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## **Violations of the International Right to Freedom of Religion: Christians**

*Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission  
Excerpts of Remarks  
Rep. Chris Smith, Co-Chairman  
June 27, 2019*

Good morning. We are here today to focus attention on the persecution of Christians worldwide, as part of the ongoing work that the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission does on promoting the International Right to Religious Freedom. I would like to thank my co-chair, Jim McGovern, who I know shares a passion for human rights and protection of those who are downtrodden.

Like many of you, the news that Christians in Sri Lanka were killed in a series of coordinated bombings on Easter Sunday saddened and sickened me.

As shocking as such news was, I cannot say it was surprising.

Or as John Allen, the author of the Global War on Christians penned in a Washington Post Op-ed following the Sri Lanka attack, “the shocking thing about the carnage is that it is *not* shocking – and instead forms part of an ugly, predictable global pattern.”

For me, it harkened back to the news how on Christmas Eve 2000, a series of coordinated explosions killed Indonesian Christians in Jakarta and elsewhere.

Easter and Christmas – the two holiest days of the Christian calendar, days when I am sure many of the people in this room have been to Church with their families.

Indeed, John Allen reminds us of how Easter and Christmas become the killing season for Christians around the world – the Easter bombings in Kaduna Nigeria in 2012 which killed 41 worshippers, the Palm Sunday bombings in Egypt in 2013 which killed a similar number. The list goes on.

Today’s focus on anti-Christian persecution is not meant to minimize the suffering of other religious minorities who are imprisoned or killed for their beliefs: we only need to think back to the killings of Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand earlier this year to remember that hatred targets other religious groups too.

Then there is the equal opportunity, State-sponsored persecution of religion which characterizes Xi Jinping's China: the mass incarceration of Uyghur Muslims, the vivisection harvesting of organs from Falun Gong practitioners while still alive – and something now apparently Uyghurs too – the suppression of the culture of Tibetan Buddhists, and the systematic razing of Christian Churches.

In December of last year I wrote an Op-Ed in the *Washington Post*—“The World Must Stand Against China's War On Religion”—I stated in part that,

“The ruling Chinese Communist Party has undertaken the most comprehensive attempt to manipulate and control – or destroy—religious communities since Chairman Mao Zedong made the eradication of religion a goal of his disastrous Cultural Revolution half a century ago. Now Xi, apparently fearing the power of independent religious belief as a challenge the Communist Party's legitimacy, is trying to radically transform religion into the party's servant, employing a draconian policy known as sinicization.

Under sinicization, all religions and believers must comport with and aggressively promote communist ideology — or else.

To drive home the point, religious believers of every persuasion are harassed, arrested, jailed or tortured. Only the compliant are left relatively unscathed.

Bibles are burned, churches destroyed, crosses set ablaze atop church steeples and now, under Xi, religious leaders are required to install facial-recognition cameras in their places of worship. New regulations expand restrictions on religious expression online and prohibit those under age 18 from attending services.

Government officials are also reportedly rewriting religious texts — including the Bible — that remove content unwanted by the atheist Communist Party, and have launched a five-year sinicization plan for Chinese Protestant Christians.”

We stand for human dignity and respect for life of whomever is oppressed, and this Commission has and will continue to highlight the suffering of religious minorities around the globe, be they Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, Ba'hai in Iran, Buddhists in occupied Tibet, Yazidis in Iraq or the Muslim Royhinga people in Burma.

Christians, however, remain the most persecuted religious group the world over, and thus deserve the special attention that today's hearing will give them.

The distinguished Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, will testify today that, “According to a recent study by Pew, Christians face the most wide-spread harassment of any religious group, targeted in 144 countries globally.”

If I may also make an observation – sometimes there is an oversensitivity about focusing on Christians, perhaps because we in the United States and the West come from traditionally Christian backgrounds, and we don't want to be accused of playing favorites. Thus we tend to overcompensate by ignoring or minimizing Christian persecution.

That is neither just nor fair either.

As John Allen reminds us, “Of the world’s [2.2 billion](#) Christians, roughly two-thirds live outside the developed West. The majority are poor, and many live in rough neighborhoods where religious freedom is more honored in the breach than the observance. Often, those Christians also belong to ethnic, linguistic and cultural minorities, meaning they’re doubly or triply at risk.”

It is an even-handed commitment to raising up the oppressed, of giving voice to the voiceless, of remembering those martyred, which compels today’s hearing.

With that, I turn to my colleague, Jim McGovern of Massachusetts...