



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

USCIRF HEARING SUMMARY:

May 2026

RISING ANTI-MUSLIM HATRED: FORB VIOLATIONS AGAINST MUSLIMS ABROAD

Vicky Hartzler
Chair

Asif Mahmood
Vice Chair

Commissioners

Mohamed Elsanousi

Maureen Ferguson

Rachel Laser

Stephen Schneck

Meir Soloveichik

Erin D. Singhsinsuk
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 May 5, 2026, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) held a hearing on [*Rising Anti-Muslim Hatred: FoRB Violations against Muslims Abroad*](#). USCIRF Chair Vicky Hartzler and Vice Chair Asif Mahmood led the hearing. Members of civil society participated as witnesses, discussing restrictions on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for Muslims abroad. They also shared recommendations for the U.S. government to advance FoRB for Muslims and combat anti-Muslim hatred. Commissioners Mohamed Elsanousi, Rachel Laser, and Stephen Schneck also participated in the hearing.

[*Chair Hartzler*](#) opened the hearing with a discussion of attacks on Muslims. She began by describing the February 2026 Islamic State attack on Muslim worshipers in Islamabad, Pakistan. Chair Hartzler then mentioned mob violence targeting Muslims in India. She also noted likely Russian involvement in a plot in which pigs' heads were placed outside several mosques in and around Paris, France, in September 2025. Chair Hartzler pointed out that anti-Muslim bias threatens people beyond the Muslim community, noting a recent guilty plea by a British assailant who attacked a Sikh woman believing she was Muslim. Concluding her remarks, Chair Hartzler noted that U.S. government advocacy ensuring FoRB protections for Muslims abroad is key to building on the Donald J. Trump administration's ongoing engagement with Muslim-majority governments on issues of critical national security importance.

[*Vice Chair Mahmood*](#) discussed key trends affecting FoRB for Muslims. He began by noting that governments often use blasphemy laws to target Muslim dissidents or those whose religious views differ from that of the state, citing Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan as examples. Vice Chair Mahmood then noted that Muslim women are often disproportionately affected by these FoRB restrictions, including limitations on religious garb. He cited several examples of anti-Muslim rhetoric in India, the United Kingdom, and Australia, noting that this "pervasive environment of hostility risks restricting FoRB" and pointing out that women wearing the hijab have been violently attacked in recent years, including an Algerian woman who was murdered in Germany in July 2025. Vice Chair Mahmood noted that governments who ignore anti-Muslim hatred open space for violent extremist groups to radicalize recruits by telling them falsely that Muslims are unwelcome in open and democratic societies.

[*Representative French Hill \(R-AR\)*](#) emphasized the importance of fighting for people of all faiths to practice their religion freely. He highlighted his work in Congress and with USCIRF to support international religious freedom and accountability for violations. He concluded his remarks by calling for the United States to prioritize religious freedom for everyone everywhere.

[Farid Hafez](#), Senior Research Fellow at Georgetown University's The Bridge Initiative and Associate Teaching Professor of International Relations at the College of William & Mary, discussed the disproportionate impact anti-Muslim hatred has had on Muslim women, especially those who wear the hijab. He also focused on how some European countries interfere in Muslim community affairs in ways that violate FoRB. Mr. Hafez discussed the use of counterterrorism legislation to target Muslim communities, especially in Russia. He concluded his testimony by providing U.S. policy recommendations, including advocating for best practice strategies to combat anti-Muslim hatred with other foreign governments.

[Abdassamad El Yazidi](#), Chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, discussed the challenges facing Muslims in Germany. He described the subtle ways that anti-Muslim hatred manifests through rhetoric, political narratives, and institutional practices, including within Germany's security authorities. Mr. El Yazidi also raised concerns about political accountability for those who espouse anti-Muslim hatred and the German government's tendency to ignore the Muslim community's concerns about FoRB restrictions. He concluded his testimony emphasizing Germany's need to establish an independent body to report on and address anti-Muslim hatred.

[Jewher Ilham](#), Forced Labor Project Manager at Worker Rights Consortium, discussed China's repression of Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims in the Xinjiang region, highlighting the case of her father, [Ilham Tohti](#). She recounted Chinese President Xi Jinping's rise to power and his policy of Sinicization, which has resulted in a crackdown on Uyghur and other faith traditions' religious and cultural practices. Ms. Ilham also discussed how China's system of Uyghur forced labor has enabled other egregious human rights violations, including mass surveillance, arbitrary detention, gender-based violence, torture, political reeducation, and forced sterilization. She concluded her testimony by advocating for tighter regulations and more aggressive enforcement to prevent U.S. complicity in Uyghur forced labor.

[M. Arsalan Suleman](#), a partner specializing in international litigation at Foley Hoag LLP, began his testimony recounting serious human rights violations against Muslim communities across the world, especially in Burma. He discussed international mechanisms the United States and other foreign governments could use to hold states and individuals accountable for violations, including the Genocide Convention and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Mr. Suleman concluded his testimony with recommendations to the U.S. government, including supporting and improving both domestic and international mechanisms for accountability.

Vice Chair Mahmood read the written testimony of [Tariq Jamil](#), an Islamic scholar. In his testimony, Mr. Jamil emphasized the importance of interfaith cooperation to preserve the rights of all people. He recounted the role of interfaith dialogue and peace within Islamic history and highlighted some of the challenges Muslims today face, including discrimination and hate crimes. Mr. Jamil ended his testimony by appealing to governments, religious leaders, educators, and media institutions to build peace and justice for all.

Following the witness testimonies, Chair Hartzler led a question-and-answer session in which hearing participants discussed in further detail the nature of anti-Muslim hatred and FoRB violations of Muslims abroad. Witnesses stressed the need for U.S. leadership on the global stage, including through prioritizing religious freedom in bilateral relations, supporting independent civil society, and restoring cooperation with the United Nations and other international accountability bodies. They also urged USCIRF to review the religious freedom situation for Muslims in European countries like France, Austria, and Denmark as part of its country recommendations. Witnesses also discussed the terminology of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, cooperation with other religious communities in the fight against discrimination, and reasons for the rise of anti-Muslim hatred around the world.

Chair Hartzler concluded the hearing by thanking the witnesses for their testimony.



Professional Staff

Michael Ardivino

Policy Analyst

Gretchen Birkle

Senior Advisor

Susan Bishai

Supervisory Policy Analyst

Mollie Blum

Policy Analyst

Guillermo Cantor

Director of Research and Policy

Serena Doan

Supervisory Policy Analyst

Kaylee Fisher

Public Affairs Specialist

Andrew Hamm

Victims List Database Specialist

Sema Hasan

Senior Policy Analyst

Thomas Kraemer

Chief Administrative Officer

Kirsten Lavery

Supervisory Policy Analyst and

International Legal Specialist

Veronica McCarthy

Government Affairs Specialist

Hilary Miller

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Policy Analyst

Dylan Schexnaydre

Policy Analyst

Katherine Todd

Policy Analyst

Ross Tokola

Policy Analyst

Brett Warner

Administrative Specialist

Scott Weiner

Supervisory Policy Analyst

Kurt Werthmuller

Supervisory Policy Analyst

Nathan Wineinger

Chief of Public Affairs

Jean Wu

Policy Analyst

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan legislative branch agency established by the U.S. Congress to monitor, analyze, and report on religious freedom abroad. USCIRF makes foreign policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress intended to deter religious persecution and promote freedom of religion and belief.