



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

Targeted Sanctions: Implications for International Religious Freedom

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Vice Chair Turkel

Thank you very much, Chair Maenza. I would like to join in welcoming you all to today's hearing.

As noted in USCIRF's 2021 Annual Report, a higher percentage of Global Magnitsky sanctions issued in 2020 were in response to religious freedom abuses than in previous years. Since the passage of the 2016 Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and the related 2017 E.O. 13818, 243 foreign individuals and entities have been sanctioned, including 30 directly related to religious freedom. In 2020, 14 out of the 35 total Global Magnitsky sanctions

were related to religious freedom violations, demonstrating progress in holding the perpetrators of religious freedom violations accountable. These sanctions included eight imposed against Chinese government entities and senior Chinese officials, including Chen Quanguo, for their direct participation in the surveillance, mass detention, and forced labor of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang. The Treasury Department also imposed Global Magnitsky sanctions against Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and five associated individuals, citing Kadyrov's many human rights violations against the LGBTI community and others in Chechnya. Although not explicit in the release announcing the designation, many of the human rights abuses overseen or condoned by Kadyrov are based on his coercive imposition of his interpretation of religion on all of Chechen society.

In 2020, the State Department also issued several public designations under section 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, of foreign officials and their immediate family members involving religious freedom violations, including Kadyrov and his family; Huang Yuanxiong and his spouse for abuses against Falun Gong practitioners; and three Chinese officials and their immediate families for abuses against Muslims in Xinjiang.

In 2021, the Biden Administration has continued to use these authorities to hold perpetrators of violations of religious freedom accountable, including by issuing Global Magnitsky sanctions against a Cuban entity responsible for a violent attack of a priest and designating a Chinese official under 7031(c) for persecuting Falun Gong practitioners. While we welcome these actions, the number of targeted sanctions imposed since the implementation of the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, continues to represent only a small percentage of the religious freedom violations occurring globally.

Earlier this year, the Chinese government retaliated to the targeted sanctions imposed by the United States and several allies by sanctioning U.S. and foreign government officials, including then USCIRF Chair, Gayle Manchin and then Vice Chair Tony Perkins. This attempt to silence international criticism against the Chinese Communist Party's genocidal policies towards the Uyghur and Turkic Muslims demonstrates the effectiveness of this type of sanction and the importance of coordinated pressure by the U.S. government and like-minded partners.

With this in mind, USCIRF recommends that the U.S. government increase the use of human rights-related financial and visa authorities to impose asset freezes and/or visa bans on individuals and entities for severe religious freedom violations. In our most recent annual report, we note contexts where asset freezes and visa bans on individual officials, agencies, and military units can stem continued religious persecution, including in Burma, China, India, Pakistan, and Russia.

In addition to more robustly imposing targeted sanctions in response to religious freedom violations, we must ensure the impact and effectiveness of these sanctions. To this aim, USCIRF recommends that the United States government coordinate with other countries with similar sanctions regimes on targeted sanctions whenever possible. When multilateral sanctions are issued, the stigma of the sanctions is stronger, and the travel restrictions and assets freezes have a greater impact.

Thank you very much to our witnesses for joining us today. I look forward to hearing your testimonies.