

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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As prepared for delivery

Thank you, Senator Sullivan, and good morning everyone

I'm very glad the CECC is holding this hearing, and to be working with you on this critical and indeed urgent issue that is so close to my heart.

I say urgent because, as we speak, the Chinese Communist Party, directed by General Secretary Xi Jinping, is engaged in one of the most extensive crackdowns on a Protestant Christian house church in 40 years. I also say urgent because, as I look around in this room, I see friends of many faiths with loved ones languishing in Chinese prisons. Their plight is pressing and we must act and pray with urgency.

At its core, religious freedom is about the right of conscience—what George Washington called “that little spark of celestial fire”—which is the inviolable domain in the heart of every human being. I am proud to say that this is the 14th hearing I have chaired or cochaired dedicated to religious freedom in China.

We say that religious freedom is a universal right, because it is guaranteed by a sovereign God who created human beings in His own Image and Likeness and imbued them with inalienable dignity and worth, whether they were born in Washington or Wuhan. It is thus not a “Western” construct but a universal one.

Yet the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, leader of the world's largest atheistic state, would force his own people to think otherwise. He would have the Chinese people believe that religious freedom is not for them, that religion itself is not for them, because he, and the Party he leads, are terrified of religious faith. They fear any moral or spiritual authority outside the control of the Party; and they punish worship of anyone but Xi Jinping.

Instead, the Chinese Communist Party wants total control over heart, mind, and spirit of each citizen of China. In one particularly ludicrous yet equally insidious example, in September, the Cyberspace Administration of China launched a two-month “Clear and Bright” campaign that polices pessimism and “negative emotions,” among other thought crimes. This is totalitarianism, pure and simple, and totalitarian governments cannot abide freedom of religion or belief.

And yet—neither can they extinguish it.

In Tibet, as Communist authorities seek to stamp out any mention or memory of his Holiness the Dalai Lama, blanketing religious sites with surveillance and security forces in the lead up to his 90th birthday, a young singer performed a song celebrating the spiritual leader, and Tibetans inside and outside Tibet shared and re-shared it on social media.

When authorities shut down Zion Church in Beijing, then one of the city's largest, Pastor Ezra Jin took the church nationwide by moving online, reaching more people than it ever could have before. (We are also proud to have as one of our witnesses, Pastor Jin's daughter, Grace, who used to work for the CECC.)

In Fujian province, authorities confined underground Catholic bishop Guo Xijin to his residence, so he joyfully celebrated the 40th anniversary of his priestly ordination by serving communion to pilgrims through the bars of the chained gate outside his home.

After removing domes and minarets from thousands of mosques in China to excise foreign elements, authorities likely believed they could dismantle two of the remaining mosques targeted for demolition with impunity, yet whole communities of Hui Muslims in Yunnan province took to the streets in protest.

And these are only a few examples out of the many we at the Commission have documented, to say nothing of the countless acts of quiet faith and steadfast devotion known only to individual believers and their God. I encourage you to read the statements we will be posting on the web page for this hearing, which will feature expert testimony and inspiring personal narratives from Uyghurs, Catholics, Falun Gong practitioners, and others.

Today, we will hear directly from brave men and women whose families and faith communities have suffered in China for their dogged belief that they, too, are entitled to freedom of religion, and that an illegitimate and atheistic regime cannot bind the conscience of its citizens.

In many cases, authorities have pursued these believers in an authority above the CCP beyond China's borders, attempting to silence their advocacy.

Thus we are especially grateful for their voices here today.

Among those voices is that of Grace Jin Drexel, the daughter of Pastor Ezra Jin—and a former CECC researcher. I heard Grace address the CPAC Christian persecution summit, and I was deeply moved by her advocacy for her father. I know we are all eager to hear how we can support Pastor Ezra and all those detained in the crackdown on the Zion Church network.

But we are not only here to lament or to cry out for the “least of these” who suffer persecution and injustice, or to call out evil rulers and bad actors. We speak up for Falun Gong practitioners, for Uyghur Muslims, for Tibetan Buddhists, and for underground Catholics because it is right, but also because robust religious freedom diplomacy is critical for U.S. national security, as Ambassador Brownback and I wrote in our recent op-ed for the Washington Times, “Why China's War on Religion Matters to the U.S.” And Ambassador, I know this is the topic of the book you have coming out soon, and I really look forward to reading it.

Studies show that religious freedom is strongly correlated with flourishing societies and nations—it is a security stabilizer, making countries and regions safer. It is associated with

economic growth and trustworthy institutions, ensuring fairer markets for American and international business.

This unalienable freedom is fundamental to peace and prosperity—for China and for the United States—and deserves our strong and unwavering support.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses

Thank you