

*House Foreign Affairs Committee*  
*Subcommittee on Africa and Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere*  
*“Defending Religious Freedom Around the World”*  
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An alliance of nations has emerged that see religious freedom as the greatest internal threat to their dictatorial control.

Communist, authoritarian, and totalitarian regimes around the world are engaged in an unprecedented effort to control people of faith within their nations. This dark alliance shares the view that organized and emboldened people of faith must be effectively - if not brutally - suppressed to maintain their power.

At the same time, radical, militant Islam continues its purification efforts throughout the MENA region and beyond. Syria and Nigeria are key focus areas of opportunity for them in their quest for dominance—excluding all other faiths, even others within Islam.

The people of faith being targeted by this persecution are America’s greatest allies in the spread of freedom around the world. We should see and treat them as such.

The United States stands as an essential voice in the global religious freedom movement—a movement of over 40 countries fighting for religious freedom for everyone, everywhere, all the time.

Put bluntly, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS NOW ONE OF OUR PRIMARY WEAPONS against the dark alliance gathered against us.

Religious freedom supports our allies and terrifies our enemies. It is one of our most powerful strategic assets—a force multiplier that strengthens allies, constrains authoritarian power and exposes the insecurity of repressive regimes.

Communist China spends billions every year inventing and deploying ever more sophisticated surveillance systems to control their own humble people of faith—Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, or Falun Gong practitioners. China has launched a war on faith—a topic on which I have written an entire book.

Transnational repression is used by religious freedom opponents in their efforts to control citizens who have left their countries but still advocate for freedom.

It is a dark hour. The U.S. and other freedom-loving nations must rise to the challenge.

Looking around the world, we see countless examples of this challenge:

Moscow has allied with the Russian Orthodox Church, working with it to persecute other faith traditions. Vietnam is oppressing its Christian population and disfavored Buddhist leaders. Even in South Korea, out-of-favor Christian groups and the leader of the Unification Church have recently been jailed by the government.

Iran's Shia clerical hierarchy is persecuting—all harshly and even lethally—all other faiths, especially targeting Baha'is, Christians and Jews, and even attacking Muslims of other schools of thought. Pakistan's Ahmadi Muslims are often violently attacked, as are Christians.

Nicaragua is systematically kicking out Catholic clerics and persecuting the faithful in a growing campaign that now includes Protestant leaders and members of other faith traditions. Recently, Nicaragua banned bringing Bibles into the country—a hardline restriction reminiscent of Communist paranoia toward free religious expression during the Cold War.

The new administration in Syria is purging religious minorities. These groups must be allowed to maintain their own security forces—or a genocide will happen in the future, as it did in Iraq to the Yezidis and Christian communities who could not defend themselves.

Burma is seeing increased Christian persecution, along with the ongoing Rohingya genocide.

Early warning signs of a Muslim-on-Christian war are brewing across Africa.

Nigeria is the deadliest place on the planet to be a Christian. At the same time, the Nigerian government is seeking and receiving support from China, Russia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

In India, communal violence against Christian and Muslim communities is increasingly commonplace. Many other cases of persecution exist as well. North Korea has no religious freedom at all. The same is true for Eritrea and Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia has not a single church in the entire country.

Religious persecution is a symptom of a closing world—a new Iron Curtain against faith drawn not just against nations, but against conscience itself. Its antidote is religious freedom, a medicine we must insist upon before it's too late.

Religious persecution is not an isolated human rights concern; it is a warning signal that freedom itself is under siege. When regimes crush faith, they are rehearsing the suppression of every other liberty that follows.

History teaches us that appeasing this repression does not bring stability. Instead, it invites greater aggression and deeper violence. On the other hand, religious freedom is a stabilizing force, a catalyst for civil society and a foundation for lasting peace.

The United States has both the moral authority and strategic interest to lead on this issue. We must insist on religious freedom consistently, unapologetically and urgently—before the space for belief, dissent and human dignity closes further, and before the cost of inaction becomes far greater than the cost of leadership.