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China's War on Christianity and Other *House of Representatives* Religious Faiths

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey... Mr. Speaker, yesterday we held a hearing on the lack of religious freedom in China today.

Several years ago during a visit to the United States, Xi Jinping chose to be interviewed by a Chinese reporter living in the U.S. After the interview, President Xi asked a single question of this reporter—not about his family and not about whether he enjoyed living in America—the one question he asked was “Why do so many Chinese students and faculty living in the United States become Christians?”

Whatever was behind that question, religious freedom conditions in China have not improved because of it. Quite the opposite, in fact, as Xi has personally launched efforts to “sinacize religion” and the central government has issued commands to each provincial Party Secretary, making them responsible to bring religion in line with Communist Party ideology.

The Chinese government is an equal opportunity abuser of religious freedom. As U.S. Commission on International Religious

Freedom Chair Tenzin Dorjee testified, Xi Jinping’ stated goal of “sincacization” affects all religious communities in China—Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners, Daoists, Muslims, and Christians.

Over the past year, the Chinese government has intensified the most severe crackdown on religious activities since the Cultural Revolution. Regulations on religious affairs issued in February tightened existing restriction and new draft regulations are being circulated to clamp down on religious expression online. Churches, mosques, and temples have been demolished, crosses destroyed, children have been prohibited from attending services, and surveillance cameras are being installed in churches.

Xi Jinping talks about realizing the “China Dream”—but when Bibles are burned, when a simple prayer over a meal in public maybe an illegal religious gathering, and when over a million Uyghur and Kazakh Muslims are interned in “reeducation camps” and forced to renounce their faith—that dream is a nightmare.

Much in the news lately has been the Chinese government's targeting of Christians. The "sinacization campaign" has affected both state-controlled and unregistered churches—Protestant and Catholic. Clergy remain in prison and the human rights lawyers who defend religious believers have been jailed, disappeared, or tortured into silence. Xi Jinping views the fast-growing Christian churches, particularly the Protestant "house church" movement that does not belong to the state-sanctioned Protestant entities, as a threat to the dominance of the Chinese Communist Party. One of our witnesses yesterday, my good friend the Rev. Dr. Bob Fu, has detailed on countless occasions the Communist Party's vicious war on independent house churches.

Underground Catholics—meaning those who do not belong to the state-sanctioned Patriotic Association—have faced tremendous persecution for decades, including Bishop Su Zhimin who I met with in 1994.

Bishop Su's body bore witness to the brutality of China's Communist Party. He was beaten, starved, and tortured for his faith and spent some 40 years in prison. Yet, he prayed not just for the persecuted church, but for the conversion of those who hate, torture and kill. Unfortunately, only couple years later Bishop Su was arrested again and disappeared. He has not been heard from since.

Today, efforts to forcibly close underground parishes expanded this year. China's Ethnic and Religion Bureau told the state propaganda arm *Global Times* in April that "activities in illegally-built parishes will be prohibited" and underground Catholic

churches were being shuttered this very summer.

Recent reports indicate that a deal has been struck by the Holy See and the Chinese government whereby the Pope will have veto power over Chinese government-approved candidates to be ordained as bishops. In exchange, seven previously excommunicated bishops, ordained without papal mandate and appointed by the Chinese government, will be welcomed back into full communion with Rome. Already, the Vatican has asked two validly ordained bishops to step aside to make way for two formerly excommunicated bishops. Cardinal Joseph Zen, bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, has questioned whether Vatican officials making these decisions "know what true suffering is."

The reports are that this deal is provisional and full details are yet unknown. The devil will be in the details—including the fate of underground churches and relations with Taiwan. But with all the efforts underway to forcibly sinacize religion, it certainly seems an odd time to strike a deal with Xi Jinping's China. I hope and pray this agreement will bring true religious freedom for Catholics in China—who have suffered so much to maintain their faith. We will continue to monitor the situation closely to see if force is used by the Chinese government to close all "underground" or unregistered Catholic churches as a result of this deal.

We heard from Dr. Tom Farr on what the implications of this deal would be and his recommendations for U.S. religious freedom diplomacy.

U.S.-China tensions are high at the moment on many fronts and the Chinese government presumably is searching for

ways to reduce – not escalate –
them. Taking a hammer and sickle to the
cross or jailing a million Uyghur Muslims
will only ensure a tougher China policy, one
with widespread, bipartisan and even global
support.