



State-Controlled Religion in China

Opening remarks as prepared for delivery

Vicky Hartzler, USCIRF Chair

Good morning. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's hearing, *State-Controlled Religion in China*, will come to order. Welcome, my name is Vicky Hartzler, and I currently serve as the Chair for the Commission.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. legislative branch agency created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, or IRFA. The Commission uses international standards to monitor religious freedom abroad and makes policy recommendations to the U.S. government. Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory authority under IRFA to convene this hearing.

I am delighted to share that we are joined today by Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, who will share some opening remarks, followed by the chair and vice chair's

opening remarks, next other members of congress have submitted pre-recorded remarks, and then we will hear from our distinguished witnesses testifying about freedom of religion or belief in China. Speaker Emerita Pelosi, thank you so much for joining us.

Speaker Emerita Pelosi, thank you again for your consistent leadership on religious freedom in China and joining us today to speak at this hearing.

In the People's Republic of China, there is only one entity that the government allows unwavering, faithful devotion to: the Chinese Communist Party. The state compels Chinese citizens of all backgrounds to adopt and enthusiastically profess their love and support for the Chinese Communist Party or CCP. Anyone who places some other being, belief, thought, tradition, way of life, culture, or activity above the CCP, its political ideology, and its chairman Xi Jinping is considered a threat.

Instilling and maintaining absolute loyalty to the CCP forms the basis of the Chinese government's policy on religion. For decades, China has tried to exert complete control over religious groups through laws, regulations, and policies that are not meant to protect and maximize religious freedom but to instead facilitate the CCP's political agenda.

The Chinese government recognizes Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Taoism as religions, and any groups affiliated with these religions must register with the government to practice their activities legally. State-controlled national religious organizations and their local subsidiaries, often known as “patriotic religious associations,” manage the religious affairs of these groups and report to the CCP’s United Front Work Department and the government’s State Administration for Religious Affairs. Through these organizations and agencies, the government severely restricts religious groups and micromanages their affairs, including their leaders, houses of worship, missionary activities, and online activities.

If this unfettered interference weren’t enough, the government has committed gross religious freedom violations in the name of the state’s “sinicization of religion” policy. This project seeks to not only regulate religious affairs but to force the CCP into the center of religious life by making groups conform their beliefs, activities, expression, attire, leadership, language, houses of worship, and more to CCP ideology. With this policy, the government seeks to eliminate any ideologies that contradict its own and transform religion into a tool for CCP indoctrination.

China’s treatment of religious groups blatantly contradicts international human rights standards. No government has the right to dictate the beliefs of its citizens. No government has the right to choose which religious leaders are legitimate. No

government has the right to impose its political interests onto its citizens' conscience and faith.

And no government has the right to imprison religious leaders for leading their religious communities. We think of 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. I condemn these arrests, and I call for the release of Ezra Jin and of all those who have been detained by the CCP for exercising their right to practice their faith. USCIRF will add to our website a statement submitted to us by Pastor Jin's family for the record.

With that, I would like to now turn the floor over to USCIRF's Vice Chair Asif Mahmood.

Asif Mahmood, USCIRF Vice Chair

Thank you, Chair Hartzler. I'd also like to welcome our witnesses and thank them for being here today to share their knowledge and expertise. The regulations and policies the Chinese government enforces on recognized religious groups have resulted in particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

In Xinjiang, Chinese authorities have committed genocide and crimes against humanity by placing more than a million predominately Muslim Uyghurs and other Turkic ethnic groups in so-called political "reeducation" camps. There, officials

have forced them to renounce their religious beliefs and ethnic identities and subjected them to other gross human rights abuses.

In Tibet, authorities have repressed all expressions of Tibetan Buddhism that do not align with the CCP's political goals. Officials imprison and torture Tibetans for their private and public support for the Dalai Lama. Authorities have appointed CCP-compliant Tibetan Buddhist leaders that promote the government's forced assimilation policies.

China targets house church Protestants and underground Catholics for refusing to join the state-controlled religious organizations. Authorities have instructed clergy to preach CCP ideology, ordered the removal of crosses from churches, and required the display of CCP slogans at the entrances of churches. Those who resist risk harassment, detention, imprisonment, forced disappearance, and even torture.

These are just violations for recognized religious groups. The government has ruthlessly persecuted unrecognized religious groups like Falun Gong and the Church of Almighty God in an effort to eradicate their movements as opposed to co-opting them for political purposes.

For decades, the U.S. government has been a leader on combatting China's religious freedom violations. It has sanctioned Chinese government officials, banned the import of goods using Uyghur forced labor, and supported independent

media and nongovernmental organizations documenting violations. USCIRF urges the U.S. government to continue prioritizing religious freedom by designating China as a Country of Particular Concern, raising religious freedom issues with Chinese officials, and supporting independent civil society. The United States cannot afford to sit on the sidelines on this issue. The lives and wellbeing of millions are at stake.

Thank you, and I'd like to turn the floor back over to Chair Hartzler.

Vicky Hartzler, USCIRF Chair

Thank you, Vice Chair Mahmood.

Before we turn to our witnesses, we would like to share prerecorded remarks from four Members of Congress. The first message is from Senator James Risch.

Senator Risch is the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the 119th Congress, and for which he previously served as Chairman during the 116th Congress. Senator Risch's committee assignments include the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Thank you, Senator Risch.

The second message is from Senator Ted Budd. Senator Budd serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee; the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence; the

Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee; and the Joint Economic Committee. Senator Budd is leading efforts to ensure that the United States stays informed on China's potential future capabilities.

Thank you, Senator Budd.

The third message is from Representative Jim McGovern. Congressman McGovern is Co-Chair of the bi-partisan Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission as well as a commissioner on the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, which monitors human rights and the rule of law in China.

Thank you, Congressman McGovern.

Finally, we have pre-recorded remarks from Representative John Moolenaar. Congressman John Moolenaar is a member of the House Committee on Appropriations and serves as the Chairman of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, which works on a bipartisan basis to build consensus that addresses the threats posed by the government of China.

Thank you, Congressman Moolenaar.

I would now like to introduce our witnesses.

First, we will hear from Robert Destro, Professor of Law at The Catholic University of America. Professor Destro is a former Assistant Secretary of

Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and a former U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues at the U.S. Department of State. We will then hear from Rushan Abbas, Founder and Executive Director of the Campaign for Uyghurs and Chairwoman of the Executive Committee of the World Uyghur Congress. Her testimony will be followed by Norgay Tenzin, Research Analyst at the International Campaign for Tibet, and then Corey Jackson, Founder and President of the Luke Alliance. Lastly, we will hear from Annie Wilcox Boyajian, President and Mark Palmer Distinguished Fellow of Freedom House. Their full testimonies can be found on USCIRF's website.

Professor Destro, you may now begin your testimony.

Thank you, Professor Destro.

Ms. Abbas, you may now begin your testimony.

Ms. Abbas, thank you very much.

We will now hear from Norgay Tenzin. Mr. Tenzin, please begin.

Mr. Tenzin, thank you very much.

We will now hear from Mr. Corey Jackson. Mr. Jackson, over to you.

Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

We will lastly hear from Annie Wilcox Boyajian. Ms. Boyajian, please begin.

Ms. Boyajian, thank you very much.

And thank you all for your insightful testimonies. At this time, I will turn to the question and answer portion of this event.