



## U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

### Technological Surveillance of Religion in China

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

**Gayle Manchin, USCIRF Chair:**

Good morning and welcome to today's hearing on *Technological Surveillance of Religion in China*. I would like to thank our distinguished witnesses for joining us to offer their expertise on this topic.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. government advisory body created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, or IRFA. The Commission monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad, using international standards to do so, and makes policy recommendations to Congress, the President, and the Secretary of State. Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory authority under IRFA to convene this hearing. Of course, because of the coronavirus, we are still conducting hearings at USCIRF virtually rather than in person.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the tremendous suffering the people of China have experienced under the Chinese Communist government. USCIRF has been warning about religious freedom violations in China since the Commission was created in 1998, and the situation has only deteriorated since then.

It is now clear to the world that the Chinese government has detained millions of Uyghur and other Muslims in concentration camps, forced them to work in factories, and subjected them to sterilization and other genocidal population control measures. Authorities have continued to wage a campaign to assimilate the Tibetan people, demolishing historic monastic complexes and arresting Tibetans for possessing pictures of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Throughout the country, Chinese authorities have raided underground house churches, arrested Christians who refuse to join the state-run churches, and banned children younger than 18 years old from attending services. Meanwhile, the government has banned the Falun Gong and Church of Almighty God movements and ruthlessly arrested thousands of practitioners.

Today's hearing will examine how the Chinese government's use of advanced surveillance technology threatens the freedom of all religious groups in China. This hearing comes in the context of broader discussions around the world about the potential risks of artificial intelligence, facial recognition technology, DNA collection, and social media. A recent report by the National Institute of Standards and Technology documented that algorithms regularly misidentified Asian and African faces, leading to concerns about "automated racism." Social media companies have come under increased scrutiny for allowing the proliferation on their platforms of hate speech against ethnic and religious minorities.

It is not our purpose today to judge the morality of these new and emerging technologies. Indeed, with the proper safeguards and oversight, these tools can be harnessed for the good of society. However, that is not what we are seeing today in China, where the Communist Party is deliberately using technology to undermine religious freedom and other fundamental rights.

I will now turn to my colleague, Vice Chair Tony Perkins, to discuss this in greater detail.