

Congressional-Executive Commission on China



China's War on Religion: The Threat to Religious Freedom and Why It Matters to the United States

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CECC Chair

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As prepared for delivery

Good morning. The Commission will come to order. Thank you to our witnesses and to all who are following this hearing online.

Today's message is straightforward: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is waging a systematic campaign to bend every faith in China to Party rule. CCP authorities aim for the complete subordination of religious belief to state ideology—re-engineering doctrine, leadership, education, architecture, and even online worship.

The CCP is not content to police behavior; it wants to control the conscience and intrude on the most powerful and personal relationship there is—the one with God.

We have documented imprisonment, torture, and worse for such simple acts as owning a prayer book, growing a beard, or gathering for worship.

There are currently 1,647 documented religion prisoner cases in the CECC's Political Prisoner Database. Though that number may be ten times higher when we consider all those detained in the Uyghur region.

At least a dozen bishops and priests from my own Catholic Church are detained.

Make no mistake, freedom of religion is under assault worldwide—witness what is happening in Nigeria. But nowhere is the scale of the threat greater than in China. There are an estimated 500 hundred million in China whose faith traditions face some form of restrictions or control.

And, the CCP's grip on religion does not end at its borders. Through transnational repression, it harasses exiled believers, infiltrates religious communities, and intimidates diaspora groups to remain silent.

Some of our witnesses have personal experience with intimidation or transnational repression right here in America.

Since Xi Jinping came to power, he has pushed an aggressive agenda to roll back what little space for independent religion once existed and to assert CCP dominance over all aspects of religious life.

Christian pastors are prosecuted for fraud for accepting charity. Uyghur Muslims are punished for reading the Koran at home. Tibetan Buddhists are targeted for honoring the Dalai Lama; Falun Gong practitioners are tortured for peaceful meditation the Party cannot control.

Across China, the Party has closed churches, imprisoned pastors and priests, and ordered the removal of Islamic and Tibetan Buddhist symbols from buildings

We are here today because the right to believe according to one's own conscience is not a privilege government may grant or withhold. It is a universal human right, central to human dignity and human flourishing.

We know now that religious freedom is a critical element in societies that are stable and prosperous. Our own history, from the earliest colonies to the First Amendment, reflects a simple truth: societies are freer, fairer, and more stable when people are free to worship, to practice their faith, and to live, speak, and act according to their beliefs.

The CCP fears the power of faith because it is a source of values and moral authority it cannot control. That is why it demands that crosses come down and portraits of Xi Jinping go up. It is why a Catholic priest must preach Party slogans alongside sacred texts.

It is why so many religious leaders and religious believers are jailed.

To the CCP, faith is not just a challenge, it is an existential threat to its grip on power—and why it must be controlled or destroyed.

The title of this hearing asks why does religious freedom in China matter to the United States. We certainly want to hear our witnesses answer this question.

But let me offer one reason why this hearing matters by reading part of a statement by detained pastor Wang Yi, who met with President George W. Bush in the Oval Office in 2006. The National Endowment for Democracy just awarded Wang Yi one of its highest prizes.

In one of his last statements before being detained, Pastor Yi said: "...the rulers of this country are waging a war...in the [Uyghur region], in Tibet, in Shanghai, in Beijing...and the rulers who are waging this war have chosen for themselves an enemy that can never be imprisoned, an enemy that can never be destroyed, an enemy that can never be controlled or subdued, namely, the soul of human beings."

Pastor Wang Yi may now be in prison—but he, and millions of others like him, are not subdued.

That is why this hearing matters—not just for one community, one country, or one faith, but for the defense of human dignity and conscience everywhere. The CCP wants believers in China to feel isolated and forgotten. Our responsibility is to show them—and to show Beijing—that they are neither.