



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

USCIRF HEARING SUMMARY:

December 2025

STATE-CONTROLLED RELIGION IN CHINA

Vicky Hartzler
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Asif Mahmood
Vice Chair

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Executive Director

USCIRF's Mission

To advance international freedom of religion or belief, by independently assessing and unflinchingly confronting threats to this fundamental right.

On October 16, 2025, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) held a hearing: [*State-Controlled Religion in China*](#). USCIRF Chair Vicky Hartzler and Vice Chair Asif Mahmood led the hearing. Members of civil society participated as witnesses, discussing religious freedom conditions in China. They also shared recommendations for the U.S. government to support freedom of religion or belief in China. Chair Hartzler opened the hearing and introduced Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi to provide opening remarks.

[*Speaker Emerita Pelosi*](#) described ways in which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has for years carried out a systematic campaign to erase faith from public life and replace it with loyalty to the Party. Speaker Emerita Pelosi spoke to religious persecution against Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghurs, Christians, and others across China. Speaker Emerita Pelosi shared that, for decades, Democrats and Republicans alike have spoken together, with one voice, to assert that defending human rights and religious freedom is not a partisan issue but a patriotic duty.

[*Chair Hartzler*](#) stated that instilling and maintaining absolute authority to the CCP forms the basis of the Chinese government's policy on religion through laws, regulations, and policies that are not meant to protect religious freedom but to instead facilitate the CCP's political agenda through the "sinicization of religion." Chair Hartzler condemned the recent detention of Zion Church founder Pastor Ezra Jin as well as the brutal arrest of dozens of other religious leaders and church staff in multiple regions across China.

[*Vice Chair Mahmood*](#) spoke to the severe violations of religious freedom perpetuated by the CCP in Xinjiang, in Tibet, against house church Protestants and underground Catholics, and against Falun Gong practitioners and the Church of Almighty God. Vice Chair Mahmood described how authorities coopt religious organizations and movements, instructing clergy to preach CCP ideology. Vice Chair Mahmood urged the U.S. government to continue to prioritize religious freedom vis-à-vis China.

[*Senator James Risch*](#) (R-ID) provided video remarks for the hearing, stating that the CCP under Xi Jinping has tightened its control over religious practice to sinicize religion. Among the CCP's other violations of freedom of religion or belief across China, Senator Risch also described how the implementation of the National Security Law in Hong Kong has been used to target prodemocracy religious groups and activists, such as Jimmy Lai.

[Senator Ted Budd](#) (R-NC) in his recorded remarks shared that the freedom to exercise one's faith is enshrined in the United States' constitution and that U.S. leadership is critical in denouncing persecution of Christians and members of other religious groups around the world. Senator Budd stated that the United States will consider every tool available—economic pressure, trade negotiations, and diplomatic measures—to confront CCP abuses and to make clear that religious persecution is not acceptable.

[Representative Jim McGovern](#) (D-MA) stated in his recorded remarks that freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is a universal right and that the violations of this right in China are vast, pervasive, and in constant need of scrutiny. Congressman McGovern shared that as a current member and former chair of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, he co-chaired a hearing on Chinese authorities' growing use of digital tools to surveil and suppress religious expression online. He urged that the United States be consistent and diligent in advancing universal human rights in China and around the world.

[Representative John Moolenaar](#) (R-MI) in recorded remarks stated that China is the world leader in religious persecution, whereas the United States was founded on the fundamental idea of religious freedom. Congressman Moolenaar stated that the CCP does not threaten just U.S. interests but also the very idea that human beings are born free—while carrying out the most systematic campaign of religious persecution since the Cultural Revolution. He stated that a regime confident in its legitimacy does not bulldoze places of worship, arrest pastors, and surveil prayers.

[Robert Destro](#)—Professor of Law at the Catholic University of America; former Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor; and former U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues at the U.S. Department of State—provided the first witness testimony. Professor Destro argued that, rather than being a niche issue, human rights and specifically religious freedom should be integral to U.S. policy alongside other realpolitik concerns such as international economic and security policy. He urged that U.S. policy be creative in using diplomatic, commercial, educational, and cultural tools as written in the International Religious Freedom Act.

[Rushan Abbas](#), Founder and Executive Director of the Campaign for Uyghurs and Chairwoman of the Executive Committee of the World Uyghur Congress, provided the second testimony. She outlined atrocities being carried out by the CCP against Uyghurs, including over 3.4 million Uyghurs transferred from their families and forced into state-controlled factories in 2024. Ms. Abbas also shared that her sister, Gulshan Abbas, was abducted by Chinese

authorities in retaliation for Ms. Rushan Abbas speaking out on the CCP's genocidal policies against Uyghurs.

[Norgay Tenzin](#), a research analyst at the International Campaign for Tibet, examined in his testimony how the CCP exerts control over Tibetans through surveillance, strict controls, laws, and policies aimed at diminishing Tibetan identity and faith to exert political control over Tibet's monastic community. Mr. Tenzin shared the 14th Dalai Lama's affirmation in May 2025 that the institution of the Dalai Lama will endure, and the 15th Dalai Lama will be found and recognized in accordance with established Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

[Corey Jackson](#), Founder and President of the Luke Alliance, shared in his testimony the repression of the Christian community in China by the CCP. Churches that register with the government are subordinated to CCP ideology. Unregistered churches are deemed illegal and their members face persistent repression, including surveillance, harassment, eviction, confiscation of religious materials, and the forced closure of places of worship. Pastors are placed under house arrest or are subject to travel bans. Some pastors are arrested, including Pastor Wang Yi and Pastor Ezra Jin.

[Annie Wilcox Boyajian](#), President and Mark Palmer Distinguished Fellow at Freedom House, stated in her testimony that the CCP operates one of the most systematic and technologically sophisticated apparatuses of religious control in the world. Ms. Boyajian also described how China's campaign of transnational repression represents the most sophisticated and far-reaching in the world. Freedom House's database documents how 22 percent of transnational repression cases since 2014 were committed by China.

Discussion then addressed the CCP's oppression of religious minorities and transnational repression. Family members living in the United States who speak out about persecution in China have been harassed, and their family members in China are threatened, imprisoned, or detained. When diaspora groups have documented the oppression of Falun Gong practitioners, their families in China have been threatened and imprisoned, though raising prisoners' names has been documented to improve their conditions. The U.S. government can make clear statements that the CCP has no authority on U.S. soil and transnational oppression by the CCP will not be tolerated. In addition, the U.S. government should make clear that the Chinese government has no right to interfere in the succession of the Dalai Lama and sanction officials who attempt to do so.



Chair Hartzler concluded the hearing and thanked the witnesses for their testimonies and the members of Congress for their contributions to the hearing. Chair Hartzler thanked the audience for their support and urged that everyone who attended the hearing not give up and not lose heart for freedom of religion or belief in China.

Following the witness testimonies, Chair Hartzler led a question-and-answer session in which hearing participants discussed the impact of the CCP's indoctrination of children separated from their Uyghur and Tibetan families; how to raise international religious freedom concerns alongside economic and national security concerns when engaging with foreign governments; how to address CCP oppression of religious minority groups; how to respond to China's transnational repression; and how to respond to any CCP interference in the succession of the Dalai Lama. Witnesses also further discussed the detentions of Pastor Jin and members of the Zion Church. The question-and-answer session closed with discussion on progress in implementing recommendations to advance international religious freedom.

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