

## **REMARKS AS DELIVERED** – USCIRF Hearing

Hello.

I'm Senator Roger Wicker from Mississippi, and it's my honor to say a few words to open today's important hearing.

To the witnesses, thank you for participating.

And to Chair Maenza and the Commissioners, thank you for the invaluable work you are doing to advance religious freedom in our world.

Your efforts, particularly in recent weeks during the Afghanistan withdrawal, were of great help to my office and resulted in the safe evacuation of many religious minorities.

Religious freedom is a foundational pillar of any free and open society.

Religious freedom stands as a basic human right alongside freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and the right to petition one's government.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom is the vanguard of religious freedom abroad – using soft power to name and push back on those who seek to deny basic rights of conscience to their citizens.

As co-leaders of the Helsinki Commission, my friend Senator Ben Cardin and I have co-labored in similar efforts to advance human rights abroad.

In 2010, we co-authored the Magnitsky Act in memory of Sergei Magnitsky, the Russian patriot who exposed kleptocracy and oppression at the highest levels of the Kremlin and paid for it with his life.

This law allows the United States to sanction not only governments but also those corrupt and ruthless government officials who violate the rights of their citizens with impunity.

The success of that legislation led to passage of the Global Magnitsky Act in 2016, which allows the United States to sanction human rights abusers around the world.

“Glo-Mag,” as the law is now known by friend and foe around the world, gives our government – and now other governments – the tools to stand up for freedom-loving patriots everywhere.

In fact, as Senator Cardin and I travel the globe, foreign leaders tell us that Glo-Mag is the most effective tool we have for fighting human rights abuse.

As of December 2019, 198 individuals had been sanctioned under Glo-Mag, but less than 10 percent of those have directly related to religious freedom abuses.

Yet religious freedom abuses are manifold and the opportunities for action are too many to count.

Sanctions ought to be considered for those individual leaders who are inflicting genocide on the Uighur Muslims in China, those persecuting Christians and Yazidis in Iraq, and those who have cracked down on the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar – to name just a few of the most glaring examples.

We have only begun tapping the potential of Magnitsky sanctions in support of religious freedom.

Glo-Mag authorizes visa bans and asset freezes against foreign individuals engaged in serious human rights abuses.

I am encouraged by this Commission's 2021 recommendations to the Biden Administration to use this tool against religious freedom violators.

And I hope today's hearing is an important step in opening up new avenues to hold those violators accountable and to bring about positive change.

I look forward to working together to realize the full potential of Global Magnitsky sanctions.

Thank you.