

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

HEARING

RISING ANTI-MUSLIM HATRED:
FORB VIOLATIONS AGAINST MUSLIMS ABROAD

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Virtual Hearing

P A R T I C I P A N T S

USCIRF COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

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Asif Mahmood, Vice Chair, USCIRF

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P R O C E E D I N G S

CHAIR HARTZLER: Good morning. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's hearing will come to order.

I'm USCIRF Chair Vicky Hartzler, and I'm delighted to welcome you to this morning's hearing.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. legislative branch agency created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, or IRFA.

The Commission uses international standards to monitor religious freedom abroad and makes policy recommendations to the U.S. government.

Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory authority under IRFA to convene this hearing.

We are glad to welcome recorded remarks this morning from Congressman French Hill of Arkansas. We appreciate Congressman Hill's participation and leadership on international religious freedom issues.

MR. HILL: [Recorded remarks.] I'm Congressman French Hill from Arkansas' 2nd Congressional District.

I'm sorry I couldn't be with you today personally, but I'm grateful to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom for convening this important hearing to shine a light on anti-Muslim religious freedom violations across the globe.

As a Catholic, my faith shapes how I see the world and how I see my neighbors.

It's the grounds of my belief that every person deserves to worship freely without fear of harassment, imprisonment or violence—not just those who believe what I believe but people of all faiths.

And that's why I've made international religious freedom my priority throughout my service in the House.

I was an original cosponsor of a resolution calling on the United States to designate Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern

for its systematic violations of religious freedom.

I introduced a bipartisan resolution directing the State Department to examine countries that the Commission has flagged as Special Watch List candidates.

And I've also coauthored an op-ed with a commissioner calling on the Trump administration to use its leverage to stop the violence in the Sudan.

Religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue are not just ideals worth celebrating. They are essential to peace and stability, and they are worth defending.

The United States must stand firmly on the side of freedom of religion or belief for everyone everywhere.

And I will continue to use my position to advocate for those who simply want to worship in peace and to fight for those being persecuted for exercising that very basic human right.

I hope today's hearing advances the cause, and I thank you for the opportunity to be a small part of it.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Thank you, Congressman Hill, for your remarks on this very important topic.

On Friday, February 6th, Muslims just outside Islamabad, Pakistan gathered—as they did each week—to pray. Prayer is a fundamental manifestation of religious freedom, serving as an essential intimate link between an individual's belief and practice.

As these worshippers entered the mosque to pray, the sharp crack of gunfire rang out, echoing off the halls of the prayer hall.

Moments later, an explosion. Smoke and debris filled the air. Then shouts of panic. In the aftermath of the attack, for which the Islamic State claimed responsibility, 32 Muslim worshippers were killed and over 160 injured.

The suicide bombing was Islamabad's deadliest attack in 18 years.

But Muslims do not suffer attacks at the hands of terrorist organizations alone. On February 1st of this year, a mob gathered in a

small village in India. Armed with sticks, bricks, stones and kerosene bottles, a violent crowd vandalized six houses and set vehicles on fire.

The group injured seven police officers trying to protect 20 village residents targeted by the mob solely for their Muslim faith.

Unfortunately, this is not the first such attack. For years, mobs in India have targeted Muslim and Christian individuals, houses, businesses, and houses of worship.

Even more concerning, India's government, which professes Hindu nationalism, has been complicit in targeting these individuals of faith.

This includes the alarmed recent arrest of 12 Muslim men in Uttar Pradesh simply for praying inside a private home.

Alarmingly, governments themselves are directly responsible for attacks on Muslims. Last September, Muslim worshippers at nine mosques in and around Paris, France arrived for early morning prayer.

Approaching the mosque entrance, they were

shocked to find a gruesome sight: decapitated pigs' heads drenched in blood.

Serbian and French investigators later revealed that the Serbian nationals who had placed the pigs' heads did not act independently but rather "at the behest of a foreign intelligence service."

Their investigation strongly indicated the involvement of Russian intelligence. This plot was meant not only to strike fear among Muslims who were simply practicing their faith but to also undermine democratic stability and sow social division.

Confronting these attacks matter because an attack on one group's religious freedom is a threat to us all. Last month, for example, a British man pled guilty in court to the rape of a woman he believed was Muslim, but who was actually Sikh.

The man followed her from a bus stop into her home and raped the woman, all while shouting profanity and insults based on the misperception

that she was Muslim.

As the judge in the case noted, "a stranger who breaks into a woman's house, who commits these offenses and does so expressing hostility to her on the basis of her presumed religion is a dangerous person."

In addition, U.S. action on this important matter has significant U.S. national security implications.

The Trump administration has built historic bilateral and multilateral relations with Muslim-majority governments, particularly those in the Middle East.

Reiterating to these governments that universal freedom of religion or belief protections apply to Muslims as well will further strengthen these ties, advance U.S. strategic interests, and hold accountable governments in the region that restrict freedom of religion or belief for Muslim minority communities.

Today's hearing lays out the nature of restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, or

FORB, for Muslims and will help crystalize policy recommendations that advance FORB for Muslims and all people.

With that, I would like to now turn the floor over to USCIRF Vice Chair Asif Mahmood.

VICE CHAIR MAHMOOD: Welcome and good morning. Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim. In the name of God Almighty, most gracious and merciful.

Thank you, Chair Hartzler.

I would like to welcome everyone to today's hearing and thank our witnesses for being here.

Anti-Muslim hatred threatens freedom of religion or belief for those of the Islamic faith and for others, as well.

Confronting anti-Muslim hatred is therefore a matter of concern for all people. USCIRF has been checking key trends in this regard, which I will share with you this morning.

First, governments often use blasphemy laws to restrict freedom of religion or belief for Muslims.

Such laws often target Muslim dissidents or those whose religious views differ from official state-imposed interpretations.

In Afghanistan, just last year, the Taliban sentenced to death Abdul Alim Khamoosh for blasphemy over allegations related to nonviolent religious speech.

In Nigeria, four Muslims are in prison for blasphemy, including two facing a death sentence.

And, in Pakistan, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan party has incited violent mobs targeting Ahmadiyya Muslims and others under the guise of enforcing that country's blasphemy law.

Such laws restrict freedom of religion or belief and prevent Muslims from expressing religious beliefs protected under international law.

Second, attacks on Muslims often target women in particular. Muslim women face harassment and assault simply for wearing hijab in accordance with their faith practice.

In the Netherlands, this past January,

police opened an investigation into a video of a police official in Utrecht beating two Muslim women wearing the hijab with a baton and kicking them.

Government attempts to restrict or ban the hijab are also pervasive and a restriction on freedom of religion or belief, particularly in Europe.

Last year, government extended such bans in France, Denmark and Portugal. And politicians floated similar bans in Italy and Sweden, in addition to Australia and Canada.

Third, Muslims abroad face a pervasive environment of hostility that risks restricting freedom of religion or belief.

Governments are obligated to address this hostility. In February, two women in India graffitied, quote, "this road is not for Muslims"—closed quote—on the site of Uttarakhand-Delhi highway.

Last month, a Muslim candidate for city council in Birmingham, UK, who also wears the hijab, reported commends on her social media

campaign, which included, quote, "filthy Muslim," closed quote, and, quote, "this woman wants to get hurt. She is begging for it," closed quote.

Governments have indeed responded in some cases. For example, in March, Australia's Senate censured a member who asked in an interview, quote, "how can you tell me there are good Muslims?" Closed quote.

This is particularly true as legitimate debate over population movement and the future of national identities become poisoned with stereotypes, misinformation, and hatred toward individual Muslims on the basis of their faith.

In light of recent attacks on Muslims, these examples are not idle speech. Last year, a woman in Ajax, Canada attacked a Muslim woman wearing a hijab at a library, shouted profanity, and attempted to set her hijab on fire.

Last July, a man stabbed to death 26-year-old Rahma Ayat, a Muslim Algerian nursing student in Hanover, Germany, after months of harassment about her hijab.

This hatred is not only harmful to freedom of religion or belief but a national security threat as well. Governments that ignore the isolation and marginalization of anti-Muslim hatred open the door to recruitment of groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

These organizations use anti-Muslim hatred to radicalize recruits by telling them that such hatred is proof that Muslims cannot thrive in open and democratic societies.

When governments defend freedom of religion or belief for Muslims, they are therefore not only defending universal freedom but are also going aggressively on the offense against those who invoke religion to justify violence.

Support for freedom of religion or belief is a proud American tradition with a long history of bipartisan support. Religious freedom has not only universal appeal but it's fundamental American value.

As an American, I am proud to stand for the freedom of every individual to teach, practice,

worship, and observe the tenets of their faith.

Confronting anti-Muslim hatred is part and parcel of these important efforts to ensure freedom of religion or belief for all people. I look forward to hearing how the United States can best support these efforts abroad.

I now turn the floor back to Chair Hartzler.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Thank you, Vice Chair Mahmood.

We'll now turn to our witnesses who I will now introduce.

Farid Hafez is a Senior Research Fellow with the Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University and Associate Teaching Professor of International Relations at the College of William and Mary.

Abdassamad El Yazidi is Chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany.

Jewher Ilham is the Forced Labor Project Manager of the Worker Rights Consortium representing the organization on the Steering Committee of the Coalition to End Forced Labor in

the Uyghur Region.

Arselan Suleman is a partner working on international litigation and arbitration at Foley Hoag LLP and represented The Gambia in its lawsuit against Myanmar for the Rohingya genocide.

He is also former Acting U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

And Tariq Jamil is an Islamic Scholar from Pakistan who has been named one of the 500 most influential Muslims by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

Mr. Hafez, you may begin your testimony. Please unmute your video. Thank you.

MR. HAFEZ: All right. Thank you.

Chair Hartzler, Vice Chair Mahmood, and honorable commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I've been asked to discuss and share my expertise on anti-Muslim hatred and freedom of religion or belief violations against Muslims and will here primarily focus on Europe.

So drawing on findings gathered over the

past two decades by international human rights bodies, I want to address three interconnected concerns.

One is individual religious rights expressed by hijab bans. The other one is collective religious rights, and the third one is the impact of counterterrorism legislation.

As for individual rights, wearing the hijab is obviously protected under international law related to FoRB as a religious practice.

Extensive reporting by human rights organizations consistently identifies Muslim women as being among those most severely affected by anti-Muslim hatred, whether in the form of hate crimes and violence in public spaces or institutional discrimination in education and employment.

Visible women who wear the hijab are particularly vulnerable.

France is obviously an example where most rigid interpretation of secularism in Europe is being expressed, banning the hijab basically from

all public sector workers from civil servants to interns.

From 2004 on, different forms of hijab bans have been expanded, and since 2021, even members of municipal councils and employees of private companies performing public service functions, such as, for instance, public transport operators and social housing concierges, are also affected by the hijab ban.

And most recently, in 2023, a decree was implemented to expand the ban to loose-fitting garments of pupils in school that do not cover their hair as religious dress, which is called by the French authorities the abaya and qamis.

So this year, in Austria, a new hijab ban for children under the age of 14 was enacted with proponents of the original law openly stating that this was intended to broaden the ban to high schools, universities, as well as public service.

For judges and policewomen, a de facto hijab ban has been maintained without explicit legislation since 2017, premised basically on the

notion that hijab, the hijab falls outside any official permitted uniform or dress code.

Given Mr. El Yazidi's participation, I will not delve into the case of Germany.

In October 2024, for the first time, a hijab ban was introduced also in educational institutions in the Vladimir Region of the Russian Federation.

Similarly, in India, the High Court of Karnataka upheld in 2022 a hijab ban in educational institutions, holding that the hijab is not an essential religious practice under Islam and, therefore, not constitutionally protected.

And this trend is largely upheld also in Europe again by the European Court of Human Rights, which continues to prioritize a very narrow conception of state neutrality over the substantive protection of religious expression.

Now the interference of the state extends very much beyond the individual rights, also to the collective realm of Muslim religious denominations.

I'll give two examples here. In Austria,

the Islam Act of 2015 has been widely criticized for granting the state extensive powers to regulate the internal affairs of Islamic religious communities.

One legal scholar, Richard Potz, characterized the law as effectively establishing a form of "religion police" with the new Islam Act, which created also legal precedent that has affected other religious minorities, such as the Protestant Church, which is also a minority church.

The second example is from Slovakia, where the disproportionately high membership quota required for any religious denomination to register as a religious community under the Act of the Registration of Churches and Religious Societies continues basically to operate as a barrier to recognition for several religious minorities, including but not only Muslims as much as it is with the old Catholics.

And recent attempts to amend this legislation were all rejected.

As for the third aspect, counterterrorism

legislation and the criminalization of Islamic practice, a recurring and deeply problematic feature of the legal landscape described above is the willingness of state actors to recharacterize Islam, not as a religion deserving of protection but as a political ideology subject to regulation or even suppression.

And this is very important because this rhetorical and legal move is often expressed through the framing of the Islamic religion as a political ideology, which effectively allows lawmakers and courts to maintain a formal commitment to freedom of religion in public discourse, even while systematically violating it in practice.

To give an example here, the hijab ban implemented in Austria in 2026 that I had mentioned was framed basically as a legitimate means to curtail not a religious practice but a symbol of so-called "political Islam."

And this discourse connects to the counterterrorism efforts that build on concepts

like "separatist Islamism" in France, "legalistic Islamism" in Germany, "political Islam" in Austria, "Islamism" in Sweden, and finds different iterations in various places throughout Europe.

Also, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights has warned that counterterrorism legislation has caused serious harm to Muslim communities.

To give two examples here. The Russian Federation has designated several Muslim movements as extremist organizations. Members or even alleged sympathizers from, for instance, the Jama'at Tabligh and the Nurdzhular movement have been facing criminal prosecution.

Germany, similar, has classified the Tabligh-e-Jama'at as a subject of domestic intelligence, which implies that members can be denied citizenship as it happened.

Comparable consequences have also affected members of other Muslim civil society organizations in Germany, which reflects a broader pattern in which participation in Islamic associational life has basically become grounds for suspicion,

sanction and exclusion from civic participation.

So based on this very short presentation, here are a few recommendations and what I think USCIRF can do to further counteract anti-Muslim hatred and FoRB violations against Muslims.

First of all, to report on anti-Muslim hatred and violation of freedom of religion or belief violations against Muslims in Europe and beyond.

Second, to visit the leaders and engage in dialogue with not only Muslim minorities but also NGOs working against anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination.

And lastly, since freedom of religion or belief are violated by some governments who use the pretext of national security to justify repression, a hearing on the impact of security on FoRB would be an important step ahead.

Thank you so much.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Thank you very much, Mr. Hafez.

Now we'll turn to Mr. El Yazidi for his

testimony. Please proceed.

MR. EL YAZIDI: Thank you very much.

Distinguished commissioners, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to submit this testimony on an issue of growing urgency, yet one that is still too often denied or downplayed: anti-Muslim racism.

Anti-Muslim racism in Germany is not an abstract concern, nor a marginal issue confined to the fringe of society. It is a reality that is visible, measurable, and lived every single day by millions of people.

Despite overwhelming evidence from academic research, civil society monitoring, and lived experiences, it continues to be minimized, rationalized or outright denied. This denial is not neutral. It is a part of the problem.

Historically, racism in Germany was most visibly and violently driven by extremist ideologies, particularly during the Nazi era. When hatred was explicit, organized, and unmistakable,

society knew where the danger lay. Today, the situation is different.

Racism has not disappeared. It has shifted. It has moved from the margins into the center of society.

It no longer always appears in the form of open hatred, but often manifests through rhetoric, political narratives, institutional practices, and everyday assumptions. Precisely because it is less obvious, it is more easily ignored and more difficult to confront.

There have been repeated scandals involving extremist networks, racist communications, and discriminatory conduct within security authorities in Germany.

When prejudice enters state structures, it is no longer just a social issue; it becomes a direct threat to the rule of law.

Equally concerning is the question of political accountability. There are instances in which individuals who have been explicitly named in reports by independent expert bodies on anti-Muslim

hostility have nevertheless risen to high political office, including positions such as State Secretary.

This raises serious concerns. What message does it send? It suggests that such findings carry no real consequences. It signals to affected communities that their experiences are acknowledged rhetorically but disregarded in practice.

These are warning signs of deeper structural failures.

What makes this development particularly alarming is that the hostility toward Muslims, in many of its forms, has become socially acceptable. It is often expressed under the cover of so-called "criticism of Islam," where sweeping generalizations and dehumanizing narratives are framed as legitimate debate.

While critical engagement is a fundamental part of democratic societies, there is a clear line between critique, which is constructive, and has to be, and discrimination.

This line is increasingly being crossed in public discourses in Germany, contributing to the normalization of prejudice.

This normalization is further reinforced by narratives that deny the very existence of anti-Muslim racism.

Some argue that there is no such phenomenon, claiming instead that only "Islamism" exists, and that anti-Muslim racism is an invention designed to distract from security concerns.

Such claims shift blame on to those affected and reinforce dangerous stereotypes, including the claim that Muslims as a group are inherently suspect.

When such positions are voiced or tolerated in positions of political responsibility, it sends a devastating signal that discrimination can be dismissed, that affected communities will not be taken seriously, and that accountability is optional.

During my position as Secretary General of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, I have

addressed this issue directly by sending letters to the Federal Ministry of the Interior as well as to the interior ministries of all German states.

In these letters, I called for the appointment of a Commissioner for Muslim Life and for Combating Anti-Muslim Discrimination.

Numerous letters were sent. However, to this day, not a single such commissioner has been appointed.

In Germany, there are commissioners for many different societal concepts and groups. Yet, when it comes to Muslims, structural recognition and institutional representation remain largely absent.

This discrepancy raises fundamental questions about equal treatment, visibility, and the seriousness with which anti-Muslim discrimination is addressed.

When an entire group is placed under general suspicion, when their dignity is questioned, and when their experiences are invalidated, the core principles of the

constitutional order are undermined: human dignity, equality before the law, and freedom of religion.

These are the foundations of our democratic society, and they are erased when racism becomes normalized.

The consequences are far-reaching. When individuals lose trust in institutions, when they feel unprotected or unfairly treated, social cohesion begins to break down.

A democracy cannot thrive when segments of its population are consistently pushed to the margins.

The question, therefore, is no longer whether anti-Muslim racism exists. The debate, this debate is over.

The real question is how long can we afford to ignore it? Ignoring it does not make it disappear. It normalizes what should never be normal and legitimizes what should never be accepted.

Germany, and Europe, more broadly, stands at a crossroad. Either we continue to downplay

this issue, risking further division and injustice, or we confront it with honesty, courage, and decisive actions.

This requires concrete measures— independent monitoring mechanisms, transparent documentation of anti-Muslim incidents, binding anti-racism strategies within state institutions, and, above all, the clear recognition of anti-Muslim racism as distinct and dangerous not only for group-based hatred but for all the country, for all, for the way we have chosen of living together.

Anything less would amount to complicity. The strength of a society is not measured by how it treats the majority, but by how it protects its minorities.

Thank you very much for your attention.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Thank you, Mr. El Yazidi. We appreciate your comments.

Now we'll turn to Jewher Ilham.

Please proceed with your testimony.

MS. ILHAM: As-salamu alaykum. May peace be upon you.

I'd like to thank the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom for inviting me to testify today.

My name is Jewher Ilham, and I am Uyghur. I am here today to testify about the human rights abuses my people have faced for years in China because of our faith and identity.

I was born and raised as a Uyghur Muslim in Beijing. Yet, ironically my first time holding a copy of the Quran and my first time stepping foot inside a mosque was in the U.S. in 2013, which is a few months after my father and I were forcibly separated at the Beijing International Airport.

Chinese authorities prevented my father, Ilham Tohti, a renowned Uyghur economist, from boarding the plane, and that was the last time I saw him.

Soon after, my father was imprisoned for advocating for equal rights to education, job opportunities, and freedom of expression and to worship for the Uyghur people.

For decades, my father called on the

Chinese government to respect its own constitution, which states that ordinary Chinese citizens have the freedom of religious beliefs.

Yet, he was sentenced to life in prison and accused of "separatism," a term that the Chinese government commonly uses to label certain religious communities and Turkic ethnic groups in China.

China is officially an atheist state and its Communist Party members are not permitted to join or practice religion, and the authorities' concern is that religion can serve as an alternative to Communism and undermine loyalty to the Chinese government.

And since Xi Jinping first took office in 2013, he has enacted a series of new policies and strategies towards cultural and religious practices to reshape them to align with Party ideology and foster loyalty to the Chinese government.

In 2015, Chairman Xi Jinping called for the "Sinicization" of religion, urging all religious groups in China to conform to socialism,

while emphasizing that only "normal" religious activities are permitted and banning religious education among minors completely.

However, the definition of "normal" religious activities is never specified.

In the Uyghur Region, authorities patrol the cities daily, and Uyghur women dressed modestly have reported to have been stopped on the streets to have their long skirts cut short, and religious signs and landmarks have been destroyed.

Traditional Uyghur street names have been renamed to fit political party lines, like "Red Road" or "Unity Road."

An estimate of over 1.8 million Uyghur people and other Turkic ethnic groups in the region were detained where religious and cultural practices were targeted under the guise of a so-called "poverty alleviation" and "de-extremification" program.

In the years since, the Chinese government has continued to violate the right to freedom of religion and has developed a state-sponsored

program consisting of re-education and forced labor as a form of widespread and systematic persecution of Uyghurs and other Muslim majority peoples on the basis of religion and ethnicity.

And while framed as efforts to "cleanse" the ethnic groups of their religious "extremist" thoughts, the program actually dilutes and erases the culture and suppresses Muslim religious practices.

And this repression involves multiple forms of involuntary labor at workplaces across the Uyghur Region and also in other parts of China that are increasingly interwoven with global supply chains.

The state-imposed forced labor programs operate through three primary mechanisms: forced labor of internment camp detainees, and forced labor transfers in and outside of the region, and forced prison labor.

And this system of forced labor has been enabled by other egregious human rights violations, including mass surveillance, arbitrary detention,

gender-based violence and harassment, rape, torture, political re-education, and forced sterilization.

The abuses are reinforced by a pervasive technology-enabled system of surveillance apparatus.

In the situation of state-imposed forced labor, where widespread, systematic, egregious human rights violations are committed by state actors, it is a practical impossibility for any business to undertake credible due diligence on the ground.

This is because it is not possible for a worker to speak candidly to an independent investigator without fear of retaliation or reprisal.

And by continuing to source from the Uyghur Region, international brands and retailers are complicit in these abuses.

By contrast, withdrawing their business cuts off export earnings and the financial support that the state relies on to sustain this repressive

system.

The Chinese government has also been transporting Uyghurs and other Turkic groups to other parts of China, like Shanghai, Beijing, Shandong, where they are placed to work in export-oriented factories under conditions that strongly indicate forced labor.

At least 3.17 million people have been transferred away from their homes in the region through labor transfer programs.

A recent whistleblower testimony revealed that conditions of the factory and living facilities can be worse than those in China's prisons, and workers live under constant surveillance by state-appointed cadres who conduct nightly inspections and monitor for any signs of religious activities, whether it's praying and wearing head scarves. They're all strictly forbidden.

And workers are required to attend weekly Chinese-flag raising ceremonies and political indoctrination sessions.

Reforming global supply chains to respect human rights is a massive challenge, but if the U.S. government vigorously implements the UFLPA, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, and coordinates with other governments that are enacting forced labor import bans, then brands and retailers will increasingly shift their business model, and we will come closer to see a global economy that does not rely on the exploitation of my people and one step closer to Uyghur people being able to freely and openly practice our religion, as well as reuniting the many forcibly separated Uyghur families, including mine.

Thank you.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Thank you so much for that heartbreaking and insightful testimony.

Now we'll turn to Arsalan Suleman.

MR. SULEMAN: Thank you, Chair Hartzler, Vice Chair Mahmood, USCIRF commissioners, esteemed co-panelists, ladies and gentlemen.

It's an honor for me to testify today before the U.S. Commission on International

Religious Freedom.

Thank you for your commitment to combating violation of religious freedom against all individuals.

My testimony will raise examples of some of the most egregious violations of religious freedom against Muslims internationally, will focus on key international accountability mechanisms, and will conclude with recommendations for U.S. policy.

Violations of religious freedom against Muslims are prevalent globally and have been increasing for the past several years.

These violations range from endemic forms of discrimination to the most serious international crimes, like genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.

For example, the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar are victims and survivors of genocide. After decades of persecution and anti-Rohingya propaganda, Myanmar's military engaged in a brutal campaign of genocidal violence that included large-scale massacres, indiscriminate killings,

widespread rape and sexual violence against women and girls, and the destruction of hundreds of villages.

The propaganda that incited and facilitated this genocide focused in large part on their Muslim identity and the alleged existential threat over Rohingya Muslims to Buddhists in Burma.

Also, as discussed in the testimony of my co-panelist, Ms. Ilham, the Uyghur Muslims of China are victims and survivors of genocide and crimes against humanity.

They too have been signaled out for persecution based on their religious identity and practices.

Gaza is another example of serious violations of religious freedom. There U.N. investigators have determined that Israel's targeting and destruction of more than half of all religious and cultural sites, including hundreds of mosques, constitute war crimes.

My other co-panelists who spoke before me, Mr. Hafez and Mr. El Yazidi, testified to pervasive

anti-Muslim discrimination in Europe.

There are also significant violations of religious freedom for Muslims in India, which will be addressed in the USCIRF hearing scheduled for this Thursday.

Similar violations against Muslims also occur in other parts of the world.

It is critical that states that engaged in such extreme violations of religious freedom be held accountable.

In addition to diplomatic measures and potential sanctions, there are international legal mechanisms that the United States and other countries can use to enforce state responsibility for such violations.

One such mechanism is the 1948 Genocide Convention. Religious groups are protected under the Genocide Convention.

The International Court of Justice, or ICJ, is the only legal forum in which state responsibility under the Genocide Convention can be adjudicated. Cases before the ICJ can only be

brought by other states.

I'm the lead counsel for The Gambia in its genocide case against Myanmar. In January, the ICJ held a hearing on the merits of our case. We are expecting a judgment later this year, which we hope will be a landmark moment for accountability.

Unfortunately, this mechanism is not available for a state like China that has a reservation to Article IX of the Convention, the dispute resolution provision.

Some forms of religious persecution overlap with ethnic and racial identities. This is true for the Rohingya and Uyghurs.

In such cases, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, or CERD, could serve as an accountability mechanism.

There is a dispute resolution clause allowing states to bring cases to the ICJ, and there is also an inter-state conciliation procedure that can be invoked.

This latter mechanism could be used in regards to China's persecution of Uyghurs.

A few other human rights treaties with dispute resolution clauses could potentially provide means for state-accountability for religious freedom violations if those violations take the form of conduct prohibited by those treaties.

Examples include the Convention Against Torture, the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Regional international organization and human rights agreements may also provide forums for accountability for religious freedom violations.

Apart from state responsibility for religious freedom violations, criminal liability for such violations may also arise.

If the state in which the violations took place does not prosecute the perpetrators, some limited options exist for international criminal responsibility if those religious freedom violations rise to the level of genocide, crimes

against humanity, or war crimes.

These options include the potential jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court or prosecution in domestic courts under a universal jurisdiction theory.

The United States can and must do more in supporting international religious freedom and accountability for religious freedom violations.

First, the United States should do a better job of consistently and impartially applying existing tools for combating religious freedom violations, such as sanctions, suspensions of aid, trade consequences, diplomatic censure, and other political expressions of condemnation.

In addition, the United States can strengthen its domestic criminal law for accountability purposes.

Although U.S. law allows for the potential criminal prosecution of genocide and war crimes, the United States currently does not have legislation that would allow prosecution of those responsible for crimes against humanity.

The United States should also improve its own domestic record on religious freedom to set a positive example internationally.

Too many U.S. politicians propagate hatred against Muslims and members of other religions. Such pernicious rhetoric must be condemned, and we should ensure that those fleeing religious persecution abroad are able to seek asylum in our country rather than face categorical exclusion.

Second, the United States should support and strengthen international mechanisms for accountability, including mandates from the U.N. Human Rights Council, which can establish the factual and evidentiary foundation for accountability processes.

The United States should also cease destructive and counterproductive efforts against multilateral human rights institutions.

This would include not sanctioning the ICC and its officials and judges for their important work.

Third, justice and accountability must be

U.S. national security priorities. In abandoning our international leadership role on this issue, we are promoting lawlessness internationally.

If we fail to end impunity at home and abroad, then cycles of violence and atrocities will continue to occur with devastating consequences.

In conclusion, I thank the chair, vice chair and other commissioners for holding this hearing and drawing attention to these important issues.

I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Thank you very much.

Now, our final witness will be Tariq Jamil. He will provide his testimony in Urdu, and followed by an interpretation of his testimony by Vice Chair Asif Mahmood.

So please proceed, Mr. Jamil.

[Pause.]

CHAIR HARTZLER: Looks like we're having some technical difficulties here. Vice Chair Mahmood, could you just go ahead and proceed with

the interpretation of his testimony, please?

VICE CHAIR MAHMOOD: Yes.

We are so sorry that there are some technical issues. We were anticipating that. It is my really honor and privilege to be reading the testimony of Shaikh Tariq Jamil, who I have tremendous respect and regard for his work, not only for Islam, but also for humanity all over the world.

I'm going to read his testimony.

MR. JAMIL: [Statement read by USCIRF Vice Chair Mahmood as follows:] As-salamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuh. Peace be upon you, and the mercy of Allah, and his blessings.

Respected members of the Commission, I speak today not only as a representative of Islam, but as a student of humanity.

Over the course of my life, I have traveled to nearly 100 countries across every continent from the villages of Chad and Djibouti to the cities of Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.

I have met thousands of people from every religion, culture, and walk of life.

I often describe myself as a traveler, a nomad, because much of what I have learned about life, Islam, and other faiths has come not only from books, but from sitting with people, listening to their stories, and witnessing their struggles and hopes.

I also consider myself a student of history. History teaches us that humanity and civilizations rise to great heights when people cooperate, share knowledge and protect one another.

It also teaches us that societies fall into darkness when differences turn into hatred when identity is made a reason for humiliation, and when one group begins to see another as less deserving of dignity.

I have seen how beautiful this world can be when people come together, when Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus and Sikhs, and people of other faiths work side by side, share meals, exchange ideas, and build something good together.

I have also seen how painful life becomes when these same differences, which should make the world more beautiful, are used to divide people and turn hearts against one another.

Through my extensive travel, I have seen both realities.

I am a Muslim scholar, and I am here to speak about Islam, but I am not here only for Muslims. I have always tried to raise my voice for peace, for character, for piety, and for the humanity.

Islam teaches us that the honor of human life is sacred. The Prophet Muhammad—peace be upon him—was sent as a mercy to the worlds, not as a mercy only to one nation or one tribe. His life was filled with examples of patience, tolerance, forgiveness, and cooperation with peoples of different faiths.

In Madinah, the Prophet—peace be upon him—established a society where Muslims, Jews, and others lived under a shared covenant with rights and responsibilities.

Later, when Sayyiduna Umar ibn al-Khattab entered Jerusalem, he gave protection and religious freedom to his people.

These examples show the true spirit of Islam, justice with humanity, strength with mercy, and faith with compassion.

Yet, today, Islam is often misunderstood and projected as a religion of extremism. This is painful for Muslims, but it is also harmful for the whole world. When any religion or people are reduced to fear and stereotypes, the door opens to discrimination, hate crimes, and injustices.

Today, anti-Muslim hatred is rising globally. Muslim women are mistreated because of their dress. Muslim children are bullied because of their names. Muslim communities are viewed with suspicion because of their faith. But my message is broader than one community.

Today, it may be Muslims. Tomorrow, it may be someone else.

We all share the same earth, the same spaces, the same resources, and the same future.

The attitude of "us versus them" is dangerous for everyone.

If a Muslim woman is mistreated in a workplace, other minorities also begin to feel unsafe. If one community's freedom is violated, every community's freedom becomes fragile.

Justice, fair treatment, and freedom must be for everyone who lives peacefully and does not harm others. We cannot build peace by protecting only those who look like us, speak like us, or believe like us. We build peace when we protect the dignity of every human being.

At times of sectarian tension in Pakistan, I have tried to serve as a voice of calm between Sunni and Shia scholars. At times of political violence, I have spoken for restraint and for the value of human life above anger, revenge, or division.

This is not separate from Islam. This is Islam.

My humble appeal is that governments, religious leaders, educators, and media

institutions must work together to challenge anti-Muslim hatred and every form of religious hatred.

We must teach our children that difference is not a threat. We must remind our societies that dignity is not a favor given by the powerful, but a right granted by God.

Let us not defend only our own but stand for what is right, whoever is suffering.

Let us build a world where no person is feared because of faith, no woman is humiliated because of her dress, no child is ashamed of his name, and no community is denied dignity.

Let us not be remembered as those who drew lines between people, but as those who erased them.

May Allah have peace on all of you.

VICE CHAIR MAHMOOD: This is the end of the testimony, and I really so humbly and from the bottom of my heart appreciate Shaikh Tariq Jamil for his work and for bringing the societies and communities and religions together.

Thank you so much.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Yes, thank you, Vice

Chair Mahmood, for sharing his testimony with us, and now several of us on the Commission, as commissioners, we have some questions for our witnesses.

And I will start with Mr. El Yazidi. I was just wondering in the wake of the 2025 murder in Hanover of Rahma Ayad, who was a nursing trainee, who also wore the hijab, how has the Supreme Council of Muslims in Germany worked with the German government to prevent similar attacks from happening in the future?

MR. EL YAZIDI: Unfortunately, we have actually in the Interior Ministry a person who is responsible for religious life in Germany, the Secretary General, State Secretary—excuse me—who is denying that there is something in anti-Muslim hatred.

We had the situation. We had the accident in Hanover, but also before in Hanover in other cities, and we are always trying to push our government to show to the 5.6 million Muslims that they are not alone, that the government is able and

is willing to do something.

But, unfortunately, we are not receiving any answers, and we saw that the actual government, they're only working on what are named with political Islam, with Islamism. There are a lot of groups that have been installed and until now there is no, nothing, nothing.

Even the media in Germany, after this attack, they didn't report about it. And we have given out some press releases. We spoke to different governments in the state of Hanover, but also in the central state, but unfortunately it's very, very worse—this situation—how the government is dealing with such happenings.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Okay. Thank you.

Vice Chair Mahmood.

VICE CHAIR MAHMOOD: Madam Chair, I want to delegate all my time to my fellow commissioner, Mohamed Elsanousi, who I believe is a champion of inter-faith harmony and really a master in protecting every religious freedom right for every faith.

So I think he deserves a lot more time. So with your permission, I'm going to give the stage to Commissioner Elsanousi for his worldwide travel and his lot of experience to come up here and raise a situation or question which we have not.

With your permission, I want to ask Commissioner Elsanousi.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Sure.

Commissioner Mohamed Elsanousi, we'll turn to you now.

COMMISSIONER ELSANOUSI: Well, thank you so much, Chair Hartzler and Vice Chairman Mahmood, and, of course, our witnesses here for blessing us this morning with your testimony.

We definitely appreciate that, appreciate your advocacy, as well.

I would have liked my colleague Commissioner Laser to begin us with the questions.

So, Commissioner Laser, do you want to do that or we can--

COMMISSIONER LASER: Sure. I have so

many.

Thank you. Thank you so much, Commissioner Elsanousi, and thank you so much to Chair Hartzler and to wonderful Vice Chair Mahmood, and to all of you for what you brought to us this morning. It was really powerful, and I appreciate the work you're all doing.

I have so many questions in my head, but one of them that I wanted you to speak to was actually what you think from—it was a debate that we were actually having at the Commission about the difference between talking about anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia, sort of when you're being an advocate for this, and what you feel is more effective and why?

So that's one question.

The other question that I just had is—I was writing this in my notes over here—how you feel U.S. leadership on fighting anti-Muslim hatred promotes U.S. leadership overall?

So those are just a couple questions, but I don't want to take up too much time because I'm

sure my fellow commissioners have more.

So, yes, starting with anti-Muslim hatred versus Islamophobia when you're being an advocate, do you have thoughts on what's more effective and why?

And I'm opening it up. Sorry. So you all have to duke it out. Whoever wants to go first.

MR. EL YAZIDI: I think that Dr. Farid Hafez is the expert on this issue. What do you think?

MR. HAFEZ: I can share a few thoughts.

COMMISSIONER LASER: Thank you.

MR. HAFEZ: Sure. I mean I've been the co-editor of the European Islamophobia Report for ten years now so maybe that's why Mr. El Yazidi is hinting to me.

I think, on the one hand, like we already have some sort of international political framework; right? We have the United Nations having declared March 15th the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

We have also the United States, the White

House has published a Strategy to Combat Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Hate, I think it was called—the White House strategy of three years ago.

So I think that we already have somehow a couple of presidents that already laid the groundwork for us conceptualizing this idea in the legal, in a legal framework.

I think one of the things that was mentioned here, especially for the German, as well as the European, landscape is kind of this hesitance, the strong reluctance on behalf of a lot of European politicians to have as much as there is a resolution against antisemitism, there is a resolution against anti-gypsies in the European Parliament, and Muslims and anti-racist folks have been working for like a decade and longer to have something similar for the Muslim people; right?

And I think that is like on the political side the problem, and it's not so much, you know, the naming of it, the politics of the naming because, yes, the European Commission also has somebody in charge of fighting anti-Muslim hatred,

but even, even though that institution is there, effectively there were not any policies being implemented based on that.

So I think it has more to do with the political will rather than with the question of the name, even though I would say largely, speaking on behalf of I think a lot of the academic literature and the research that is out there, I think there is a growing consensus that people talk about Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism and include within that not only the question of anti-Muslim hatred as an individual prejudice, but also the questions of the violation of religious freedom.

But it obviously goes beyond that. One of the reasons for what I stick here to anti-Muslim hatred and how it is being manifested in the collective is simply because that's your mandate; right?

So I want to address that. But obviously the problem is much larger than that, and I think, you know, problematizing also the question, what I tried to do is with the intersection of the

security politics and the question of religious freedom is just one, one good example of how we can see the entanglement of these issues and also the problem and the challenge therein and how to disentangle it and try to protect religious freedom for specific groups.

And, again, I want to highlight and emphasize it's not only the Muslims, right, and we see that all over. It starts maybe with Muslims where they are a smaller minority, but it affects every other religious minority as well potentially and can do so.

So I think this is something that I would like always to keep in mind that we have a lot of different broader aspects here that in a way are connected also to other questions; right?

And I'm sure there is a U.S. commission also with a mandate on issues about around security politics and others. So maybe a common effort to cooperate also across one's own mandate with others to see where people can help each other would also be helpful in that sense.

COMMISSIONER LASER: Thank you.

Anyone can add, but my second question, and then I will pass the baton, is on sort of U.S. leadership and how it promotes U.S. leadership overall to become involved in international accountability mechanisms—Arsalan Suleman—or just in general to be seen as leaders in this fight?

MR. SULEMAN: Sure. Thanks, Commissioner Laser. I can pick up on that.

I think in terms of U.S. leadership, a lot of that really starts at home. What kind of rhetoric our political leaders are using; what kind of priorities is the administration putting forward and actually following through?

There are many really important mechanisms that we have, and it's already been mentioned, you know, the IRF Act itself provides for sanctions mechanisms. You have the Magnitsky Act that provides for various mechanisms.

The tools are there, but the question is, you know, is the United States exercising them in a way, is it doing it consistently, is it doing it

impartially, so it doesn't seem like there's a double standard where the tools are only being applied to certain countries or for certain religious groups and not others?

And I think that's a really, a critical issue to focus on because I think perceptually there are a lot of people, domestically and internationally, who think that, well, the United States only cares about religious freedom for certain groups, whether it's Christians or others.

And I think the work of USCIRF shows that USCIRF really focuses on violations against everyone, and I think that's really important, and I think we can have more leaders emphasizing that equal application of U.S. concern and tools, and that would be a really great help on the leadership side of things.

But also in terms of how we deal with ensuring freedom of religion domestically for all communities.

And, of course, on the accountability side, that's a broader question, but there are so

many situations globally where the U.S. could do so much more to support international accountability, and unfortunately at times, for example, with this current administration, the U.S. is withdrawing from international institutions and bodies like the United Nations, the U.N. Human Rights Council.

We are affirmatively attacking international accountability mechanisms like the International Criminal Court.

We are reducing our funding for various U.N. mechanisms. For example, mandates that are created by the Human Rights Council, which do critical work on actually documenting violations.

All of the measures that this administration has taken to kind of withdraw the U.S. from international and multilateral institutions does a huge, does huge damage to our international standing and international leadership, and I think those are great places to start to reverse those policies and try to reestablish credible leadership on these topics internationally.

COMMISSIONER LASER: Thank you so much.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Thank you.

Now we'll go back to Commissioner Elsanousi for his question.

COMMISSIONER ELSANOUSI: Well, thank you so much, and I do have so many questions, but with the permission from Commissioner Schneck, maybe I could start here a number of questions, and again reiterating my appreciation to all of you.

But I want to really begin by you, Jewher, and my question to you, and, of course, you know we are very aware of the situation of your father and your family, and we, our prayers are with you and we support your father.

We know that President Trump will be meeting with President Xi I think in a couple of weeks or less.

So what kind of recommendations, you know, you recommend to this agency, to USCIRF? Sometimes, you know, we can raise that issue, we can encourage the White House to basically raise the questions of those who are, you know,

persecuted, particularly he's meeting with President Xi and how we can raise that? Any recommendation there would be very helpful for us as a Commission.

Then I want to move on to you, Farid Hafez, and thank you for your testimony as well.

You know, we report as USCIRF on violations of religious freedom around the world, and we actually basically submit Countries of Particular Concerns. That's where the violation is ongoing, systematic, and egregious.

And then, of course, you said that we are not reporting enough about what happens in Europe. Do you see what happened in Europe is ongoing and systematic violations of religious freedom in terms of violations against Muslims and other minority groups so that we can look into whether some of these should have been—countries should have been included in our list of Watch List.

We have a Watch List also, as the second tier, when the violation is systematic and ongoing. So you said you were not reporting enough as

USCIRF. So I'm asking you do you see this as ongoing and how you demonstrate that by examples?

And then to you, Mr. El Yazidi, it's good to see you, and my condolences also. I know that you just lost your, your older brother, so please accept our condolences as well.

But I want to ask you a question related to you as a minority in Germany, and we have seen around the world when communities work together, and I know there is antisemitism in Germany, as well, any illustration that you have to share with us because you said that, you know, there are a number of social commissions—right—in Germany, but you yet to get the commissioners into addressing this issue of violations of religious freedom for the Muslim community and all of that.

So any, any collaboration? Maybe it's, you know, it's more impactful when you have that collaboration with the Jewish community in Germany so that you can do that.

So I know that you understand this, and I know you created [?] in Europe, you know, as we

have it here in the United States, as well.

I really was hoping, and, you know, Commissioner Mahmood, is Shaikh Tariq, going to be back with us here or no?

VICE CHAIR MAHMOOD: He is not going to be back.

COMMISSIONER ELSANOUSI: Okay. I would have loved to ask him questions.

VICE CHAIR MAHMOOD: He had huge technical issues.

COMMISSIONER ELSANOUSI: I see.

VICE CHAIR MAHMOOD: So that is why.

COMMISSIONER ELSANOUSI: I see. I see.

And then to you, Mr. Suleman, here, another question for you. You mentioned that the international accountability mechanisms are underutilized by our, by our country, by the administration.

So any specific example that you have for us that shows that we use international mechanism basically to support those who are persecuted or bring the victim, you know, support the victims of

FORB violations?

That would be a specific example so we just need to know that.

Thank you so much. Thank you, Chair Hartzler, here.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Very good. I believe he started with Jewher Ilham. So could you answer the question there?

MS. ILHAM: Of course. Thank you very much for this very important question and for highlighting my father's case as well.

I think for the upcoming U.S.-China meeting, the biggest mistake would be treating human rights as a side issue.

If it's not integrated into trade, security, and tech discussions, and if it does not get integrated into those important discussions, then it will get sidelined.

So the most effective recommendations are those embedding accountability into the broader bilateral agenda, not to isolate it. And the human rights issue needs to be a standing, not symbolic,

agenda item.

And individual cases need to be highlighted as well. Human rights should be institutionalized in bilateral dialogue, not raised once and just dropped, and it's quite important for the current administration to, you know, integrate religious freedom and general human rights topic into all U.S.-China bilateral or multilateral dialogues, ensuring that it's, you know, it's never sidelined in pursuit of economic or security cooperation.

And vulnerable communities need to be protected, and it would also be hugely, greatly appreciated if the administration can help strengthen the asylum programs and humanitarian aid for, for groups like the Uyghur groups and other communities who have been put into very vulnerable situations, and also while helping with, providing support, whether it's legal or psychological support for survivors of human rights violations, and where survivors will feel safe enough to come out and testify and help CS groups to gather

evidence.

And the civil society groups with, it's important to also support civil society resilience by funding documentation of human rights violations, independent media, and diaspora organizations that provide lifelines to persecuted religious communities.

And not just with upcoming U.S.-China meeting, but, in general, I think it's important for U.S. government to also coordinate closely with countries that have already adopted forced labor import bans or are currently considering doing so to ensure that those kind of import bans lead to pressing corporations to exit the Uyghur Region and facilities that are implicated in labor transfers from the region.

And when the CBP prevents products from entering the U.S. because of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act noncompliance, it's very important that these same goods do not have a safe harbor in other countries, as well, and it is important that the U.S. government knows, the

Chinese government knows that this is not just between U.S.-China. This is a global issue where products are made under state-imposed forced labor are actually being sent to, being interwoven into the global supply chains.

And the products that we, that we have in our closets or in our pantries could be tainted by the blood and sweat of my brothers and sisters, and also by sharing information with other governments on which specific imports are blocked at the border because of concerns of forced labor.

The U.S. can help reduce the overall market for those goods, which will hopefully increase pressure on the Chinese government to abandon this state-imposed program of forced labor.

And the state-imposed forced labor issue should be included as a main agenda topic for the upcoming U.S.-China meeting.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Thank you very much for those excellent suggestions, and, of course, International Religious Freedom Act stipulates that human rights, religious freedom should be an

integral part of our foreign policy.

So you're so right. This is a wonderful opportunity here in a couple of weeks for the president when he meets with Xi Jinping to bring these things up along with trade and security and other issues.

So, thank you for that reminder as well as those other great recommendations.

So, now I'll turn to Farid Hafez, who had a question from Commissioner about Europe, and should they be included in our Special Watch List because of ongoing and egregious violations?

Would you consider it's raised to that standard or is it just some concerns that we need to address generally?

MR. HAFEZ: Well, that's a very good question. Also, I am not super-familiar with all the details in terms of what are the criteria to enlist somebody on the Watch List.

I would certainly say if you ask me based on the European Islamophobia Report, which is a report that we have done, as I said, for ten years,

and what we're doing is we basically track what happens from January 1st to December 31st in each and every country.

So consisting—the report consists of individual country reports so we have a team of 35 authors, primarily from out of academia, who are monitoring and covering each and every country on their own.

And if you ask me like broadly speaking are there countries where I think there is an ongoing and systematic concern emanating out of the state authorities and the governmental structure, and not only pertaining to like let's say far right movements, who might also be at one point or another part of the government coalition or the like, which is obviously increasingly the case in a lot of European countries.

But, again, are there ongoing and systematic violations on behalf of some governments, I would say, yes, there are, and I would, I would certainly argue that France is probably the number one most hostile country in

Europe where you have a systematic violation of religious freedom for Muslim folks.

I would also include Austria where I am a citizen of. I would also include Denmark, and I think there is a couple of other countries where there is also a systematic concern, but it's not as much overtly, openly anti-Muslim in-your-face, but still in terms of the legislation and the manifestation of how that translates into everyday life, there is also a lot of concern that I would offer, including the country of Germany, Netherlands, and more recently also Sweden.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Great. Thank you very much.

Now, Mr. Yazidi, your question from Mr. Elsanousi. I believe it had to do with collaboration between different faiths and what you've seen there.

MR. EL YAZIDI: Yes. Thank you very much and thank you, Dr. Elsanousi, also for your condolences. Thanks a lot.

The relationship between us and our Jewish

friends and fellow citizens are very, very good, but on institutional level, there are almost no relationship. There is no working together.

We don't feel that we are supporting each other, especially after the 7th of October. There are persons in the media, persons in governments, that are speaking a lot, or talking a lot about, the imported antisemitism, and they are meaning that antisemitism is imported from the Muslim, Muslim world countries.

It's unbelievable that we speak in Germany, that we talk in Germany about imported antisemitism in the country who is responsible for the Holocaust.

And so this is the situation. I told in the beginning when, I'm also member of the Muslim Jewish Leadership Council. This is a council which had been organized on European level. We tried to get it recognized in Germany, but we failed.

We failed because automatically when there is some kind of cooperation between, institutional cooperation between Muslim organizations and Jewish

organizations, you will hear a lot of attacks from different sides.

They are trying to stop such cooperation because they know that when we are together, we are strong, and the people who are the figures who are named on anti-Muslim hatred in Germany, mostly they are also, they have also antisemitism in their own and also they hate every kind of minority.

But the anti-Muslim hatred is the one which is social accepted, which you can talk out in the, also in the congress of Germany, the Bundestag, from party members like AfD and others, but they are not still, actually still not, they don't feel comfortable to make the same with other religions, but in their, in their DNA, they hate every kind of minorities.

This is the situation we have and we try to work on it. We have a very good relationship, even when we criticize the government. We have a good relationship with them. We try to always have the corridors of talking together.

And like as I told already, we have a very

personally, very good relationship with Jewish leaders in Germany.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Very good. Thank you. Now, Mr. Suleman, your question.

MR. SULEMAN: Thank you, Chair Hartzler, and thank you, Commissioner Elsanousi, for your questions.

I'll try to be brief. There have been many examples of the U.S. supporting international accountability mechanisms for FoRB violations successfully.

Generally, when the U.S. engaged at the U.N. Human Rights Council, we were very active supporters for the Special Rapporteur on FoRB who reports globally on the issue.

We also supported U.N. mechanisms like fact-finding missions regarding the Rohingya situation, on the situation in Syria, on violations against the Yazidis.

That's a really important forum where the U.S. should be active, but unfortunately this administration last year, the president signed an

executive order disengaging the U.S. from the Human Rights Council, meaning that we're not even engaging with the activities of the council with the special rapporteurs and commissioners, commissions, and others. That's a real absence of leadership.

We have in the past through the Global Criminal Justice Office of the State Department supported universal jurisdiction prosecutions abroad.

For example, prosecutions in Europe against members of ISIS, including for crimes against the Yazidis. I don't those, that form of cooperation is ongoing at this point.

So these are just a few examples. You know, there is so much more we can do across the board, but if you want to consider, for example, specifically the situation of China, in the last administration, there was an attempt to have the U.N. Human Rights Council adopt a resolution on the situation in Xinjiang, and that after it failed, but there are other mechanisms, like I mentioned in

my remarks, in my testimony, the inter-state conciliation mechanism of the CERD Convention is a mechanism that could be used to achieve the same end that a U.N. resolution would be, which is to create, to have, to foster the creation of a independent U.N. report on the situation of violation and persecution against the Uyghurs.

But the U.S. has decided at the moment, at least, not to pursue that option or engage in similar mechanisms.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Thank you.

Now I'll turn to Commissioner Stephen Schneck for his question.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: First of all, I'd like to thank all of the witnesses.

This has been an extraordinary session, and I've learned so much. So thank you all very much.

I have one overarching question that I would like to ask, like each of the witnesses to try to address.

And that is why are we seeing this fight

in anti-Muslim hatred around the world? What are the, what are the factors that are driving it? What are the conditions in which it's being nourished?

I think if we can understand that a little bit, we might, we might better think about how to address it.

Perhaps we can start with Mr. El Yazidi.

MR. EL YAZIDI: Yes. Thank you very much, Commissioner Schneck.

In my opinion, in the past, the Muslims in Europe, they have been, they have been not so visible. And everything has been okay as far as the Muslims have been in the fabrics, in the [?] and was not, they have not been visible.

Now, they are in the universities, now we see women with hijab talking to their colleagues. We see young Muslim youth trying to get in higher positions, and this, and we have people, especially in Germany, we have a minority, but it's a very loud minority, who is exporting this kind of hatred because they are, they have hatred ideology.

And they are so loud in the social media and also in the press that they let the majority feel, feel in fear against this visible, this visible participants of Islam.

This is my opinion on how I see why in the last years, we see this kind of rising of anti-Muslim hatred.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thank you.

I wonder if we could turn to Ms. Ilham now. I know China is a special case, but why is the Chinese government really cracking down on the practice of Islam in the country?

MS. ILHAM: I think there are different elements into this; right? The Chinese government did not really target the Uyghurs with the Islam angle until 9/11.

Before that, the Chinese government did already target the Muslim communities, but would never with the background of because they're a Muslim communities, and after 9/11, this was used as a perfect excuse for the Chinese government to get away from the global condemnation on their

actions towards the Muslim communities.

And, but boiling down, as I mentioned in my testimony that all religion, all religions in China are targeted, and, but Uyghur people are one of the largest religious communities in China.

And that we have been fighting really hard to keep our Muslim identities and, instead of refusing to be assimilated into, you know, the rest of China. And I think that is one of the reasons why the Uyghur communities and Kazakh communities have been considered as so threatening for the Chinese government.

And the Chinese government has been having the intention of cracking down on the population and the region for decades because of the geopolitical value of the region, whether it's the natural resources from gas, gold, uranium, you know, all the most valuable assets that oftentimes global leaders would like to focus on.

And when, when the Chinese government learned that Islam, Islamophobia, it's a wonderful tool that they could use in order to justify their

actions, they went ahead and used it.

And as you know, for the past few years, Chinese Christians and Tibetan Buddhists have also been targeted as well. And you see the Falun Gong practitioners as well have been targeted for a very long time.

So when it comes to China, Islam, it was never the core issue, but the differences that we hold and the value that the land provide is the major reason. And the religion was just a tool that the Chinese government used.

And talking broadly outside of China, whenever we see a—just going back to the last question—whenever we see there's a spike in anti-Muslim sentiment, oftentimes it's followed by major geopolitical events involving Muslim population, whether we're talking about Gaza issue or the 9/11 issue because of isolated instances.

Oftentimes entire groups get to be blamed, get blamed, and those narratives are oftentimes portrayed by global leaders and media.

Why this happens? I don't know. Leaders

would like to run and fearmongering oftentimes is a way to help with their, during their election cycles.

And also we've seen that there's a huge increase in officials posting about anti-Muslim narratives in their, during their, when they're running.

And when folks are trying to, when people are trying to gain understanding of a community, they either learn from the textbooks or from their elected officials.

And when there is very limited educational materials on the communities, they will have to rely on what the media and what their elected officials are telling them, too.

So I think it's important that we, we, you know, make sure that the education materials are fair to all communities and that we're not isolating one religious group or one ethnic group because of their identity, and we also train people at the appropriate age with media literacy as well to identify what is a biased media narratives and

what is a fair one.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thank you, Ms. Ilham.

Mr. Hafez.

MR. HAFEZ: Yes, I'll try to make this short. A wonderful question.

I think there is a couple of different factors that feed into that, and beyond what has already been said, and I very much agree with El Yazidi and Ilham.

Speaking of Europe, I think one of the issues is, and, you know, never forget that the reason why a lot of white people are in America is because of religious persecution in Europe, and to an extent, I think even though there was progress obviously in learning about religious freedom, we are not there, yet, right, especially if we compare it to the United States, without idealizing everything here.

But I think of the issues is really that there is this idea that the dominant religious community really holds power over everybody else so

in a way, all religious minorities are to some extent, and Muslims certainly extremely more than a lot of other communities, but all religious communities are, to an extent, affected by this oppression by the dominant community.

I think one part of it is also that we have in more recent times seen an extreme rise of the far right, and I think one thing always that I tell my students here in the U.S., the far right in Europe is not like the Christian right here.

It's very anti-religious. It's very anti-Christian, even though it tries to co-op religious Christian symbols.

And, therefore, Islamophobia has been a great ground for them to mobilize on this idea of the "great white replacement" that we have to fight against Muslim invasion—quote-unquote.

So that's part of the story. The other thing, which is much more systematic, which is also much more global in scale, is the long-term effects of the global war on terror.

A lot of the security policies that have

been implemented throughout the world are based on this rationale that Muslims are aching to some sort of radicalization, extremism, et cetera.

And that has translated into a crackdown on organized religious civil associations, and that affects a lot of the organized Muslims.

The other thing I think is also true, and when I speak about France being of extreme concern is because France, Austria, and these countries are countries where we have almost a percentage of up to ten percent of the whole population being Muslim.

With this increasing number, going hand-in-hand with the underrepresentation in the political sphere, what happens is that we see policies being implemented against the community who cannot defend itself.

And that also is one of the main explanations I think why in certain countries we see that being even much more aggressively implemented than in others because there is this fear of, well, they want to sit at the table and

want to also decide upon the common future of everybody.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thank you, Mr. Hafez.

Mr. Suleman, I do want to note we're just about out of time so--

MR. SULEMAN: I'll be very short, Commissioner Schneck. Thank you for the question.

I agree with everything that's been said by my fellow co-panelists. I just want to emphasize one point that I think Jewher was mentioning, which is the way in which political leaders specifically use, you know, anti-Muslim rhetoric and Islamophobia as a tool around elections.

And in the U.S., in particular, we often see spikes of anti-Muslim hatred around elections, and I think we're seeing that happen again right now. There are many officials who are campaigning against so-called Sharia.

There's an anti-Sharia caucus apparently in Congress now. I don't know why. There's

obviously no threat of Sharia doing anything to anyone in the United States.

But there are leaders, members of Congress, who have decided to make this a political issue and run campaigns, organize campaigns around it. And that's a big reason why you see spikes of anti-Muslim hatred.

COMMISSIONER SCHNECK: Thank you all.

CHAIR HARTZLER: Yes. Thank you, Commissioner Schneck, and we want to thank all of our witnesses today and everyone who has tuned into this hearing.

We will now conclude this hearing and just let everyone know that you can access a recording of this hearing and the witness testimonies on our website, which is www.uscirf.gov.

And with that, I will declare this hearing now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:39 a.m. EDT, the hearing was adjourned.]