



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

Technological Surveillance of Religion in China

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Tony Perkins, Vice Chair

Thank you very much, Chair Manchin.

In past Annual Reports, and in a report published last September, USCIRF has closely monitored the impact of China's surveillance state on religious communities.

The Communist Party, with help from Chinese companies like Hikvision [HIK-VISION] and Dahua [DAH-HWA], uses artificial intelligence systems that can reportedly combine information from video surveillance, facial and voice recognition, GPS tracking, and other data in order to track certain religious communities. During the past decade, it has installed hundreds of millions of surveillance cameras across the country, particularly in Xinjiang [SHIN-JIANG] and Tibet, where facial recognition systems distinguish Uyghurs and Tibetans from members of other ethnic groups. This is the first time a government is known to have intentionally used artificial intelligence for racial profiling. Authorities even installed cameras on the pulpits of churches and other houses of worship, allowing the Party to identify and monitor anyone who attends services.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government has deployed an army of censors and online tools—collectively known as the “Great Firewall”—to continuously monitor Internet activity and remove anything deemed offensive to the Communist Party. This includes blogs and social media posts promoting Uyghur or Tibetan culture. Importantly, this virtual-world censorship has real-world consequences. In April, authorities raided a branch of the Early Rain Covenant Church while they were holding Easter services online. In Tibet, authorities have detained people for sharing photos of the Dalai Lama [DA-LAY LA-MA] in WeChat messages.

Due to the international nature of twenty-first century technology and trade, the United States cannot turn a blind eye to these human rights violations. Indeed, key technological components driving China’s surveillance state come from American businesses and researchers, while some companies have actively cooperated with Chinese authorities to make such surveillance possible.

We know China’s surveillance industry depends on imports of advanced processors and sensors from American companies, including Intel and Nvidia. According to credible reports, both companies have sold critical components to Hikvision, which has lucrative contracts establishing surveillance cameras for the concentration camps in Xinjiang.

In addition, Thermo Fisher Scientific, a company based in Massachusetts, has exported DNA testing kits that are designed to distinguish between Han Chinese, Uyghurs, and Tibetans. Although the company said it halted sales to government entities in Xinjiang, it continues to sell its products elsewhere in China.

Google’s planned development of Project Dragonfly would have enabled its search engine to conform to China’s Great Firewall censorship standards. The company was forced to shut the project down after Google employees protested the initiative.

These examples should concern all of us. For too long, American companies assumed that they could do business in China without compromising their commitment to universal values. That is no longer the case, if it ever was. The

information revolution is one of our country's greatest contributions to human civilization, but we also have a responsibility to ensure that the fruits of American innovation are not distorted into a dystopia.

We look forward to hearing from Acting Undersecretary Cordell Hull about how the Department of Commerce has already taken important steps to restrict certain Chinese companies from obtaining sensitive American technology. Earlier this month, the Departments of State, Commerce, Treasury, and Homeland Security issued an advisory warning businesses about the legal and ethical risks of assisting in the development of surveillance tools in Xinjiang. I look forward to hearing from our other panelists about what the U.S. government should do next to ensure that Americans do not inadvertently contribute to religious freedom violations in China.

I will now turn to my colleague, Vice Chair Anurima Bhargava, to discuss the impact of China's surveillance state on the rest of the world.