



**Statement of U.S. Representative
Christopher Smith, Chairman of the
Congressional-Executive Commission on
China (CECC)**

**CECC Hearing on “Religious with
‘Chinese Characteristics’:
Persecution and Control in Xi Jinping’s
China”
Thursday, July 23, 2015**

The freedom of religion is the key human right. It is clearly the first freedom from which all other flow. It allows each citizen the precious right to follow their conscience peacefully and without fear. It protects the critical part of who we are as human beings—to seek, to speak, and to act out our fundamental beliefs. When this freedom is protected the very well-being of society is enhanced. No government should deny or suppress this essential claim to conscience.

The reality is that governments and terrorist groups do restrict the freedom of religion, sometimes in the most brutal and public ways. ***The freedom of religion is under siege in many places of the world***, including in China which is the subject of today’s hearing.

Because religious freedom conditions are deteriorating globally, I introduced HR 1150, the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act. The bill gives the Administration tools to better address religious freedom violations around the world. It is why I am also fighting to reauthorize the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) which a bipartisan and independent advisory body. USCIRF gives Congress vital recommendations about religious freedom conditions globally.

Several years ago during a visit to the U.S., Xi Jinping was interviewed by Chinese reporter on fellowship at a U.S. college. (*Some of the details changed to protect the identity of the person*) After the interview, President Xi asked a single question of this reporter—not about his family, not about his studies, not about whether he enjoyed living in America—the one question he asked was “Why do so many Chinese students studying in the U.S. become Christians?”

Why one of the world’s most powerful political leaders asked this question may never be known. And the student did not have an answer. But religion was on President Xi’s mind that day. Whatever was behind that complex question, religious freedom conditions in China have not improved because of it. Quite the opposite in fact, ***it has been a punishing year for China’s diverse religious communities.***

China continues to rank up there with Iran, Vietnam, and Saudi Arabia in terms of the sheer misery it inflicts on members of its diverse religious communities. This is the verdict of the bipartisan and independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. It is the verdict of the State Department, which has designated China as a “Country of Particular

Concern” since 1999 for being one of the world’s worst violators of religious freedom. This is the verdict of human rights organizations. We will hear today if our witnesses share this verdict.

Chinese authorities are frightened by the simple proposition that individuals have the right to live out their beliefs openly and peacefully, without fear or intimidation. *All we have to do is look at events in the past few weeks to see a coordinate, unnecessary, and often brutal campaign to manage, control, or crush China’s many religious communities.* It’s been a very bad month in China:

- Two days ago, a cross on a Christian church was burned near the city of Wenzhou. Over 1200 crosses, along with 35 church buildings, were demolished since 2014. This was done reportedly because they were too prominent, demonstrating the Party’s weakness.
- During the just-concluded month of Ramadan, Uyghur Muslim students, teachers, professors and government employees were deprived of the freedom to fulfill their religious duties. In recent years, officials have shut down religious sites; conducted raids on independent schools, confiscated religious literature, and banned private study of the Koran. A new draft Counterterrorism law equates terrorism with “religious education of minors.”
- The Dalai Lama turned 80 this month and the Chinese government expanded attempts to undermine his leadership and control the selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders. 273 Tibetan Buddhist monks, nuns are currently detained. Sadly, revered teacher Tenzin Deleg died in prison last week. He was serving a life sentence on politically motivated charges.
- Beijing also continues its relentless 16-year campaign to obliterate the Falun Gong, the anniversary which is each year during July. There are reports of torture in detention, deaths in custody, and allegations of the harvesting of organs.
- Two weeks ago, Chinese Communist Party authorities also launched a massive crackdown on human rights lawyers. The lawyers were accused of being a “criminal gang” charged with “creating chaos” because they defended the rights Falun Gong, Uyhgurs, Christians and others persecuted. Many of the lawyers detained are professing Christians, spurred by their faith to defend the vulnerable.

Senator Rubio and I put out a statement about the arrest of human rights lawyers in China. We called the detentions “unjustified” and said the round-up of human rights lawyers was “an undeniable setback in U.S.-China relations.” I would like to add that statement to the record without objection.

China active suppression of faith communities, its massive repression of rights lawyers, and the brutal, and sometimes deadly, way it deals with prisoners of conscience are a sad and black mark on China’s recent history. *And it will be remembered by history as brutal, unnecessary and entirely counterproductive.*

It is counterproductive because religious restrictions makes China less stable, repression can exacerbate extremism and cause instability. Religious freedom, according to the Pew Research Center, can be a powerful and effective antidote to religious extremism.

It is counterproductive because targeting peaceful religious citizens undermines the legitimacy of the state, because it reminds even non-believers of the state's capricious power.

It is counterproductive because religious persecution marginalizes the persecuted, robbing China of their talents, their economic productivity, and their contributions to society.

The issue of religious freedom must be addressed by the Administration during a planned September summit.

But we must ask whether this summit should even take place. There are many issues in the U.S.-China relationship that need attention, but does President Xi—given his 'bold disregard' for human rights and his brutal suppression of dissent—deserve to get red carpet treatment in Washington?