

TESTIMONY

BEFORE THE NATIONAL SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON

OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

ON

EXAMINING THE GOVERNMENT'S RECORD ON IMPLEMENTING

THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT

BY

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I am Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today before the National Security Subcommittee on "Examining the Government's Record on Implementing the International Religious Freedom Act." This hearing is important because religious freedom is important: it is a pivotal human right that is both central to U.S. history and heritage and affirmed by international treaties and obligations. This hearing also is both important and timely given that religious freedom also is a practical necessity crucial to both the security of the U.S. and the world, especially the post-9/11 world.

The International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), out of which USCIRF was created, provides the U.S. government with unique capabilities to promote religious freedom and address violations of this fundamental freedom. These capabilities are especially significant given that religious freedom violations are implicated in some of the United States' most pressing foreign policy challenges. By using the tools that IRFA provides, the United States can more effectively encourage respect for human rights while also addressing factors driving violations of religious freedom and the violent religious extremism such violations generate.

Now more than ever, the U.S. government, including both the Executive Branch and Congress, needs to more fully utilize the tools that IRFA offers.

Before I focus specifically in my testimony on these tools, I want to lay out the stakes. Simply put, violations of religious freedom lead to violent religious extremism, and many governments, including those that top the U.S. foreign policy and security agendas, either perpetrate or tolerate religious freedom abuses. Governments perpetrate these abuses in at least three ways.

First, some governments actually embody the extremism itself. Both the Iranian and Sudanese governments, for example, are run by religious extremists who violently impose their worldview on others. Iran remains a world-class religious-freedom violator, and USCIRF deemed Sudan as the world's most violent religious-freedom abuser due to its conduct during the North-South civil war of 1983-2005 when it called for jihad against the south. Since South Sudan became independent, conditions in Sudan have deteriorated, as its leaders continue to repress their people.

While Iran and Sudan repress freedom on behalf of extremism, other governments engage in repression in the name of opposing it. Both China and Russia, for example, repress Muslims in the name of fighting extremism in Muslim communities.

Still other governments embolden extremists to commit abuses. Pakistan, for example, with its anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws, encourage extremists to commit violence against those they perceive as transgressing these laws.

These are examples of how governments violate religious freedom in connection with their stance on extremism. Other governments are responsible for extremist-driven violations through their toleration of these violations -- that is, by their failure to prevent violence or bring justice to the responsible parties. Such failures create and perpetuate a climate of impunity. Egypt's failure to protect Coptic Christians and Nigeria's failure to protect both Christians and Muslims from sectarian violence are two such examples.

Thus, through sins of commission and omission, governments are responsible for religious freedom abuses within their borders, including those driven by violent religious extremism. Such abuses are harmful not only to human rights, but also to the stability of their societies and that of other countries. Indeed, studies show that countries that honor religious freedom enjoy greater stability, harmony, and prosperity -- and women have higher status in such societies -- while those whose governments perpetrate or tolerate violations create the conditions for failed societies. There are at least three reasons for this correlation.

First, governments that persecute or fail to protect their citizens and others against religious persecution can drive people into extremist hands. When our Commission visited Ethiopia last year, we witnessed disturbing signs of this danger. Ethiopia's recent efforts to combat extremism by forcing its Muslim community to embrace a foreign form of Islam run the risk of producing exactly what it fears -- the radicalization of individuals within that community.

Second, governments that enforce laws which violate religious freedom unwittingly encourage people to monitor others for signs of trespass and take violent actions against perceived transgressors. Such is the case with Pakistan with its anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws.

And third, governments that restrict religious freedom in the name of fighting religious extremist groups end up strengthening these very groups by weakening their more moderate but less resilient competition. For example, in Egypt, President Mubarak's restrictions weakened the hand of pro-freedom movements, making it easier for Salafists to emerge stronger than their more democratic competition in the post-Mubarak era.

These examples demonstrate the centrality of religious freedom and religious freedom violations to the narratives of countries that top the U.S. foreign policy and security agendas. They also underscore that effectively promoting religious freedom can help U.S. policy makers achieve crucial goals by fostering respect for human rights while promoting stability and ultimately national security. And IRFA, when used properly, can help the U.S. achieve these important goals.

USCIRF's Role in IRFA Implementation

In October 1998 Congress passed, and President Clinton signed, the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). IRFA mandated the promotion and protection of religious freedom around the world as a central element of American foreign policy. The Act was a response to the growing concern about religious persecution worldwide and the perception that religious freedom was an orphan human right that the U.S. government was not adequately focused on.

IRFA put into place three mechanisms to monitor religious persecution abroad: An Ambassador-at Large for International Religious Freedom within the Department of State; the bipartisan and independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, (or USCIRF), on which I serve; and to give teeth to this new effort, the creation of a "country of particular concern" status for countries engaged in or tolerating "systematic, ongoing and egregious" violations.

I first will first focus in my testimony on USCIRF's activities and recommendations and then turn to other aspects of IRFA.

USCIRF was created by IRFA as an entity separate and distinct from the State Department: an independent, bipartisan U.S. government advisory body that monitors religious freedom worldwide and makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. USCIRF bases its recommendations on the standards found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international documents.

USCIRF's work is accomplished through the leadership of its Commissioners, who serve in a voluntary capacity without pay, and the engagement of its professional staff. Three Commissioners are appointed by the President, while six are appointed by the leadership of both parties in the House and Senate. As mentioned, the Commission is bipartisan: Congressional leaders of the party that is not the President's party appoints four Commissioners, and the party in the White House appoints five. Dr. Suzan D. Johnson Cook, the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, serves as a non-voting *ex officio* member.

Far from duplicating the work of the State Department and its Office of International Religious Freedom, USCIRF's independence gives it the freedom to speak publicly about violations of this fundamental right and ways the United States can engage positively. To perform this function, USCIRF issues written analyses, including its Annual Report, as well as periodic policy briefs and frequent press statements and op-eds. In addition, USCIRF has released major reports on a variety of issues, highlighting specific actions the U.S. government should take to improve religious freedom. In 2005, USCIRF released *Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung*, with eyewitness accounts of religious freedom violations in North Korea, as well as the Congressionally-mandated *Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal*. In 2008, USCIRF issued *A Prison Without Bars: Refugee and Defector Testimonies of Severe Violations of Freedom of Religion or Belief in North Korea*. In 2011, in response to a Congressional request, USCIRF issued *Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan*, which analyzed whether the portrayal of the country's religious minorities in public school and *madrassa* textbooks leads to acts of discrimination or violence against them. In 2012, USCIRF issued a major report on constitutions of member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and how they address religious freedom.

USCIRF also works with Congress on a range of issues. Commissioners and USCIRF staff serve as a resource to Members of the House and Senate and their offices on a range of countries and issues, including testifying before Congressional committees about USCIRF's independent findings and recommendations. USCIRF also engages with religious groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), seeking their insights and benefiting from their information. Commissioners and staff meet with representatives of religious communities and institutions, victims of religious persecution and their families, human rights groups, academics, and policy experts.

USCIRF's engages with the State Department, National Security Council, USAID, and other executive branch entities to help promote international religious freedom as a key foreign policy

priority, as IRFA mandated. The Commission also meets with high-ranking officials from foreign governments and international organizations, participates in U.S. delegations to international meetings, and helps provide training to Foreign Service officers and other U.S. officials. The Commission travels internationally to examine conditions firsthand, meeting with high-level officials and others.

USCIRF's CPC Recommendations

One of USCIRF's most important responsibilities is to recommend to the State Department those countries that the Department should designate as "countries of particular concern" or CPCs for their "systematic, ongoing and egregious" violations of religious freedom, marking them as among the worst religious freedom violators:

In its 2013 Annual Report, USCIRF recommended that the State Department re-designate the following countries as CPCs: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan:

- In Burma, despite political reforms, sectarian violence and severe abuses against ethnic minority Christians and Muslims continue with impunity.
- In China, conditions continue to deteriorate, particularly for Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims. To stem the growth of independent Catholic and Protestant groups, the government arrested leaders and shut churches down. Members of Falun Gong, as well as those of other groups deemed "evil cults," face long jail terms, forced renunciations of faith, and torture in detention.
- In Eritrea, religious freedom conditions continue to be extremely grave, with torture or other ill-treatment of 2,000 to 3,000 religious prisoners, arbitrary arrests and detentions without charges, a prolonged ban on public religious activities, and interference in the internal affairs of registered religious groups.
- In Iran, already-poor religious freedom conditions continue to deteriorate, particularly for religious minorities, especially Baha'is, Christians, and Sufi Muslims, as well as for dissenting Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. In the lead-up to the June 14, 2013 presidential election, the government has silenced all forms of dissent.
- In North Korea, the government tightly controls all religious activity and perpetuates an extreme cult of personality venerating the Kim family as a pseudo-religion. Individuals engaged in clandestine Protestant activity or "fortune telling" are arrested, tortured, and even executed, and thousands of religious believers remain imprisoned in North Korea's notorious penal labor camps, including refugees repatriated from China.
- Despite improvements in religious freedom, Saudi Arabia remains unique in the extent to which it restricts the public expression of any religion other than Islam. Not a single church or other non-Muslim house of worship exists in the country. The government privileges its own interpretation of Sunni Islam over all other interpretations. It also arrests and detains

Shi'a Muslim dissidents and continues to imprison individuals for apostasy, blasphemy, and sorcery.

- In Sudan, religious freedom remains poor due to the government's imposition of a restrictive interpretation of Shari'ah (Islamic law) on Muslims and non-Muslims alike, including use of amputations and floggings for crimes and acts of "indecent" and "immorality." The government continues to arrest Christians for proselytizing and for the capital offense of apostasy, and governmental and non-governmental attacks against the Christian community continue.
- In Uzbekistan, the Uzbek government continues to repress religious freedom through a restrictive religion law facilitating state control over all religious communities, particularly the majority Muslim community. It imprisons individuals who do not conform to officially-prescribed practices or who it claims are extremist, including as many as 5,000 to 10,000 Muslims.

USCIRF also has recommended that seven other states also meet the CPC threshold and should be designated as CPCs: Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam.

- In Egypt, the government repeatedly has failed to protect religious minorities, including Coptic Christians, from violence, while prosecuting and jailing people for "defamation" of religion. In addition, Egypt's new constitution includes problematic provisions relating to religious freedom.
- In Iraq, despite the government's efforts to improve security, religiously-motivated violence by extremist groups continues with impunity, with Shi'a Muslims experiencing the worst attacks in the past year. In recent years, such violence has forced large percentages of the country's smallest religious minority communities, including Christians, Mandaeans, and Yezidis, to flee the country, and those who remain live in fear of further violence and face discrimination, marginalization, and neglect.
- In Nigeria, protection of religious freedom continued to falter, as the terrorist group Boko Haram attacked Christians, as well as fellow Muslims opposing them, and inflamed tensions between Christians and Muslims. Nigeria's government has repeatedly failed to prosecute perpetrators of religiously-related violence that has killed more than 14,000 Nigerians, both Christian and Muslim, fostering a climate of impunity.
- In Pakistan, religious freedom abuses have risen dramatically due to chronic sectarian violence targeting Shi'a Muslims. The government's continued failure to protect Christians, Ahmadis, and Hindus, along with its repressive blasphemy law and anti-Ahmadi laws, have fueled religious freedom abuses and vigilante violence.
- In Tajikistan, The Tajik government suppresses all religious activity independent of state control, particularly the activities of Muslims, Protestants, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The government also imprisons individuals on unproven criminal allegations linked to Islamic religious activity and affiliation.

- In Turkmenistan, the religious freedom environment remains extremely poor, as the Turkmen religion law makes it difficult for religious groups to function. Police raids and other harassment of registered and unregistered religious groups continue, and Jehovah's Witnesses are imprisoned for conscientious objection.
- In Vietnam, religious freedom conditions remain very poor despite some positive changes over the past decade in response to international attention. The Vietnamese government continues to imprison individuals for religious activity or religious freedom advocacy. It uses a specialized religious police force (*công an tôn giáo*) and vague national security laws to suppress independent Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai activities, and seeks to stop the growth of ethnic minority Protestantism and Catholicism via discrimination, violence and forced renunciations of their faith.

While not mandated in IRFA, USCIRF feels it is important to shine the light on other countries that violate religious freedom. The Commission has placed eight countries on its Tier 2 List, which replaces our Watch List designation. These countries are: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Laos and Russia.

USCIRF found that abuses in these countries are serious enough to meet at least one of three criteria, but not all, of the “systematic, ongoing, and egregious” CPC benchmark language as specified by the IRFA Act of 1998. These abuses affect billions of our fellow human beings. For instance, in Russia, conditions continue to worsen, as the government uses extremism laws against certain Muslim groups and so-called “non-traditional” religious communities, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses, through raids, detentions, and imprisonment. In addition, massive violations continue in Chechnya. Outside of Russia, similar repression occurs across Central Asia as well. In Indonesia, extremist violence coupled by government arrests of individuals considered religiously deviant threatens its tradition of tolerance and pluralism.

Besides documenting abuses and formulating recommendations for Tier 1 and Tier 2 countries, USCIRF's Annual Report also spotlights countries and regions in which current trends are worth monitoring – Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Ethiopia, Turkey, Venezuela and Western Europe. And this year's report also addresses several themes relating to religious freedom. These themes range from legal retreat from religious freedom in post-communist countries to severe religious freedom violations by non-state actors. And let me add that recently, USCIRF released a separate report on religious freedom conditions in Syria, including how our government can help Christian and Alawite minorities, as well as members of the Sunni majority.

CPC Designations

Unfortunately, neither Republican nor Democratic Administrations have fully utilized IRFA as the key foreign policy tool it was intended to be. Neither have designated CPCs in a timely manner nor issued specific Presidential actions based on these designations. For instance, the Obama Administration had issued CPC designations only once during its first term; and while the Bush Administration issued several designations, it also allowed the annual designation process to fall off track.

Under IFRA, countries remain designated until removed, but any corresponding penalties will expire after two years. The countries currently designated—Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan—were named in August 2011. Because of the two-year life span of any sanctions associated with CPC designations, the Administration must prioritize this pivotal freedom by pressing countries to implement reforms that will confront violations and ensure that the Presidential actions do not expire in August 2013.

Naming countries as CPCs isn't the end of engagement, but rather the beginning of a high-level process to encourage governments to improve. When combined with the prospect of sanctions or other actions, the CPC designation can create political will where none existed, moving repressive governments to undertake needed changes. Failing to act by August would send a terrible message about the commitment of the United States to this important issue.

Even for those currently named, the State Department issued indefinite waivers on taking any action against Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia, in both cases to “further the purposes of the [International Religious Freedom] Act.” As a result of these waivers, the United States has not implemented any policy response tied to the CPC designation for either of these countries.

The State Department also should implement specific Presidential actions. IRFA includes a menu of options for countries designated as CPCs and a list of actions to help encourage improvements in countries that violate religious freedom but do not meet the CPC threshold. The specific policy options to address severe violations of religious freedom in CPC countries include sanctions (referred to as Presidential actions in IRFA) that are not automatically imposed. Rather, the Secretary of State is empowered to enter into direct consultations with a government to find ways to bring about improvements in religious freedom. IRFA also permits the development of either a binding agreement with a CPC-designated government on specific actions it will take to end the violations that gave rise to the designation or the taking of a “commensurate action.” The Secretary may additionally determine that pre-existing sanctions are adequate or waive the requirement of taking action in furtherance of the Act.

However, in practice, the flexibility provided in IRFA has proven detrimental to the intent of the law. Generally, no new Presidential actions pursuant to CPC designations have been levied, with the State Department instead relying on pre-existing sanctions. While relying on pre-existing sanctions is technically correct under the statute, the practice of “double-hatting” has provided little incentive for CPC-designated governments to reduce or end egregious violations of religious freedom. For these mechanisms to have any real impact on promoting religious freedom, the designation of an egregious religious freedom violator as a CPC must be followed by the implementation of a clear, direct, and specific Presidential action.

Other IRFA Provisions

Along with creating USCIRF, IRFA created the International Religious Freedom Office in the State Department with an Ambassador-at-Large as a principal advisor; authorized a director-level position at the NSC to coordinate efforts; mandated that the State department establish prisoner lists; calls for American diplomats to receive training on how to promote religious

freedom effectively around the world; and bars the entry of aliens who are responsible for or directly carried out “particularly severe violations of religious freedom.”

The International Religious Freedom Office at the State Department: The key official inside the U.S. government for coordinating and developing U.S. international religious freedom policy is the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. According to a report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) dramatically reduced the rank of the Ambassador-at-Large. GAO reported that the current Ambassador was informed that, while officially reporting to the DRL Assistant Secretary, she would in practice report to the bureau’s Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary or a Deputy Assistant Secretary.

This reduction in the Ambassador-at-Large’s rank constitutes a major change in the structure IRFA established and a thwarting of congressional intent. Under IRFA, the Ambassador-at-Large is to be a “principal adviser to the President and the Secretary of State regarding matters affecting religious freedom abroad.” Since the position was established, every Administration, including the current one, has situated the Ambassador-at-Large in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) and therefore under its Assistant Secretary. However, as reported by the GAO, the State Department’s organizational structure guidelines consider an Ambassador-at-Large to be of higher rank than an Assistant Secretary. Furthermore, other Ambassadors-at-Large report to the Secretary, including those for Global Women’s Issues, Counterterrorism, and War Crime Issues, as well as the AIDS Coordinator.

USCIRF recommends the Obama Administration fulfill IRFA’s intent that the Ambassador-at-Large be a “principal adviser to the President and the Secretary of State regarding matters affecting religious freedom abroad” by ensuring he or she has direct access to the President and the Secretary of State; continue the practice of having the Ambassador maintain direct oversight of the staff of Office of International Religious Freedom; and have the Ambassador chair a working group with other religiously-oriented positions and programs at the State Department to ensure consistency in message and strategy. In addition, the Office of International Religious Freedom should be empowered to be the central location for all State Department efforts on religious freedom and religious engagement, including by enlarging its staff and deepening its expertise.

Position at the NSC: IRFA also authorized the creation of a director-level position at the National Security Council to serve as the Special Adviser on International Religious Freedom. The Special Adviser was envisioned to be a resource for executive branch officials, compiling and maintaining information on the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom, and making policy recommendations. The Special Adviser was briefly filled during the Clinton administration, but has been vacant since. USCIRF urges the Administration to fill this position.

Monitoring Mechanisms – Prisoner Lists: IRFA mandated that the Secretary of State establish monitoring mechanisms “consisting of lists of persons believed to be imprisoned, detained, or placed under house arrest for their religious faith, together with brief evaluations and critiques of the policies of the respective country restricting religious freedom.” In compiling this list, the State Department was directed to use the resources of the various bureaus and embassies and

consult with NGOs and religious groups. While the State Department has advocated for individual prisoner cases, USCIRF is unaware of the Department establishing or maintaining a comprehensive prisoner list. However, USCIRF has compiled an informal list of prisoners that reflects only a small number of those detained, jailed, or disappeared, and longer lists of prisoners in Iran, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan are included in the 2013 Annual Report's appendices. In addition, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China maintains a comprehensive, searchable database of prisoners in China. The ability of both commissions to track prisoners, even while operating with substantially fewer resources and less access to international information than the State Department, demonstrates that the State Department can fulfill this statutory mandate.

Training: IRFA calls for American diplomats to receive training on how to promote religious freedom effectively around the world. In the past few years, training for Foreign Service Officers on issues of religious freedom has increased, but remains voluntary. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) continues to offer a three-day course on *Religion and Foreign Policy*. USCIRF staff was invited to speak to classes about the role of the Commission, and also has been invited regularly to regional studies classes to discuss the Commission's findings on countries of interest. While USCIRF welcomes these initiatives, these courses remain optional and are not yet part of the core curriculum for all diplomats in training.

To ensure that U.S. diplomats, service members, and military chaplains are adequately equipped to deal with issues of religious freedom in the field, USCIRF recommends that all diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute and relevant members of the military receive training on the importance of religious freedom and practical ways to best promote this freedom as an aspect of U.S. foreign policy.

Training on religious freedom issues in the military education system remains minimal, despite the many schools, military service colleges, and universities providing professional military education and the fact that religious and sectarian issue underlie many conflicts around the world. None have a specific focus on training on international standards of freedom of religion or belief. Overall, professional military education at the various service colleges should be expanded to include religious freedom as a topic, to ensure U.S. service members are mindful of these standards when engaging or partnering with religious leaders or local government officials and understand the value of religious freedom in countering violent religious extremism. For the chaplaincy corps, the Army has created the Center for World Religions, which is a small U.S. Army Chaplain Corps Directorate co-located at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Center in Ft. Jackson, South Carolina. Expanding its capability to train on religious freedom standards, as well as other matters concerning religious issues, could fill a void in joint and inter-agency planning. In addition, the curriculum of the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Center should be expanded so chaplains involved in religious leader liaison are better equipped to understand religious freedom standards in the context of human rights and stability operations.

Admissibility to the U.S. of Severe Violators of Religious Freedom: Another IRFA issue relevant to both the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) relates to the admission to the United States of aliens who were "responsible for or directly carried out...particularly severe violations of religious freedom." IRFA bars the entry of such

individuals. This provision has been invoked only once: it was used in March 2005 to exclude Chief Minister Narendra Modi of Gujarat state in India due to his complicity in the 2002 riots that resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1,100 to 2,000 Muslims. USCIRF had urged such an action.

USCIRF continues to urge the Departments of State and Homeland Security to develop a lookout list of aliens who are inadmissible to the United States on this basis. USCIRF wrote to Secretary Clinton in 2012 about the possibility that Chief Minister Modi might apply for a visa, reiterating the Commission's concerns about his admissibility to the United States. Directly related to identifying and barring from entry such severe religious freedom violators, IRFA also requires the President to determine the specific officials responsible for violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by governments of CPCs, and, "when applicable and to the extent practicable," publish the identities of these officials in the Federal Register. Despite these requirements, no individual officials from any CPC countries responsible for particularly severe religious freedom violations have been identified to date.

U.S. Leadership Is Needed

When it comes to promoting religious freedom and combating the rise of violent religious extremism, religious freedom abuses not only offend human rights, but pose a grave threat to the security and stability of countries. And unfortunately, this instability and violence often spills beyond national borders into neighboring countries, threatening entire regions.

As Americans living in a post-9/11 world, we of all people know what happens when violent religious extremism is exported globally as terrorism. This is why the U.S. government must prioritize religious freedom not just as a core human right, but a global security imperative and a vital part of any counter-extremism strategy. Our government must recognize the pivotal role of religion in countries that top our foreign policy agenda and how limitations on religious liberty can prevent the growth and establishment of stable and productive societies.

Religious freedom has national security relevance. Conditions favoring religious freedom can help counter extremism by undercutting the message of extremists and fostering religious diversity and minority rights. As a fundamental right, religious freedom is a core component of a healthy society, as it encompasses other freedoms – including those of expression, association, and assembly.

To further the religious freedom agenda, our Commission believes that both the Executive Branch and Congress have important roles to play in promoting religious freedom. USCIRF recommends the following activities that are part of the *Executive and Congressional Road Maps* that USCIRF developed that I request be included in the record. Along with the Executive Branch actions I noted earlier in my testimony, USCIRF recommends that the Administration:

- Create a national security strategy to guide U.S. government's promotion of international religious freedom: Such a strategy would help ensure that the full weight and influence of the United States is brought to bear on these important issues. Doing so would give guidance to disparate efforts and maximize our ability to influence other countries. It is also important that such a strategy also is reflected in the next Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development

Review (QDDR) and as appropriate in the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). To facilitate this effort, USCIRF has also recommended the creation of an interagency working group at the National Security Council to coordinate a whole-of-government effort on religious freedom, including civilian and defense agencies and USCIRF. We also see benefit in staffing this initiative with the NSC position authorized by IRFA.

Congress has a critically important role to play in the promotion of religious freedom. USCIRF urges Members of Congress to connect the dots and undertake activities that reflect the central role that religious freedom plays in U.S. foreign policy. We appreciate today's hearing and urge that Congress:

- Support Legislation that Promotes Freedom of Religion or Belief: Introduce and support legislation that focuses on religious freedom violations and remedies for such violations in specific countries. Such remedies should underscore the human rights, foreign policy and national security dimensions of religious freedom and address violations by measures including: Implementing targeted visa bans and asset freezes on foreign government officials, their family members, and close associates who are implicated in violations of religious freedom; Applying specific sanctions directly related to a country's violation of religious freedom rather than "double hatting" sanctions; and requiring certification by the Secretary of State, prior to the obligation of funds to countries that violate religious freedom and related human rights, that these countries are implementing policies to protect the freedoms of religion, expression, association, and assembly, and provide heightened security for religious minority communities and their places of congregation and worship;
- Hold Hearings in Support of International Religious Freedom: Hold Congressional oversight and other hearings in the relevant House and Senate committees on international religious freedom and related issues that underscore the many dimensions of the issue. Invite USCIRF Commissioners to testify about its Annual Report and topical issues, along with State Department officials who can speak about the Department's annual Report on International Religious Freedom.
- Promote International Religious Freedom through the National Security Strategy: Urge the White House to create a national security strategy to guide the U.S. government's promotion of international religious freedom and advocate for this strategy being reflected in the next Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review and, as appropriate, in the Quadrennial Defense Review.
- Support Civil Society, other NGOs and Prisoners Abroad: During delegation trips abroad, meet with individuals and organizations that promote religious freedom and related human rights, targeted religious communities, and people detained for their religious freedom and human rights work or beliefs. Undertake CODELS to countries of concern to specifically examine conditions of religious freedom for all faiths/beliefs.

Another way Members of Congress can help prisoners who are detained for their religious freedom and human rights advocacy or observance is to join the Defending Freedoms Project. This is a collaborative effort between the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International and USCIRF whereby Members of Congress adopt prisoners of

conscience and advocate on their behalf. By participating in the Project, Members of Congress will be standing in solidarity with these prisoners, letting them know they are not alone, shining a light on the laws and policies that have led to their imprisonment, and helping hold governments accountable.

Let me stress as I conclude that despite the bleak and challenging picture we see of religious freedom abroad, progress remains possible. If we as a country reaffirm our commitment to religious freedom by making it a permanent and integral part of our foreign policy, it can be a game-changer – both for us and for the world.