission has held several hearings on religious freedom, including religious minorities in India, religious and indigenous communities in Vietnam, prisoners of conscience, and religious minorities in Iran. Holding annual Congressional oversight hearings on IRFA implementation in both the House and Senate would reinforce Congressional interest in the issue.

As religious freedom problems are interwoven into some of the most difficult foreign policy challenges facing the United States, both houses of Congress should ensure that religious freedom issues are included in specific country hearings and ambassadorial confirmation hearings. In addition, Members of Congress should continue to use appropriations bills and supporting report language to express congressional concerns to both our own government and other governments. While creating the new Senate Human Rights Caucus is an important step, creating a Senate caucus on international religious freedom, similar to the existing House caucus, would also serve an important function.

Another example of congressional action is the Defending Freedoms Project, an initiative of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, in conjunction with USCIRF and Amnesty International USA. Through the project, Members of Congress advocate on behalf of prisoners abroad, work toward their release, and shine a spotlight on the laws and policies that have led to their incarceration. The goal of this

Congress has an important role to play to ensure that religious freedom remains a priority to the U.S. government.

State Department's IRF Report and USCIRF's Annual Report, as well as country-specific religious freedom issues. The National Security Subcommittee of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee for two years in a row has held a hearing on protecting international religious freedom. The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs held a hearing in March 2015 on

project is to help set free these prisoners and increase attention to and support for human rights and religious freedom.

With respect to these issues, USCIRF recommends that:

- Both the House and Senate hold annual oversight hearings on IRFA implementation, as well as hearings on religious freedom-specific issues, and ensure that

religious freedom is raised in country-specific hearings and ambassadorial confirmation hearings; and

- During delegation trips abroad, Members of Congress examine conditions of religious freedom for all faiths/beliefs, and meet with individuals and organizations that promote religious freedom and related human rights, targeted religious communities, and people detained for their religious beliefs or religious freedom advocacy.

Dissenting Statement of Vice Chair James J. Zogby:

I voted against some of the recommendations in this chapter because I cannot support USCIRF calling on Congress to micro-manage the way the State Department and the White House National Security Council organize their staff and set their priorities.

We are united in our commitment to advance religious freedom but recommending that important offices of the Executive Branch play musical chairs with the positions they currently have in place or that they add more chairs to the game both exceeds our mandate and has the potential of making an admittedly cumbersome and sometime confusing bureaucracy even more cumbersome and confusing.

We can advocate that attention be paid to advancing religious freedom, but it is up to the President and the Secretary of State - not USCIRF - to decide how the Executive Branch should configure their offices and expend their resources in furthering that goal.

Additional Statement of Chair Katrina Lantos Swett, with whom Vice Chair Robert P. George and Commissioners Mary Ann Glendon, M. Zuhdi Jasser, and Daniel I. Mark join:

As I conclude my second term as USCIRF Chair and enter my final year as a Commissioner, I want to thank USCIRF's dedicated team for their diligence, hard work, and professionalism. The Annual Report is a task of herculean proportions, with USCIRF analysts gathering facts and data from numerous sources around the world, vetting the data, and drafting the chapters and recommendations. Based on those drafts and working with staff, Commissioners are able to produce what I

have consistently referred to as the "gold standard" of U.S. government reports on religious freedom. As the Government Accountability Office found when surveying non-governmental organizations, our report is highly valued and sought after because of its impartiality, factual nature, and inventive and creative ideas for how the U.S. government could better position itself in the 21st century to advance religious freedom.

In addition, I have had the opportunity to travel with Commissioners and USCIRF analysts to Bahrain, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. I have been repeatedly impressed by USCIRF staff with their knowledge of the issues relating to international religious freedom, their contacts with U.S. government officials and NGOs, their nonpartisan approach to the issue, and their dedication to help ensure that the United States more effectively advances this fundamental freedom for all persons everywhere. Our government is well served by this team of dedicated public servants including USCIRF's able Executive Director, Ambassador Jackie Wolcott.

Additional Statement of Commissioners Eric P. Schwartz and Hannah Rosenthal and Vice Chair James J. Zogby:

Our chapter on implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) addresses many aspects of the legislation, but it does not address in great detail the operations or overall effectiveness of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom itself, which, of course, was created by the IRFA legislation. We believe that the Commission has played an important role in keeping issues of religious freedom on the policy agenda, and in keeping faith with victims of abuses around the world. But we also believe there are ways that the Commission can be more effective in its work. We hope the upcoming reauthorization discussion will provide an opportunity to explore several important issues in our efforts to protect religious freedom, such as whether we are most effectively critiquing, engaging and, where appropriate, complementing the work of the Department of State and the Administration, whether we can enhance Commissioner-Commission staff relations and safeguard staff professionalism, independence and impartiality over time, how we should address new challenges posed by non-state actors, and how we might

better engage issues of religious reconciliation even as we continue to focus on issues of basic rights. We look forward to considering these and other issues in the months to come.