



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

Targeted Sanctions: Implications for International Religious Freedom

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Nadine Maenza, USCIRF Chair

Good morning and thank you for attending the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's hearing today on *Targeted Sanctions: Implications for International Religious Freedom*. We are grateful to have Senators Ben Cardin and Roger Wicker, as well as Representative Jim McGovern, join us today. Each of them played a vital role in the passage of the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act. Their bipartisan leadership transformed how the U.S. government holds human rights abusers accountable for their crimes. In our 2021 annual report, USCIRF recommended that Congress reauthorize the Global Magnitsky sanctions regime by passing S.93, which will expand the actors and abusers eligible for visa property blocking sanctions. Thank you all for your

important work and for taking time out of your schedules to give remarks today.

Senator Cardin, the floor is yours.

It is a special honor to hold this hearing and host our distinguished witnesses on International Religious Freedom Day. Twenty-three years ago today, then President Bill Clinton signed into law the International Religious Freedom Act, or IRFA, which made the advancement of freedom of religion or belief abroad a priority in U.S. foreign policy and also created our Commission, known as USCIRF, an independent, bipartisan U.S. government advisory body. The Commission uses international standards to monitor conditions for freedom of religion or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the U.S. government. Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory authority under IRFA to convene this virtual hearing.

In Burma, the Burmese military perpetrated mass killings, torture, and rape against the mostly Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2017, forcing over 700,000 to flee to Bangladesh within days. The United Nations has called for the Burmese Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing to be prosecuted for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes for leading the military to commit such

horrendous crimes. Hlaing seized the country in a military coup this February and has continued the brutal and violent assault of the Rohingya.

In China, Chen Quanguo, China's Xinjiang Communist Party Secretary, created the blueprint for the dystopian surveillance state that has led to millions of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims being placed in concentration camps. In January 2021, the State Department designated the atrocities in Xinjiang, which Chen continues to orchestrate, as genocide and crimes against humanity.

Besides both being responsible for atrocity crimes, another commonality between Chen and Hlaing is that they were both sanctioned under the 2016 Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and the related 2017 executive order, E.O. 13818.

The Global Magnitsky Act provides authority to deny U.S. visas to and freeze the U.S.-based assets of any foreigner responsible for “extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally protected human rights” against someone seeking to expose illegal government activity or to exercise or defend internationally protected rights. Executive Order 13818, issued in December 2017

to implement the Global Magnitsky Act, authorizes visa bans and asset freezes against foreign persons involved in “serious human rights abuse,” providing an even more expansive basis for targeted sanctions.

Alongside Global Magnitsky, the U.S. government has used other tools to impose consequences on violators of religious freedom. Section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act requires the Secretary of State to make foreign officials and their immediate family members ineligible for U.S. entry if there is credible evidence that such individuals have been involved in “a gross violation of human rights.”

Today, we will discuss how these targeted human rights sanctions have been and can be utilized within the broader U.S. foreign policy strategy to address religious freedom violations. This discussion is particularly timely as the Global Magnitsky Act is set to expire next year. At this pivotal moment, we will reflect on the success of the current program and consider opportunities to strengthen the legislative framework.

I will now turn the floor over to Vice Chair Turkle to discuss USCIRF’s recommendations related to targeted sanctions.