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**Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern
Co-chair, Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

**Hearing on
“Control of Religion in China through Digital Authoritarianism”
Tuesday, September 13, 2022, 10:00 a.m.**

As delivered

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to our witnesses. Religious freedom has been at the core of the Commission’s work since its founding. I appreciate your scheduling this hearing on this important topic.

The Chinese government’s record on religious freedom is as atrocious as it is well documented, including by this Commission and by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, whose chair we are honored to have as a witness today.

In our thoughts today are the prisoners of conscience who have had their religious liberty violated by the Chinese government. It is our moral responsibility to help them tell their stories, and those of the people whose voices do not reach us.

Today’s hearing will focus on new and insidious methods authorities are using to exert control over religious practice, including online regulation and digital surveillance technologies.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief last year reported that the Chinese government reportedly uses “biometrics, digital surveillance and personal data for behavioral analysis for identifying ‘extremist’ or ‘unhealthy thought.’” He notes that such technologies used in “counter-terrorism” contexts threaten freedom of thought.

This aligns with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights’ recent report on Xinjiang which explained how Chinese officials misused “counter-terrorism” policy to brutally repress Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims and deny their ability to practice their religion and cultural heritage.

This shows how the right to freedom of religion intersects with other fundamental rights – the freedoms of speech and association, equal protection, due process, presumption of innocence – all of which are protected under international human rights law.

In this light, I hope the witnesses will expand on the meaning of “Sinicization” of religion – a process to coerce religious believers’ allegiance to the state and the Party.

We also want to understand how “Sinicization” manipulates the teaching of religious principles to imply they support the Party’s ideology. It appears the Party is exploiting religion as a means to impose social controls.

Last month, a group of UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, issued a statement against the “cynical abuse of religion or belief as a tool of discrimination, hostility and violence, and noted that “[i]nternational law rejects any attempt to call on either religion or belief, or freedom of religion or belief, as justification for the destruction of the rights and freedoms of others.”

USCIRF shows that the United States seeks to be a leader in promoting international religious freedom. To be effective, however, we must live up to the standards we demand of other countries. We lack credibility in criticizing China for using religion as a pretext to restrict other liberties if our own governments, including at the state level, engage in the same behavior.

Two final points. One, while China only officially recognizes five religions, our analysis and advocacy must recognize that there is a stunningly wide array of religious beliefs, and non-belief, in the country. PRC regulation not only harms religious freedom but its diversity too.

Lastly, as China suffers from a devastating heat wave, I am interested in how restrictions on religion undermine the cause of environmental protection, given the links between spirituality and nature within Buddhism and Daoism, for example.

Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to the testimony.