

**TESTIMONY**

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE**

**OF THE**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM**

**ON**

**REVIEW OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN PROTECTING**

**INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

**BY**

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I am Kristina Arriaga, Vice Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the National Security Subcommittee of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on the “Review of the U.S. Government’s Role in Protecting International Religious Freedom.”

I am honored to appear before this subcommittee and appreciate your interest in USCIRF’s assessment of the government’s role in protecting international religious freedom. In my testimony, I will highlight: why we should care about freedom of religion or belief as a core human right and a source of peace, stability and economic vitality; the different ways governments, recognizing the power of religion, seek to control their citizens and in the process sow instability and insecurity; the tools, some new, that our government can and should use; and recommendations for Congress.

It saddens me to report that the state of affairs for international religious freedom appears to be worsening in the depth and breadth of violations by both governments and non-state actors. Religious minorities and dissenting members of the majority community face many abuses worldwide, including imprisonment, displacement, and genocide, and non-state actors present increasing challenges. In fact, the violations are so egregious that less egregious abuses often go unnoticed. However, as I will note shortly, I believe that there is an increased recognition of the importance of this precious right to stability and security, and with this recognition some new tools have been created to confront these challenges.

### **Why the Freedom of Religion or Belief needs to be a Factor in U.S. Foreign Policy**

When we consider the conditions and possible trajectories of countries that top the U.S. foreign policy agenda and the national security implications if these conditions are not addressed, it seems obvious that our government, using international standards, must factor freedom of religion or belief into our foreign policy. And then there is another fact: simply put, people care about religion. A reported 84% of the world’s population identifies with a specific religious group, and, according to the most recent Pew Research Center study on global religious restrictions and hostilities, more than three-quarters of the world’s population live in countries in which religion is restricted significantly, either by the government or societal actors.

So we know that religion and religious freedom are key factors in nations that top the U.S. foreign policy agenda. We also know that people care about religion. Yet for far too long, the U.S. government did not give this foundational human right the priority it merited. Many in government asserted that religion belonged, if at all, in the private sphere, or simply did not matter much in the modern world. This view reflects what commonly has been known as the secularization thesis: that as societies progress and modernize, religion loses its authority and secular institutions achieve supremacy.

Nothing could be further from the truth. World events repeatedly have demonstrated that religion remains central to people, and our nation and its diplomats cannot have productive dialogues and satisfactory relations or outcomes if we ignore, downplay, or dismiss religion’s pivotal role.

I am pleased to report that our government increasingly is recognizing the importance of freedom of religion or belief as a source for lasting stability and sustainable security, and that violations of

this essential freedom can feed instability and insecurity. As Secretary of State Tillerson noted when [releasing](#) the most recent International Religious Freedom Report, “[w]here religious freedom is not protected, we know that instability, human rights abuses, and violent extremism have a greater opportunity to take root.” Then Secretary of State John Kerry made the same point in 2013 [remarks](#): “when countries undermine or attack religious freedom, they not only unjustly threaten those whom they target; they also threaten their country’s own stability.”

For the past several years, more Executive Branch officials are working on international religious freedom than ever before and Congress has supported USCIRF and passed measures that include robust funding for international religious freedom-related issues.

### **Violations of Religious Freedom**

Government Abuses: Many foreign governments also understand the importance of freedom of religion or belief. Some are fearful of religion (and its adherents) as an alternate source of authority, especially in light of the relative ease of communication in the Internet age. These nations seek to repress this unwelcome competitor for their absolute power through repressive legal systems and laws, brute force, crack downs, and imprisoning members of religious communities. These tactics create more instability, not the enhanced security these governments seek. Examples of these types of governmental abuses include:

- **“Securitizing” Religious Freedom**: Some governments – including those in Russia, Central Asia, and China – use national security concerns to justify religious freedom violations. They severely limit religious communities’ activities through anti-extremism and anti-terrorism laws which stifle peaceful dissent and imprison non-violent religious practitioners and their advocates.
- **Pitting Groups against Each Other to Enhance its Power**: Both the Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad regimes in Iraq and Syria pitted communities against each other, creating the conditions that lead to sectarian strife and conflict once these regimes began to lose their tight grip on power. Even today, the inability and sometimes refusal of the Iraqi and Syrian governments to curb sectarian attacks (such as those of the Popular Mobilization Forces assaults on Iraq’s Sunni Arab population, and the Shi’a Iranian-backed militias attacks on Sunni Arab communities in Syria) have exacerbated religious tensions between Syria’s and Iraq’s diverse religious communities.
- **Allowing Violators to Act with Impunity**: Coupled with efforts to sponsor violent ideologies, government inaction to prevent or punish religious freedom violations is a proven recipe for abuses. Instead of enforcing the law and protecting vulnerable populations, some governments turn a blind eye to violations, thereby creating climates of impunity. For example, funding reportedly originating in Saudi Arabia is used globally to finance religious schools, mosques, hate literature, and other activities that support religious intolerance and, in some cases, violence toward non-Muslims and disfavored Muslims. In Nigeria, the federal government continued to fail to implement effective strategies to prevent Muslim-Christian violence or to hold perpetrators accountable.

- **Targeting a Group and Inciting Vigilante Groups and Others to Violence:** Government targeting of members of religious minority communities, or dissenting members of majority communities, incite vigilante and other groups to violence. For instance, in India, seven states have adopted anti-conversion laws that restrict the right of individuals to freely convert from one faith to another. These laws have created a climate in which Hindu Nationalist groups, in particular, feel emboldened to harass and violently attack religious minority communities, especially Christian churches, leaders, and laity. In Iran, hundreds of pro-government articles have appeared online and in print inciting religious hatred and encouraging violence against Baha'is.

Blasphemy charges and accusations also can incite violence by vigilante groups in many countries. Blasphemy is “the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God.” In nearly 70 countries worldwide, laws criminalize acts and expression deemed contemptuous of sacred things, which some governments justify as necessary to promote religious harmony. In fact, they do the opposite: they restrict the freedoms of religion and expression, thereby violating two of the most hallowed human rights, and lead to abuses and the destabilization of societies.

Pakistan, where the crime of blasphemy carries the death penalty or life imprisonment, has the dubious distinction of having more people sentenced to jail for blasphemy than any other country. USCIRF is aware of nearly 40 prisoners convicted of blasphemy charges who have received life sentences or are on death row in Pakistan. Others have been killed by vigilante mobs just for being accused of blasphemy.

USCIRF recently released two reports on blasphemy. [\*Respecting Rights: Measuring the World's Blasphemy Laws\*](#) shows how blasphemy laws around the world fall short of international human rights benchmarks. The report catalogs the offending laws found in more than one-third of the world's nations. The other report highlights [selected blasphemy cases](#), underscoring the fact that these unfair laws impact individuals.

Abuses by Non-State Actors: Governments are not the only actors that commit severe religious freedom violations. Increasingly, non-state actors, especially in failing or failed states, commit systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. Non-state actors vary greatly and include individuals, mobs, vigilante groups, anti-government insurgents, militant organizations, and U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). They differ significantly in ideology, purpose, end goals, and level of international and domestic recognition. Generally, they are motivated by a violent religious ideology and seek to impose their religious beliefs on local populations and harshly punish those who do not abide by their religious edicts.

Non-state actors are among the primary perpetrators of egregious religious freedom violations, and the source of instability, in countries including the Central African Republic, Syria and Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

## Selected Case Studies

The United States government has an important role to play, both reactively and proactively, in promoting freedom of religion or belief, pursuant to international standards. Both the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) and the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act provide some of the tools to do so, including the “country of particular concern” (CPC) designation. Through the CPC designation, the U.S. government designates countries that commit systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief, as defined in international human rights law. I discuss these and other tools in more detail later in my testimony.

Burma, Iraq and Syria, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Russia, to name just a few, are nations in which egregious religious freedom violations threaten stability and progress. Not recognizing these violations for what they are, but rather blaming other factors, limits the United States’ ability to achieve its foreign policy goals.

- **Burma:** While Burma has taken some important steps in its transition from a military dictatorship, conditions for the country’s religious and ethnic minorities have severely deteriorated. The Burmese security forces have created a staggering humanitarian disaster, which the United Nations has labeled ethnic cleansing, by killing hundreds of Rohingya Muslims and forcing more than 400,000 to seek refuge in Bangladesh since late August. Non-state actors such as Ma Ba Tha and other nationalist individuals and groups merit continued international scrutiny for their severe violations of religious freedom and related human rights.

Given that the National League for Democracy (NLD) government has allowed systematic, egregious, and ongoing violations of freedom of religion or belief to continue, USCIRF has recommended that Burma continue to be designated a CPC, in 2017. The State Department has designated Burma as a CPC since 1999, most recently in October 2016, and should continue to make this designation.

- **Iraq and Syria:** Religious freedom conditions in Syria continue to deteriorate and significant challenges remain in Iraq. Notwithstanding differences between the two, religious minorities and dissenting members of the majority community in both nations face the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’s (ISIS) egregious and barbarous attacks. These attacks have threatened some communities’ very existence. Regrettably, the actions of both governments provided fertile ground for ISIS’s advancement.

In March 2016, then-Secretary of State Kerry proclaimed that groups including Yazidis, Christians, and Shi’a Muslims in Iraq and Syria are victims of genocide by ISIS, also referred to as Daesh. In his statement, Secretary of State John Kerry rightly observed that: “Daesh is responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control,” is “genocidal by self-proclamation, by ideology, and by actions,” and that it “kills Christians because they are Christians; Yezidis because they are Yezidis; Shia because they are Shia.”

On August 15, 2017, at the release of the International Religious Freedom Report, Secretary of State Tillerson similarly stated that “ISIS is clearly responsible for genocide against Yezidis, Christians, and Shi’a Muslims in areas it controls or has controlled,” and “is also responsible

for crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing” directed at these and other groups. He also stated that “the protection of these groups – and others subject to violent extremism – is a human rights priority for the Trump administration.”

While there has been some success militarily in confronting ISIS, religious and ethnic minorities in both nations face daunting challenges. Thus, the swift enactment of H.R. 390, the Iraq and Syria Genocide Emergency Relief and Accountability Act of 2017, is imperative. This vitally needed measure would provide emergency relief for victims of genocide and crimes against humanity in Iraq and Syria, address urgent humanitarian, stabilization and recovery needs, and provide accountability for perpetrators of these crimes. In addition, USCIRF has recommended in 2017 that Syria be designated as a CPC, and that ISIS be designated an “Entity of Particular Concern” for its systematic, ongoing and egregious violations in Iraq and Syria.

- **Nigeria:** Widespread challenges continue to impact religious freedom in Nigeria. Fears of ethnic and religious domination are longstanding. Religious identity, which frequently falls along regional, ethnic, political, and socioeconomic lines, routinely provides a flashpoint for violence. Sectarian violence between predominately Muslim herders and Christian farmers has increased, and the Nigerian federal government has failed to implement effective strategies to prevent or stop such violence or to hold perpetrators accountable. The Nigerian government at the federal and state levels continues to repress the Shi’a Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), including holding IMN leader Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky without charge, imposing state-level bans on the group’s activities, and failing to hold accountable Nigerian Army officers who used excessive force against IMN members. The Nigerian military continues to recapture territory from Boko Haram and arrest its members, but the government’s nonmilitary efforts to stop Boko Haram are insufficient. Finally, other religious freedom abuses continue at the state level. Based on these concerns, in 2017 USCIRF again has recommended that Nigeria be designated a CPC, as the Commission has since 2009.
- **Pakistan:** Pakistan has a severe religious freedom problem. Both USCIRF and the State Department consistently have documented the Pakistani government’s systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations. Religiously discriminatory constitutional provisions and laws, such as the country’s blasphemy and anti-Ahmadiyya laws, continue to result in prosecutions and imprisonments. At least 40 individuals have been sentenced to death or are serving life sentences for blasphemy. An elderly Ahmadi, Abdul Shakor, was sentenced in January 2016 to eight years in prison, three years under the Penal Code for blasphemy and five years under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Religious minority communities, including Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and Shi’a Muslims, also experience religiously-motivated and sectarian violence from both terrorist organizations and individuals within society; the government’s longstanding failure to prevent or prosecute such violence has created a deep-rooted climate of impunity that has emboldened extremist actors. Provincial textbooks with discriminatory content against minorities remain a significant concern.

USCIRF has recommended every year since 2002 that the State Department designate Pakistan a CPC. Despite USCIRF’s longstanding recommendation, the State Department has never designated Pakistan as a CPC.

- **Russia:** Russia has not only intensified its repression of religious freedom, but it also expanded its repressive policies to the territory of a neighboring state by means of military invasion and occupation. The government has implemented these policies, ranging from administrative harassment to arbitrary imprisonment to extrajudicial killing, in a fashion that is systematic, ongoing, and egregious. In mainland Russia, new laws effectively criminalized all private religious speech the state does not sanction. The government also banned the Jehovah's Witnesses and has targeted the Scientologists, and has tried innocent Muslims on fabricated charges of terrorism and extremism. In the North Caucasus, particularly in Chechnya and Dagestan, security forces carried out with impunity arrests, kidnappings, and disappearances of persons suspected of any links to "non-traditional" Islam. In Crimea, which Russia has occupied since 2014, Russian authorities have co-opted the spiritual life of the Muslim Crimean Tatar minority and arrested or driven into exile its community representatives. In the Russian-occupied para-states of eastern Ukraine, religious freedom is at the whim of armed militias not beholden to any legal authority. Russia also has not tolerated critics of these policies: the two most prominent domestic human rights groups that monitor freedom of religion or belief were officially branded as "foreign agents" in 2016. Based on these particularly severe violations, in 2017 USCIRF for the first time has recommended that Russia merits being designated a CPC.

### **Tools in the U.S. Government Arsenal**

The U.S. government has tools, some of which are new, that can be used to help counter the violations of religious freedom abroad and the resulting violence and insecurity, and help nations achieve freedom of religion or belief. For these and other efforts, Congress needs to appropriate ample funding, exercise its oversight responsibility, tirelessly focus on accountability, and continually create and refine the tools needed to address new challenges, including accountability for genocide and crimes against humanity.

Before noting some of these tools, I want to highlight legislation I referenced earlier and urge its immediate enactment: H.R. 390, the Iraq and Syria Genocide Emergency Relief and Accountability Act. This bill has two main goals: (1) promoting accountability for the various atrocity crimes committed by ISIS and other foreign terrorist organizations operating within Iraq and Syria and (2) addressing humanitarian, stabilization, and recovery needs for persecuted religious and/or ethnic minorities. The House passed the bill and sent it to the Senate where the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported out an amended version that included the provisions of S. 905, the Syrian War Crimes Accountability Act, another vitally needed measure. USCIRF urges the full Senate quickly to take up this urgently needed legislation, the House swiftly to reconsider it, and the President expeditiously to sign it into law.

Current tools include:

**IRFA:** Congress, recognizing the need to arm the U.S. government with tools to address the violations of the freedom of religion or belief, introduced and passed the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), which President Clinton signed into law (P.L. 105-292). IRFA, among other provisions, stipulates that the President should designate as CPCs those countries that commit "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" violations of religious freedom. The Act also

provides a menu of actions that the U.S. government should take in consequence of this designation.

- USCIRF’s CPC recommendations: USCIRF recommends that the State Department again designate 10 countries as CPCs in 2017 because of the governments’ “systematic, ongoing, and egregious” violations of religious freedom: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. USCIRF also finds that six other countries meet the CPC standard and should be so designated: Central African Republic, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Syria, and Vietnam.
- The Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom: IRFA created the position of the Ambassador-at-Large for International Freedom (AAL). The AAL heads the Office of International Religious Freedom and helps coordinate the Executive Branch’s efforts in support of freedom of religion or belief abroad. USCIRF has urged the prompt appointment of a qualified and experienced individual who, after confirmation, is given the authority and resources necessary to carry out the position. USCIRF also has called for the development and implementation of a whole-of-government strategy to guide how the U.S. government will protect and promote religious freedom abroad and the establishment of an interagency working group, which the AAL co-chairs with the Special Adviser to the President on International Religious Freedom, to oversee implementation.

As an *ex-officio* member of USCIRF, the AAL is a direct connection between the Executive Branch and the Commission, which is a legislative entity. Commissioners deeply valued the many contributions of the last AAL, Rabbi David Saperstein, and welcomed the nomination of Governor Sam Brownback as the new AAL.

**The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 114-281)**: IRFA was amended several times, but none of these measures, until the Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, focused on updating the law so that it would reflect contemporary conditions on the ground and provide needed new tools. Important provisions in the Wolf Act include:

- The Ambassador at Large: The Act requires that the Ambassador at Large report directly to the Secretary of State and be the principal adviser to the Secretary on international religious freedom matters. However, according to the Secretary’s reorganization plan, the Ambassador-at-Large is to report to the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights (J).
- CPC Requirements: The Act requires the President to make CPC designations not later than 90 days after the release of the annual report (November 13, 2017) and notify Congress not later than 90 days after these designations (February 11, 2018) about the parties responsible for the violations giving rise to the designation, the actions the U.S. government has taken in response, and the effectiveness of these actions.
- Special Watch List: The Act also creates a State Department “Special Watch List” by requiring the President to designate annually each country that engaged in or tolerated severe violations



of religious freedom during the previous year but does not meet, in the opinion of the President, the CPC threshold.

USCIRF's Tier 2 is similar in character to the Special Watch List. In the 2017 Annual Report, USCIRF placed 12 countries on Tier 2: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malaysia, and Turkey. USCIRF's Tier 2 includes countries where the violations are serious and meet one or two, but not all three, of the "systematic, ongoing, and egregious" test.

- Entities of Particular Concern: The Act requires the President to identify non-state actors that commit systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations and designate them as "entities of particular concern," or EPCs. The act defines a non-state actor as "a non-sovereign entity that exercises significant political power and territorial control; is outside the control of a sovereign government; and often employs violence in pursuit of its objectives."

USCIRF recommends in the 2017 Annual Report that ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and al-Shabaab in Somalia be designated EPCs. But for the territorial requirement in the new law, USCIRF would have recommended Boko Haram, the Taliban in Pakistan, and ISIS affiliates in Bangladesh and Egypt.

- Curriculum/Training for Foreign Service Officers: The law requires the Ambassador-at-Large, in coordination with other Federal officials as appropriate and in consultation with USCIRF, to make recommendations to the Secretary of State about the curriculum to be used for religious freedom training for Foreign Service Officers. Such training is to be included in the A-100 course all Foreign Service officers attend and the courses required of every Foreign Service Officer, deputy chief of mission, and ambassador prior to a posting outside of the United States with segments tailored to the particular religious demography, religious freedom conditions, and U.S. strategies for advancing religious freedom in each receiving country. The law also recommends that the curriculum and training materials be shared with the U.S. Armed Forces and other Federal departments and agencies with personnel stationed overseas.
- Designated Persons List for Particularly Severe Violations of Religious Freedom: The law: 1) directs the Secretary of State, in coordination with the Ambassador-at-Large and in consultation with relevant government and nongovernment experts, to establish and maintain a list of foreign individuals to whom the consular post has denied a visa on grounds of particularly severe violations of religious freedom, or who are subject to financial sanctions, or other measures, for particularly severe violations of religious freedom; 2) requires the Secretary to submit to Congress a report that contains the list required under this subsection and a description of the actions taken; and 3) requires updates to the report every 180 days thereafter and as new information becomes available.
- National Security Strategy: The law recognizes the connection between security and the promotion of religious freedom by expressing, through a sense of Congress, that the President's annual national security strategy report should promote international religious freedom as a foreign policy and national security priority and should articulate that promoting religious freedom is a strategy that protects other, related human rights, and advances democracy outside

the United States; and the national security strategy report should be a guide for the strategies and activities of relevant Federal agencies and inform the Department of Defense's quadrennial defense review.

- **Prisoner List:** The law requires USCIRF, to the extent practicable, to compile online and in official publications, lists of persons it determines are imprisoned, detained, disappeared, placed under house arrest, tortured, or subject to forced renunciations of faith for their religious activity or religious freedom advocacy by the government of a foreign country that the Commission recommends for designation as a country of particular concern or a non-state actor the Commission recommends for designation as an entity of particular concern, and include as much publicly available information as practicable on the conditions and circumstances of such persons.

**The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act:** This Act gives the United States a powerful accountability tool by authorizing the President to impose U.S. entry and property sanctions against any foreign person (or entity) who:

- Is responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights committed against individuals in any foreign country seeking to expose illegal activity carried out by government officials, or to obtain, exercise, or promote human rights and freedoms;
- Acted as an agent of or on behalf of a foreign person in such activities;
- Is a government official or senior associate of such official responsible for, or complicit in, ordering or otherwise directing acts of significant corruption, including the expropriation of private or public assets for personal gain, corruption related to government contracts or the extraction of natural resources, bribery, or the facilitation or transfer of the proceeds of corruption to foreign jurisdictions; or
- Has materially assisted or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services in support of, such activities.

**Focusing on Prisoners of Conscience:** It is vitally important to shine a light on prisoners of conscience who have been unjustly prevented from enjoying the most fundamental human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and other international human rights instruments and standards, as well as on the laws and actions that have led to their imprisonment. It also is important to advocate for these prisoners of conscience until they are free – and until the countries that have imprisoned them have implemented needed reforms that reflect the internationally approved standards that many of them have agreed to in writing but violate in practice.

A focus on individuals makes concrete and understandable the impact of unjust laws: people often are numbed by large numbers and cataclysmic events that are beyond their control and understanding. To address this concern, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission launched an initiative in the House of Representatives, in conjunction with USCIRF and Amnesty International

USA, called the Defending Freedoms Project. The initiative aims to draw attention to prisoners of conscience around the world by having Members of Congress advocate in support of individual prisoners.

Along with working to fulfill the prisoners lists mandate noted above from P.L. 114-281, USCIRF has created the Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project whereby Commissioners select a prisoner of conscience (see Appendix), advocate on his or her behalf, and highlight the conditions in the country that led to their imprisonment. Commissioners' selections are:

- China: Gulmira Imin – Vice Chair Sandra Jolley
- China: Panchen Lama – Commissioner Tenzin Dorjee
- Eritrea: Patriarch Abune Antonios – Commissioner Thomas J. Reese, S.J.
- Iran: Fariba Kamalabadi – Vice Chair Kristina Arriaga
- Iran: Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani – Commissioner Jackie Wolcott
- Pakistan: Abdul Shakoor – Chairman Daniel Mark
- Russia: Bagir Kazikhanov – Commissioner John Ruskey
- Saudi Arabia: Raif Badawi – Commissioner Cliff May

**Empowering Women through Religious Freedom:** Building lasting peace and sustainable security requires the participation of women, and during conflicts, women often are targeted for violence and discrimination. Around the globe, many women are deeply religious, yet religion has been used to disempower women. USCIRF's reporting has documented that women and girls often are victims of religious freedom violations, violent extremism, discriminatory personal status laws, and laws that restrict religious dress, and has highlighted the plight of female prisoners of conscience. In fact, it is a betrayal of the very foundations of freedom of religion or belief whenever it is misused to justify inexcusable and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, child brides, and forced conversions.

While such dire vulnerabilities exist, Commissioners began to be concerned that this kind of reporting could be viewed as supporting the entrenched misperception that women's rights to equality and freedom of religion or belief are clashing rights. This misperception, however, does not take into account that the freedom of religion or belief is neither a right of "religion" as such, nor an instrument for the support of religiously phrased reservations and limitations on women's rights to equality. This view also misperceives the universal nature of all human rights and their indivisibility, interdependency, and inter-relatedness and the duty of all states to promote and protect human rights. One hundred and seventy-one states affirmed this stance in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action which the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna adopted on June 25, 1993:

All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms

With this understanding, the Commissioners decided to explore the complexities and synergies between the rights of women and girls and the freedom of religion or belief. To that end, USCIRF commissioned the report, [Women and Religious Freedom: Synergies and Opportunities](#).

The report explored this common misperception that women's rights to equality and freedom of religion or belief are clashing rights, finding instead that the two are indivisible and interrelated. Harmful practices affecting women and girls cannot be accepted as legitimate manifestations of religious freedom because the assertion of one human rights claim cannot be used to extinguish other rights. Moreover, freedom of religion or belief can play an important role in responding to harmful practices by: mobilizing belief-based actors; supporting individuals to understand and interpret their religion in harmony with the rights of others; and encouraging everyone to consider whether their religious laws should be imposed on others.

USCIRF will continue to explore these synergies and opportunities to use the freedom of religion or belief as a tool to empower women.

### **Congressional Leadership is Needed**

Congress has an important role to play in promoting the freedom of religion or belief abroad. Along with urging Congress to work with and support the Commission, USCIRF urges Members of Congress to:

**Support Legislation and Take Initiatives that Promotes Freedom of Religion or Belief Abroad:** Through legislation and appropriations, the Commission urges Congress to develop an international religious freedom strategy, support legislation that highlights positive examples, and focus on issues including: anti-blasphemy laws, genocide, violent religious extremism, religious prisoners of conscience, and religious freedom violations in specific countries. The Commission also urges Congress, through legislation and other initiatives, to urge the Executive Branch to more fully integrate international religious freedom policies into democracy promotion, public diplomacy, countering violent extremism and counterterrorism, and multilateral diplomacy. Finally, USCIRF urges Congress to craft legislation that includes remedies that underscore the human rights, foreign policy and national security dimensions of religious freedom and address violations by:

- Developing additional targeted visa bans and asset freezes for foreign government officials and other individuals and entities implicated in egregious violations of religious freedom;
- Developing specific sanctions directly related to a country's violation of religious freedom;
- Requiring the State Department and other Federal agencies to certify, prior to obligating aid to countries that violate religious freedom and related human rights, that the countries receiving any U.S. funding are implementing policies to protect the freedoms of religion, expression, association, and assembly, and providing heightened security for targeted religious communities and their places of congregation and worship; and

- Creating political, financial, and diplomatic tools to address particularly severe violations of religious freedom committed by non-state actors and foreign individuals as well as governments.

**Hold Hearings in Support of International Religious Freedom:** USCIRF urges Congress to hold hearings on international religious freedom and related issues.

**Focus on Competency in International Religious Freedom During Confirmation Hearings:** During confirmation hearings for officials in the State Department (including Ambassadorial nominees) and other agencies, USCIRF urges that Members of Congress raise the importance of freedom of religion or belief as a central component of U.S. foreign policy, and highlight the need for these officials to exhibit a core competency in this area.

**Monitor Required Curriculum Development and Training for Foreign Service Officers and Provide Adequate Funding:** USCIRF urges Congress to conduct oversight on the required training specific to religious freedom for all Foreign Service Officers, the development by the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom of a curriculum for training Foreign Service Officers on international religious freedom, and the sharing of the curriculum and training materials with the U.S. Armed Forces and other Federal entities with personnel stationed overseas or working with the international community. USCIRF also urges Congress to encourage the Ambassador-at-Large to consult with USCIRF on the development of this curriculum, and appropriate sufficient funding to develop and implement this curriculum and training.

**Engage the State Department, USAID and other Entities:** USCIRF urges Congress to encourage the State Department, USAID, and other government entities to prioritize programs that develop and disseminate educational and teacher training materials, especially in countries of concern, on international human rights and religious freedom standards and the centrality of interfaith understanding to achieving development objectives. USCIRF also urges that these programs be implemented especially in countries with public and private education systems that promote religious intolerance and extremism, and that the National Endowment for Democracy and other entities that receive federal funding solicit competitive proposals on specific international religious freedom programming.

**Conduct Oversight on the Implementation of P.L. 114-281, the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act:** Given that this law includes new mandates and responsibilities for both the State Department and USCIRF, USCIRF urges that Congress conduct oversight and ensure that adequate funding is appropriated to fulfill the new mandates and responsibilities.

**Support Civil Society, Prisoners of Conscience, and Religious Freedom Advocacy Networks Abroad:** During delegation trips abroad, USCIRF urges that Members of Congress meet with individuals and organizations that promote religious freedom and related human rights, targeted religious communities, and people detained for their religious freedom and human rights work or beliefs. USCIRF also urges Members to undertake delegations to “countries of particular concern” and “Special Watch List” countries to examine conditions of religious freedom. Finally, USCIRF urges that Members of Congress work with religious freedom advocacy networks including the International Panel of Parliamentarians on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

**Support Congressional Entities that Focus on Religious Freedom and Related Human Rights:** USCIRF urges Members of Congress to support the efforts of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, the Congressional International Religious Freedom Caucus, the Religious Minorities in the Middle East Caucus, and the Senate Human Rights Caucus.

**Promote Religious Freedom through Public Commemorations:** USCIRF urges Members of Congress elevate international religious freedom through Congressional press releases, briefings, hearings, and one-minutes on the Floor. For example, International Religious Freedom Day (October 27) and Religious Freedom Day (January 16) provide opportunities for public commemorations.

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While we face an enormously challenging landscape for the freedom of religion or belief abroad, I believe that a consensus finally is being achieved that this freedom is a foundational human right, a key factor in achieving stability and security abroad, and a necessary component of U.S. foreign policy. Such centrality is underscored by the many millions who care about this fundamental freedom, the governments that fear and oppress it, the other governments that support it, and the many prisoners of conscience worldwide who languish in detention because of their religious beliefs, actions, identity, and advocacy. We must not forget them.

The U.S. government, with Congress needing to play a central role, also has tools in its arsenal that would facilitate the promotion of this key freedom. The possibility of achieving real progress toward religious freedom and other human rights is in our hands, the hands of our fellow citizens, and the hands of citizens of nations worldwide.

We must not delay and we must have the political will to take action. As Martin Luther King said: “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”

## **Appendix: Religious Prisoners of Conscience**

Through USCIRF's Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project, Commissioners advocate in support of a prisoner of conscience. Through increased education, outreach, and advocacy, USCIRF hopes to raise awareness of these and other individuals being imprisoned for their religion or beliefs, reduce their number, and highlight the country conditions that led to their imprisonment.

# Gulmira Imin

**Country:** China

**Key Fact:** Community leader, website administrator, and government worker

**Detained Since:** July 14, 2009

**USCIRF Advocate:** Vice-Chair Sandra Jolley

**Biography:** Gulmira Imin is a Uighur Muslim and former web administrator for Salkin, a Uighur-language website. Ms. Imin was also a government employee in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in Northwest China. Xinjiang is home to the majority of the country's Uighur Muslim population.



Ms. Imin was born in 1978 in Aksu in Xinjiang and graduated in 2000 from the Chinese-Uighur translation department of Xinjiang University. In spring 2009, Ms. Imin became the moderator of Salkin, a website to which she had previously contributed poetry and short stories. Many of her online writings criticized government policies.

On July 5, 2009, Ms. Imin participated in a major demonstration protesting the deaths of Uighur migrant workers in Guangdong Province. Initially peaceful, the protests turned violent, with about 200 people, including ethnic Han Chinese, killed during the riots and confrontations with police. On July 14, 2009, Ms. Imin was arrested in Aksu after authorities alleged she had organized the protests, posted an announcement for them on Salkin, and leaked state secrets by phone to her husband in Norway. Her family was not notified of the arrest and was unaware of her location until the October 2009 airing of a China Central Television documentary that depicted Imin in prison garb.

On April 1, 2010, the Urumqi Intermediate People's Court sentenced Ms. Imin to life in prison under Articles 103, 111, and 296 of China's Criminal Law on charges of "splittism, leaking state secrets, and organizing an illegal demonstration." Ms. Imin alleges she was tortured and forced to sign documents while in detention. She also reportedly was not allowed to meet with her lawyer until the trial. Her appeal was subsequently rejected. Ms. Imin is currently detained in the Xinjiang Women's Prison (Xinjiang No. 2 Prison) located in Urumqi, where she is allowed one family visit every three months.



# Gedhun Choekyi Nyima – The Panchen Lama

**Country:** China

**Key Fact:** 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama

**Disappeared Since:** May 17, 1995

**USCIRF Advocate:** Commissioner Tenzin Dorjee

**Biography:** Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was born on April 25, 1989 in Lhari County, Tibet. After the death of the 10th Panchen Lama, His Holiness the Dalai Lama chose Gedhun on May 15, 1995 to be the 11th Panchen Lama, which is the second highest position in Tibetan Buddhism.



Three days after his selection as Panchen Lama, Chinese government authorities kidnapped then six-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family. On November 11, 1995, Chinese authorities announced their own pick to serve as the Panchen Lama: Gyancaïn Norbu. Most Tibetan Buddhists have rejected him.

In the more than 20 years since Gedhun's abduction, Chinese authorities have provided little information about his whereabouts, alleging that they need to protect him from being "kidnapped by separatists." In May 2007, Asma Jahangir, then-United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, suggested that the Chinese government allow an independent expert to visit and confirm Gedhun's well-being. On July 17, 2007, the Chinese authorities said that he is a "perfectly ordinary Tibetan boy" attending school and leading a normal life, and that he "does not wish to be disturbed." Chinese authorities also say that the state employs both of his parents and that his brothers and sisters are either working or at university.

# Patriarch Abune Antonios

**Country:** Eritrea

**Key Fact:** Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church

**Detained Since:** May 27, 2007

**USCIRF Advocate:** Commissioner Thomas J. Reese, S.J.

**Biography:** Patriarch Abune Antonios was born on July 12, 1927, in Himberti, a town north of the Eritrean capital, Asmara. His father was a priest. At the age of five, Patriarch Antonios entered the monastery of Debre Tsege Abuna Andrewes, where he was educated, ordained a deacon at the age of 12, and then served as a monk. Patriarch Antonios was ordained a priest in 1942 and was eventually elected Abbot in 1955.



When the Eritrean Orthodox Church first sought its independence, Patriarch Antonios was one of the five abbots from monasteries sent to Egypt to be ordained a bishop so that the church would be able to constitute its own Holy Synod. Antonios was ordained as Bishop Antonios of Hamasien-Asmara on June 19, 1994, in Saint Mark's Cathedral in Cairo by His Holiness Shenouda III, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria.

Following the death in 2003 of Abune Yacoub, then Patriarch of the Eritrean Church, Patriarch Antonios was elected as the third Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church by a joint vote of the Holy Synod and representatives of all dioceses in the presence of the delegates of the Holy Synod of the Egyptian Orthodox Church. Pope Shenouda III, assisted by Eritrean and Coptic Orthodox Metropolitans and Bishops, ordained and enthroned Antonios as Patriarch on April 23, 2004.

The Eritrean government notified Patriarch Antonios on January 20, 2006, that he would no longer lead the country's largest religious denomination after he called for the release of political prisoners and refused to excommunicate 3,000 parishioners who opposed the government. One year later, on January 20, 2007, authorities confiscated Patriarch Antonios' personal pontifical insignia. On May 27, 2007, the Eritrean government replaced Patriarch Antonios with Bishop Dioscoros of Mendefera, forcefully removed the Patriarch from his home, and placed him under house arrest at an undisclosed location. Patriarch Antonios, who is 90 years old, continues to be held incommunicado and reportedly is being denied medical care despite suffering from severe diabetes.

Eritrean authorities briefly allowed Patriarch Antonios to appear in public for the first time in over a decade at a Mass held at St. Mary's Cathedral in Asmara on July 16, 2017. However, the Patriarch was prevented from concelebrating or speaking to his congregants during the event and was quickly placed back under detention after the Mass concluded.

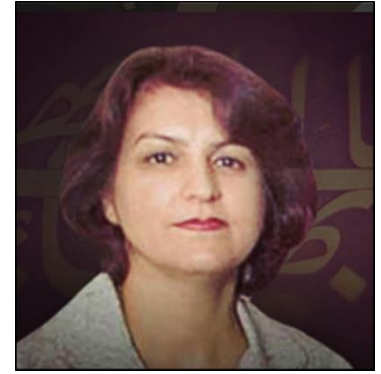
# Fariba Kamalabadi

**Country:** Iran

**Key Fact:** Developmental psychologist and Baha'i member

**Detained Since:** May 14, 2008

**Charges:** Espionage, propaganda against the Islamic Republic, and establishment of an illegal administration



**USCIRF Advocate:** Vice-Chair Kristina Arriaga

**Biography:** Fariba Kamalabadi was born on September 12, 1962, in Tehran, Iran. Ms. Kamalabadi graduated from high school with honors but was barred from attending university due to her Baha'i faith.

In her mid-30s, Ms. Kamalabadi embarked on an eight-year period of informal study and eventually received an advanced degree in developmental psychology from the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE), an alternative institution the Baha'i community of Iran established to provide higher education for its young people. The Iranian government does not recognize the BIHE.

Ms. Kamalabadi is one of the seven Baha'i leaders known as "Yaran" or "Friends," who tended to the spiritual and social needs of the Iranian Baha'i community in the absence of a formally elected Baha'i leadership due to restrictions by the Iranian government. The other six members are Mahvash Sabet, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli, and Vahid Tizfahm.

Ms. Kamalabadi was arrested on May 14, 2008 after an early morning raid on her home. Ms. Kamalabadi and the other Baha'i Seven were held incommunicado for weeks, placed in solitary confinement for months, and spent a year behind bars without access to legal counsel. In 2010, the seven were tried and convicted of charges of "espionage" and "spreading propaganda against the regime." The Seven were sentenced to 20 years in prison, longer than any current prisoners of conscience in Iran.

In 2013, Iran passed a reformed Islamic Penal Code that stipulated that courts may carry out only the most severe punishment assigned to a prisoner, rather than carrying out multiple, similar punishments for related crimes. In early 2016, the Baha'i Seven were informed that this rule would be applied to their cases, reducing their imprisonment from 20 years to 10 years.

Ms. Kamalabadi currently is being held in Tehran's Evin prison, along with other female prisoners of conscience.

Ms. Kamalabadi married fellow Baha'i Ruhollah Taefi in 1982 and they have three children, Vargha, Alhan, and Taraneh. Ms. Kamalabadi's father was fired from his job in the government health service in the 1980s because he was a Baha'i; he was later imprisoned and tortured.

# Youcef Nadarkhani

**Country:** Iran

**Key Fact:** Pastor repeatedly targeted by the Iranian government

**Start of Latest Government Action:** May 13, 2016

**Charges:** Acting against national security

**Sentence:** 10 years imprisonment and two years of exile in southern Iran

**USCIRF Advocate:** Commissioner Jackie Wolcott



**Biography:** Youcef Nadarkhani was born on April 11, 1977 to Muslim parents in Rasht, Iran. Although he was not religious as a child, he converted to Christianity when he was 19, becoming a member of the Only Jesus Church. He is the pastor of a 400-member house church and a member of the evangelical Church of Iran.

Pastor Nadarkhani and his wife were among several Christians whom officials from the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence detained in the city of Rasht on May 13, 2016, releasing them the same day. Three other Christians arrested with them (Yasser Mossayebzadeh, Saheb Fadaie, and Mohammad Reza Omid) also were released on bail. However, on July 24, Pastor Nadarkhani again was detained, charged with “acting against national security,” and accused of being a Zionist and evangelizing. He was released the same day on condition that he raise within a week the equivalent of US \$33,000 for bail.

In October 2016, Pastor Nadarkhani and his three co-defendants were tried in Rasht. However, the court could not reach a verdict and transferred the case to a court in Tehran. The Revolutionary Court in Tehran held hearings in December 2016 and February and June 2017. During the June 24, 2017 hearing, officials charged them with “acting against national security,” and the presiding Judge Ahmadzadeh reportedly accused their church of annually receiving 500,000 pounds (\$650,000) from the British government. Non-presiding Judge Abolghasem Salavati reportedly burst into the courtroom and disrupted the proceeding, proclaiming that Christians “make foolish claims.” On July 6, 2017, the four Christians received a verdict backdated to June 24. Each was sentenced to 10 years in prison and was allowed twenty days to appeal. Nadarkhani received an additional sentence of two years in exile in Nikshahr in southern Iran. As of August 15, 2017, Nadarkhani has yet to report to prison and the status of the appeal is uncertain.

Iranian authorities have previously targeted Pastor Nadarkhani on numerous occasions. His first imprisonment took place in December 2006 when he was charged with “apostasy” and “evangelism,” but was released two weeks later. On October 13, 2009, while applying to register his church, he was arrested after protesting a government policy that required all students, including his two young sons, to study the Quran in school. The tribunal charged Pastor Nadarkhani with “apostasy” and “evangelism.” On September 22, 2010, he verbally was issued a death sentence for apostasy. On November 13, 2010, officials of the Revolutionary Tribunal delivered the written verdict from the September trial: execution by hanging. The pastor and his attorney, Mohammad Ali Dadkhah, appealed the sentence. The Court found in September 2011 that Pastor Nadarkhani had committed apostasy because he was born to Muslim parents and left Islam after the legal age of majority. Advocacy and human rights groups believe his execution order was issued in February 2012. On September 8, 2012, amid continuing international outcry, Nadarkhani was acquitted of apostasy in a retrial and the court rescinded the death penalty, allowing him to leave prison, though he was briefly rearrested on December 25, 2012 before finally being fully released on January 7, 2013.

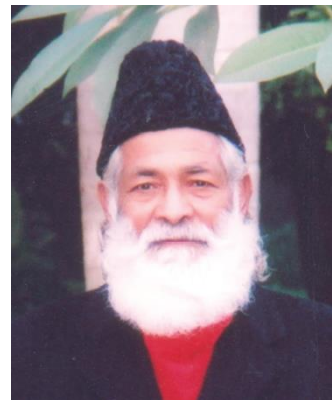
# Abdul Shakoor

**Country:** Pakistan

**Key Fact:** 80-year-old Ahmadi manager of a bookshop and optician store

**Detained Since:** December 2, 2015

**Charges:** Propagating the Ahmadiyya faith and stirring up “religious hatred” and “sectarianism”



**Sentence:** Three years in prison under the Pakistan Penal Code for blasphemy and five years under the Anti-Terrorism Act on January 2, 2016

**USCIRF Advocate:** Chairman Daniel Mark

**Biography:** Abdul Shakoor was born on February 2, 1937 in Qadian, India. He is married and the father of five daughters and two sons. Before his arrest, Mr. Shakoor was the manager of an optician’s store and bookshop in the main bazaar of Rabwah (also known as Chenab Nagar), Punjab Province, Pakistan. The population of the Ahmadiyya community in Rabwah, about 70,000, is about 95 percent of the city’s total population. Many view the city as the de facto headquarters of Pakistan’s Ahmadiyya community.

On December 2, 2015, officials from the Counter Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police and Pakistan’s Elite Force raided the bookshop Mr. Shakoor managed. He was arrested along with the shop’s assistant, Mazhar Abbas – a Shia Muslim – and accused of selling an Ahmadiyya commentary on the Qur’an, among other publications. The officials confiscated Ahmadiyya publications during that raid and a later raid that took place on December 9. After their arrest, the two men were held in unknown locations and were not permitted to contact their families.

Mr. Shakoor’s trial was held in the Anti-Terrorism Court in Faisalabad, Punjab province, with the officers who raided the bookstore as the only witnesses. The prosecution entered into evidence a letter (ostensibly recovered during the December 9 raid) from the Ahmadiyya Director of Public Affairs to Mr. Shakoor notifying him that the Punjab provincial government had banned some Ahmadiyya literature and that he should neither display nor sell the banned literature. Ahmadiyya leaders assert that the prosecution fabricated the letter to support their story, noting that none of the literature cited in the letter was banned until January 20, 2016, after the trial’s conclusion. Mr. Shakoor contended during the trial, and maintains the position, that he did not distribute any of the literature listed, although he admits to being in possession of some of them. However, possession of Ahmadiyya literature is not a crime in Pakistan.

On January 2, 2016, Mr. Shakoor was given a five-year prison sentence for violating article 11-W of the 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) which involves “printing, publishing, or disseminating any material to incite hatred.” He also was given a three-year sentence for violating article 298-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, for a total of eight years. (Section 298 of Pakistan’s Penal Code criminalizes acts and speech that insult a religion or religious beliefs or defile the Qur’an, the Prophet Muhammad, a place of worship, or religious symbols.) Mazhar Abbas was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment for violating article 11-W of the ATA. Mr. Shakoor filed a writ petition for bail and appeal against the verdict with the Lahore High Court. On multiple occasions, the Lahore High Court listed Mr. Shakoor’s appeal on the daily docket, but each time the case was postponed. The last postponed hearing date was believed to be June 22, 2017. Mr. Shakoor remains in prison and is suffering from a hernia and back pain.

# Bagir Kazikhanov

**Country:** Russia

**Key Fact:** Follower of Said Nursi

**Detained Since:** April 2014

**Sentence:** Three and a half years' imprisonment

**USCIRF Advocate:** Commissioner John Ruskay

**Biography:** Bagir Kazikhanov was born on September 9, 1983 in the Republic of Dagestan, an administrative entity of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Kazikhanov organized regular Islamic study sessions in rented flats between 2012 and 2014. During these sessions, he and his fellow Muslims studied the works of the Turkish Islamic revivalist theologian Said Nursi, along with watching football. Nursi, who died in 1960, was an ethnic Kurd who wrote a body of Quranic commentary advocating the modernization of Islamic education. Nursi also criticized the secular character of the post-Ottoman Turkish government, for which he was persecuted. Nursi's emphasis on the integration of modern science into Islamic learning is said to have inspired Fethullah Gülen, the prominent exiled Turkish Islamic preacher. Although Nursi's writings do not advocate hatred, violence, or the violation of human rights, many of Nursi's works are banned in Russia, reportedly due to state opposition to foreign spiritual and cultural influence.

Mr. Kazikhanov was arrested in the city of Ulyanovsk on April 9, 2014, after participating in one of these study sessions, which authorities deemed to be the "organization of extremist activity" under the Criminal Code Article 282.2, Part 1. He was accused of recruiting a terrorist cell of Nursi followers as part of a supposed "Nurdzhular" movement, which was officially banned in Russia in 2008 but is widely believed to be a legal fiction invented for the purpose of prosecuting Nursi adherents. Mr. Kazikhanov was held in a pre-trial detention center from April to October 2014, and then placed under house arrest until his February 25, 2015, conviction by Judge Natalya Damayeva at the Lenin District Court in Ulyanovsk. Judge Damayeva sentenced Mr. Kazikhanov to three and a half years' imprisonment.



# Raif Badawi

**Country:** Saudi Arabia

**Key Fact:** Blogger

**Detained Since:** June 27, 2012

**Charges:** Violating Islamic values and propagating liberal thought

**Sentence:** 10-year imprisonment, 1,000 lashes, a fine of 1 million riyals (equal to about \$266,000) and banned from any media work or foreign travel for 10 years after his release from prison

**USCIRF Advocate:** Commissioner Clifford D. May

**Biography:** Raif Badawi was born on January 13, 1984, in Khobar, Saudi Arabia. He is a blogger, activist, and the creator of the website *Free Saudi Liberals*, which encourages debate on religious and political matters in Saudi Arabia.

First detained on apostasy charges in 2008, Mr. Badawi was released after a day of questioning. He was then arrested on June 17, 2012 and charged with insulting Islam through electronic channels. Later, Mr. Badawi was brought to court on several charges, including apostasy, a conviction which carries an automatic death sentence. Badawi's website reportedly had hosted material criticizing "senior religious figures." Mr. Badawi also suggested that Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University had become "a den for terrorists."

Mr. Badawi appeared before a district court in Jeddah on December 17, 2012, charged with "setting up a website that undermines general security," "ridiculing Islamic religious figures," and "going beyond the realm of obedience." On July 30, 2013, the Jeddah Criminal Court sentenced Mr. Badawi to seven years in prison and 600 lashes for founding an internet forum that "violates Islamic values and propagates liberal thought." On May 7, 2014, an appeals court increased the punishment to 1,000 lashes and 10 years in prison. He also received a fine of 1 million riyals (equal to about \$266,000) and is banned from any media work or foreign travel for 10 years after his release from prison.

On January 9, 2015, Mr. Badawi was flogged 50 times before hundreds of spectators in front of a Jeddah mosque. He has not received additional floggings, due partly to international reaction and partly to a medical doctor's finding that he could not physically endure more lashings. On June 7, 2015, Saudi Arabia's Supreme Court denied another appeal from Badawi and upheld the sentence of 1,000 lashes.

Mr. Badawi received the 2015 Sakharov Prize for his human rights work. Raif Badawi married Ensaf Haidar in 2002 in Saudi Arabia; they have three children. His wife and children were granted political asylum in Quebec, Canada in 2013.

