

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4606

November 10, 2021

The Honorable Nadine Maenza
Chair
United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
732 N. Capitol Street, N.W. Suite A714
Washington, DC 20401

Dear Chair Maenza,

As you know, it has long been a goal of the United States to ensure that the right to practice one's faith is held sacred and protected in the international community. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has long played an integral role in this process.

We are writing today concerning infringements on religious freedom in Finland. The Finnish government is currently prosecuting well-known Christians for publicly supporting long-standing Christian doctrine. The prosecutions of the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF), the Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola, and Dr. Päivi Räsänen, a Member of Parliament, are specific examples of the Finnish government's violation of freedom of religion.

On April 29, 2021, the Prosecutor General of Finland charged Rev. Dr. Pohjola and Dr. Räsänen with "ethnic agitation" based on a 2004 pamphlet discussing sexuality. Dr. Räsänen faces three charges of incitement against ethnic groups, and Rev. Dr. Pohjola faces one charge of incitement against ethnic groups.¹ Additionally, Dr. Räsänen is facing further prosecution for criticizing the Lutheran Church of Finland on social media and tweeting a short excerpt from a TV program on theology, sexual ethics, and politics. These criminal prosecutions raise serious questions regarding the extent of Finland's commitment to protecting freedom of religion for its citizens, as agreed to with its participation in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other multi-lateral organizations. Additionally, punishing citizens for remarks made on social media and a booklet that has been in the public eye for more than 17 years is a clear abuse of government power. These actions by the Finnish government will undoubtedly have a chilling effect on free speech in Finland and the West.

At the center of religious liberty is the freedom for individuals to live in accordance to their conscience and beliefs. After all, James Madison famously wrote, "Conscience is the most sacred

¹ Northern Finland Public Prosecutor's Office, "Päivi Räsänen and the Luther Foundation's Juhana Pohjola are charged with incitement against ethnic groups," press release, April 29, 2021, <https://syyttajalaitos.fi/sv/-/paivi-rasanen-samt-lutherstiftelsens-juhana-pohjola-atalas-for-hets-mot-folkgrupp>.

of all property.”² Free people should not have to violate and recant their deepest convictions to remain a part of a free society. True religious liberty both protects an individual’s right both to hold beliefs that are unpopular with the prevailing cultural winds of the world, but also their right to live out authentically and profess the truths they hold dear without fear of government interference. Those rights are fundamental and unalienable to the whole human race, and it is critical to the flourishing of both the human soul and civil society.

We are not the only ones concerned with these violations of human rights. In May of this year, ten academics and human rights advocates sent a letter to USCIRF calling for the U.S. Secretary of Treasury to issue sanctions against Finland’s top prosecutor for filing charges against Rev. Dr. Pohjola and Dr. Räsänen.³ Additionally, the International Lutheran Council published a letter expressing their concerns regarding this situation.⁴

Citizens should never be forced to choose between a fundamental freedom - their faith - and legal persecution. We strongly condemn the actions of the Finnish government to persecute Christians for speaking their beliefs and urge USCIRF to take these actions into consideration when recommending which countries should be added to State Department’s Special Watch List, established under the International Freedom Act of 1998.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.



Chip Roy
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress



Dr. Paul Gosar
Member of Congress



Jody Hice
Member of Congress



Michael Cloud
Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress

² James Madison, “Property,” March 29, 1792, accessed October 26, 2021, <https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch16s23.html>.

³ Peter Berkowitz, Keegan Callanan, Carlos Eire, Robert P. George, Mary Ann Glendon, Sergiu Klainerman, John B. Londregan, Jacqueline C. Rivers, David Rivkin, and Adrian Vermeule, “A Letter to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom,” *RealClearPolitics*, May 28, 2021, accessed October 26, 2021,

https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2021/05/28/a_letter_to_the_us_commission_on_international_religious_freedom_145839.html.

⁴ “A Protest and Call for Free Religious Speech in Finland,” International Lutheran Council, June 25, 2021, <https://files.licms.org/wl/?id=zDL6Erf0qUJkCuqYeJNwo6nYi7jhNkil>.