



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

China's Religious Freedom Violations: Domestic Repression and Malign Influence Abroad

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Nury Turkel, USCIRF Chair

Good morning and thank you for attending the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's hearing today on China's Religious Freedom Violations: Domestic Repression and Malign Influence Abroad. I would also like to thank our distinguished witnesses for joining us and offering their expertise today.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, or USCIRF, is an independent, bipartisan U.S. government advisory body created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, or IRFA. The Commission uses international standards to monitor freedom of religion or belief abroad and makes policy recommendations to the U.S. government. Today, USCIRF exercises its statutory authority under IRFA to convene this important hearing.

China is unambiguously one of the most repressive countries and worst religious freedom violators and human rights abusers in the world. The most recent example is its repressive tactics, on display for the world to see, in responding to the protestors throughout China and the world regarding its Zero-COVID policy. The protests are in part sparked by the tragic deaths caused by a fire in Urumqi amid strict zero-COVID lockdowns. Chinese officials are stopping individuals randomly on the street and searching and deleting from their phones any social media content and communications related to the protests. Officials have also called and threatened Chinese citizens who are overseas, coercing them to delete such content.

USCIRF has repeatedly recommended China's designation as a country of particular concern, or CPC, a designation that the State Department has consistently applied since 1999, soon after the passage of IRFA. The State Department announced its most recent CPC designations, including China, on December 2.

In the past decade, religious freedom conditions in the country have rapidly deteriorated under the brutal rule of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Xi Jinping. The CCP's techno-authoritarianism, transnational repression, and other forms of malign influence abroad represent some of the most troubling aspects of

its religious tyranny, impacting Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Catholic and Protestant Christians, and many other religious groups.

Uyghur Muslims, for example, have long fallen victim to China's techno-authoritarianism and transnational repression. The Chinese government has used advanced surveillance technology as an integral part of its repression in Xinjiang. Chinese tech companies, both state-owned enterprises and private companies such as Huawei and others, play a vital role in facilitating and implementing the CCP's oppressive policies in the Uyghur region. Moreover, Uyghurs continue to experience terror and intimidation even after they have escaped to other countries. Many of them fear for their safety and the safety of their families who remain in Xinjiang, as well as the threat of forcible deportation by some countries that are under Chinese government pressure.

The U.S. government must continue to vigorously enforce policies to ensure that our nation's trade policies do not contribute to CCP's religious repression at home, and we must also actively counter its malign foreign influences and transnational repression—including here in the U.S. homeland.

With that, I will now turn it over to my colleague Vice Chair Abraham Cooper for his remarks and to introduce our witnesses.