



**Testimony by Dr. David Curry, President, Open Doors USA
Before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**Hearing on
“Violations of the International Right to Freedom of Religion: Christians”**

June 27, 2019
10:00 AM
2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Chairman Smith, Chairman McGovern, and other members of the Commission: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of Open Doors USA on the plight of Christians globally. I would request my written testimony, including our World Watch List report, be submitted for the record.

Today I'd like to tell you about Zauna. She is a widow. Her husband was one of the over 3,700 individual Christians who were killed in Nigeria due to their faith last year. Zauna's village has been attacked three times by Boko Haram. Before the Boko Haram attacks started, Zauna lived a relatively peaceful life as a farmer with her husband and children.

One night militants entered Zauna's village near midnight. Somehow, Boko Haram collected the names of many of the villagers before the attack and they were calling out names of specific people in the village that night—so that the village people would think they were friendly. But they were luring the village people out of their homes to kill them. The militants eventually entered Zauna's home by force. They took her husband and pushed him back into their home. Zauna was able to slip away in the night and she hid behind a wood pile near their home. Then she saw the members of Boko Haram light the roof of the house on fire with Zauna's husband locked inside. She escaped with her life, but lives with the trauma of seeing her husband burned alive in their own home.

More must be done to help people like Zauna. Although Zauna's story is horrific, it is not isolated. On the contrary, it is emblematic of a far wider issue that impacts hundreds of millions of men, women, and children around the world.

For over 25 years Open Doors has released the World Watch List documenting violations against Christians. Our data is only that which we can verify is related to religious intolerance and therefore should always be seen as a conservative baseline of religious persecution. 4,146 Christians were killed for their faith last year - 11 Christians were killed, on average, every day. Additionally 2,625 Christians were detained without trial, arrested sentenced and imprisoned. Over 1,266 churches were attacked. This data is carefully collected through networks established

throughout more than 70 countries over the past six decades. It is often reported or verified directly by our in-country field offices, who maintain regular contact with both survivors of religious persecution and the wider Christian community in their area.

Sadly, the number of violent incidents against Christians documented last year represents a dramatic rise over recent years. We believe it can be attributed to the following factors:

First, the spread of Islamic jihadist ideology. In Nigeria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere, theologies of hatred toward Christians are widely propagated, leading to great suffering.

Secondly, the rise of nationalist agendas in Asia. India is 10th on the WWL because nationalist Hindu leaders are stoking the idea that Muslims and Christians cannot be truly Indian. It's resulted in a shocking rise of attacks in Christian churches, with nearly 300 churches attacked thus far in 2019 and hundreds of cases of pastors held without trial - just for being Christian pastors.

Lastly, communist and post-communist systems. North Korea is the most oppressive place on earth to practice religious faith. Anything and anyone who challenges the leadership of the Kim regime is considered an enemy of the state. Many are imprisoned for their faith for even possessing a bible. With over 100 million Christians, China also has the technology and political will to monitor and restrict expressions of faith like never before.

While Open Doors is working tirelessly to bring relief to those who suffer from severe religious freedom violations, more must be done to address the underlying factors that allow violations of religious freedom to occur in the first place. This is where the United States, including Congress and the executive branch, can play a pivotal role.

I have a few recommendations I'd like to offer, but first, I want to commend Chairman Smith and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for holding this important hearing. Hearings of this kind are a fundamental key to shining the spotlight on abuses and lay the necessary groundwork for advancing international religious freedom.

In order to better address religious freedom violations globally, both against Christians and other communities, we would prioritize the following recommendations:

1. The U.S. State Department must ensure that Foreign Service Officers, detailees, and other appropriate staff at U.S. Embassies and posts overseas are provided with, and required to, dedicate sufficient time and resources to develop a thorough understanding of religious freedom conditions in their respective postings and to build robust networks with faith actors in-country. This should be beyond the minimum time and resources required to draft their respective sections of the annual international religious freedom report. While there are many dedicated state department personnel who invest thoroughly in these issues, all too often our frontline diplomats are not allowed to, or not asked to, build the necessary networks and expertise needed to address the many grave religious freedom concerns that exist in their postings.

2. We also strongly recommend that President Trump and Secretary Pompeo consider a more robust implementation of the Country of Particular Concern designation's provided for by the International Religious Freedom Act. By statute, the administration is required to issue these designations 90 days after the issuance of the annual IRF report, released this past Friday. We urge the administration to seriously weigh options for targeted sanctions against individuals and foreign government entities responsible for systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom around the globe.

Today Zauna has rebuilt her house, a small one room hut, and her husband is buried inside. She farms her land, and she is thankful to God that she is alive. Yet she is traumatized and deeply misses her husband. She asks for your prayers.

There is much more yet to do to support Zauna. We look forward to working with this Commission and others in Washington to ensure that her story, and the many other stories like hers, are not forgotten.

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you today, and this concludes my remarks.