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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA)**, Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:
Human Rights Under Siege Worldwide
July 12, 2016

(As prepared for delivery)

This hearing will come to order. This morning we meet to survey the troubling state of human rights around the world.

According to Freedom House's 2016 Freedom in the World Report, this was the 10th consecutive year of decline in global freedom. Unfortunately, the world's most abusive governments continue their abuses, while non-state actors have become boastful promoters of unspeakable evil.

Whether in Syria, Iraq, Libya, or the Sinai, ISIS has set a new standard for brutality – bombing Shi'ite neighborhoods, selling young Yazidi girls into sexual slavery, slitting the throats of Christians, and throwing gay men to their deaths from rooftops. The House of Representatives and the White House have recognized ISIS attacks on Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims as "genocide." Yes, "genocide"!

In Africa, Boko Haram continues to attack Christians and many Muslims. From church and mosque bombings to mass kidnappings of children, this deranged group has cut a wide swath of terror through Nigeria and neighboring countries, killing thousands and displacing millions.

In May, a mob of Islamists in southern Egypt reportedly forced a 70-year-old Christian woman to walk naked through the streets, before burning down homes belonging to Christian families. This is just one of many recent attacks against Christians in Egypt.

Religious minorities from nearly every faith face persecution somewhere in the world.

Human trafficking remains a global epidemic that preys on millions of women, girls, and migrant workers who are trapped in degrading and dangerous forms of modern slavery. In June, the House passed Congressman Trott's legislation to address another ghoulis form of exploitation -- trafficking in persons for the removal of their organs.

Many regimes – such as in China, Cuba, Iran, Sudan, and Vietnam – continue to deny basic political rights to their citizens. North Korea's brutal Kim dynasty continues to imprison entire families in its vast and deadly gulag that holds more than 100,000 political prisoners. The death toll from the Assad regime's deliberate targeting of civilian populations in Syria is staggering – estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands.

According to experts, press freedom has declined to its lowest point in 12 years. In places like Russia and Iran, we've seen governments take extreme measures to stifle communication, intimidate political opposition, and deny basic rights of speech and assembly to disfavored groups, including LGBT persons.

Child marriage has dire, life-long consequences for the health, safety, education, and opportunity of the estimated 15 million girls it victimizes every year. That is one girl every two seconds.

Torture. Extrajudicial killings. Forced conscription of child soldiers. The list goes on and on.

Too often, public discussions present a false choice between stability and human rights. That has been the favored dodge of dictators and despots since the last century. But U.S. national security is bolstered when states are stable, and stability ultimately depends on respect for fundamental human rights. Human rights can't be our only foreign policy guide, but neither can human rights be discounted, which happens too often.

America has inspired the human rights movement worldwide for decades. This hearing will help us understand what is driving the global decline in human decency I have mentioned, and discuss how we can turnaround this depressing trend, including by being the best example we can be. Promoting respect for the human rights of all people serves the national interests – and the national values – of the United States.

I now turn to Ranking Member Engel for his remarks.