



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

The State of Religious Freedom Around the Globe

Wednesday, July 12, 2021
2:00 p.m. – 4:30 pm
Virtual via Cisco WebEx

Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), Co-chair

Excerpt of Remarks

Pursuant to notice, this hearing on the state of religious freedom around the globe will come to order.

We are gathered to explore the state of religious freedom around the world, coinciding with the nongovernmental International Religious Freedom Summit that began today at the Omni Shoreham Hotel here in Washington, DC.

Shockingly, as it prepares to host the 2022 Winter Olympic games, China's leader Xi Jinping is committing genocide against the Uyghur Muslims and other minorities in Xinjiang.

Xi Jinping's genocide includes the forced disappearances of millions of Uyghurs into concentration camps, the forced sterilization of Uyghur women and forced abortion of their children, and state abduction of Uyghur children into orphanages far from home to be reared with non-Uyghur upbringing while their parents are tortured.

The Chinese Communist Party is today systematically erasing Islam in western China—bulldozing mosques and shrines, severely throttling all religious practice, and forcing camp detainees to renounce their faith.

Leaked documents published by the New York Times quotes Xi Jinping shamelessly pushing his genocide saying "show no mercy."

[Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party have also exponentially increased persecution against all other religious believers](#) —including Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners—in ways not seen since the cultural revolution.

Xi Jinping, apparently fearing the power of independent religious belief as a challenge to the Communist Party's absolute dominance, is trying to either destroy or radically transform religion into the party's servant, employing a draconian policy known as [sinicization](#) that seeks to subjugate or eliminate any faith or belief that competes with Chinese communism.

Virtually all of China is [affected](#). Those under the age of 18 cannot perform many religious functions or receive religious schooling. Sacred texts like the Bible are under assault as Chinese officials scramble to rewrite them.

And then there is the utter cruelty.

I would like to call attention to one witness in particular, Gulzira Auyelkhan, a Kazakh Muslim, who will give compelling eyewitness testimony of the use of "[tiger chairs](#)" – horrific instruments of torture – against Uyghur and Kazakh detainees, as well as the systematic rape of Uyghur women by Chinese authorities.

As my colleagues know, religious freedom is under siege all over the world.

Two decades ago, the great Jewish human rights leader and former political prisoner in the Soviet Union Natan Sharansky [testified at one of my congressional hearings](#) on combating anti-Semitism and said "...there are two important components in this new phenomenon of anti-Semitism. One is using an anti-Israeli campaign for strengthening anti-Semitism and the other is classical anti-Semitism—the old, deep, primitive prejudices against Jews..."

Mr. Sharansky proposed a simple formula for exposing anti-Semitism masquerading as mere policy differences with the nation of Israel and called it the 3D test: demonization, double standard and delegitimization.

All three manifestations of anti-Semitic hate are on full display today as violence against Jews erupts on America's streets and throughout the world.

Anti-Semitism in the United States—which had already been worsening according to the FBI, more than 60% of all anti-religious hate crimes in the U.S. are directed against Jews—is now exploding as never before.

Our words and deeds must be clear and bold.

We must absolutely reject anti-Semitism in all of its ugly forms.

In Nigeria we see a country which, on paper, has robust legal protections for all religions, but in practice is now a country where many religious and ethnic groups perceive themselves to be under serious threat.

While much attention has focused on extremist terror by Salafist groups such as Boko Haram and breakaway factions such as Islamic State West Africa or Ansaru against those they consider infidels, that is not the only threat.

Nor is it from climate change or “farmer-herder conflict,” a popular narrative favored by the State Department and certain academics, but a narrative which is woefully incomplete.

Rather, the principle threat comes from Fulani ethno-religious supremacism, which has been actively encouraged and abetted by the current administration of Muhammadu Buhari.

It is important to note that this cannot be labelled strictly a Muslim-Christian conflict, though Christians, particularly in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, are often targeted by Fulani Muslim extremists. So too are Shia Muslims, however, as well as ethnic Yoruba, who can either be Muslim and Christian, and often have families where interreligious marriage is commonplace.

What we are seeing unfold in Nigeria under President Buhari is the deliberate Fulanization of Nigerian institutions. This can be seen, for example, in the sacking of the Chief Justice of the Nigerian Supreme Court Walter Onnoghen and his replacement by Ibrahim Tanko Muhammad.

It can be seen, for example, in the monopolization of key security and military as well as economic leadership positions by Fulanis appointed by Buhari in recent years, including National Security Advisor, the Chief of Staff to the President, the Inspector General of the Police, the head of the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Minister of Police Affairs, the Ministers of Justice, Finance, Education and Agriculture, the heads of the National Petroleum Corporation and the Federal Inland Revenue Services, as well as the [Chief of Army Staff](#) – more than 30 key positions at the highest level of government.

Nor is this a new agenda; if you speak with Nigerians or listen to what Fulani say in Fulfulde or Hausa, you will hear expressed the desire to fulfill the jihadist ambitions of Usman dan Fodio, who in the late 18th and early 19th century sought to spread Islam to the sea under a Fulani spear, displacing and subjugating the far older Kanuri-dominated Islamic political order.

As goes Nigeria, so goes all West Africa, underscoring the importance of respect for ethnic and religious pluralism in this critically important African nation.

I think it is also important to underscore the fact that the single most persecuted religious group in the world is Christians, and that often these persecuted Christians come from the most economically downtrodden and marginalized classes.

This was noted in a report two years ago issued under the direction of [British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt](#), who fingered secular political correctness as creating an awkward inability to speak about the persecution of Christians. In his words, “What we have forgotten in that atmosphere of political correctness is actually the Christians that are being persecuted are some of the poorest people on the planet.”

In Iran and Pakistan, we see a different model of religious persecution, where religious minorities are singled out for their non-conformity with the dominant religion.

Iran’s authoritarian government uses its constitution and raw power to mete out punishments for practicing the very rights it should protect. In October, the International Foundation for Human Rights found that “the death penalty...has often been used against members of Iran’s ethnic communities and religious minorities, especially in political cases based on moharebeh, ‘spreading corruption on Earth,’ insurrection, and other vaguely worded crimes.”

Last November, the homes of dozens of Baha’is were simultaneously raided; several Sunni Muslim students and teachers were interrogated and arrested during Ramadan for their beliefs. Christians from historic churches are treated as second class citizens, while [Iranian converts](#) from Islam to Christianity, many of whom are evangelical, are treated with greater severity.

In Pakistan, which was designated a Country of Particular Concern in December, state and nonstate acts have continued to erode the religious freedom of minorities. Harsh blasphemy laws continue to be enforced against Shia and Ahmadi Muslims, as well as Christians. Pakistani Hindus, who historically found Sindh province to be more tolerant, are today being [forced to migrate](#) to escape persecution and marginalization.

As the State Department noted in its 2020 International Religious Freedom Report, “in far too many places, individuals continue to be killed, tortured, jailed, harassed, and threatened on account of their religious identity or beliefs. Left unaddressed, such abuses threaten social cohesion and political stability, undermine economic development, and can foster radicalization and violent extremism.”

Where necessary, the numerous tools at the United States’ disposal must be wielded firmly against individual persecutors, especially the sanctions embedded in the Frank Wolf International Religious Freedom Act and Global Magnitsky Act. Where moral suasion fails, the curtailment of access to countries and markets can incentivize real change.

And above all, when we engage in bilateral and multilateral conversations with countries, we cannot delink human rights, in particular religious freedom, from economic and security concerns. Our commitment to the fundamental human dignity of our neighbors must remain paramount.

With that I yield to my esteemed colleague, Co-Chair McGovern of Massachusetts.