

KEY FINDINGS

In 2018, religious freedom conditions in China trended negative after the new Regulations on Religious Affairs—implemented on February 1, 2018—effectively banned “unauthorized” religious teachings and required religious groups to report any online activity. Moreover, the Chinese government continued to persecute all faiths in an effort to “sinicize” religious belief, a campaign that attempts not only to diminish and erase the independent practice of religion, but also the cultural and linguistic heritage of religious and ethnic communities, particularly Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims. During the summer, reports emerged that the government had detained 800,000 to possibly more than two million Uighur and other Muslims in Xinjiang. It also deployed one million party cadres to live with Uighur Muslim families and report on any signs of “extremist” religious behavior. The Chinese government continued to use advanced surveillance technology and other measures to repress Tibetan Buddhists. In September, the Vatican reached a provisional agreement with China that would allow the government a role in the appointment of new bishops; nevertheless, repression of the underground Catholic

Church increased during the latter half of the year. The government also raided or closed down hundreds of Protestant house churches, including Zion Church, Rongguili Church, and Early Rain Covenant Church. Meanwhile, more than 900 Falun Gong practitioners were arrested during the year simply for practicing their beliefs or distributing literature about the Falun Gong. In March 2018, jurisdiction over religious affairs was transferred from the government to an organ of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), further eroding the barrier between religion and party.

Based on the Chinese government’s systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom, USCIRF again finds that China merits designation in 2019 as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). The U.S. Department of State has designated China as a CPC since 1999, most recently in November 2018. USCIRF recommends that the State Department redesignate China as a CPC under IRFA and maintain the existing, ongoing export restrictions under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (P.L. 101-246).

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Integrate religious freedom and related human rights diplomacy into ongoing trade negotiations, the U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue, and all other levels of the U.S.-China bilateral relationship, and devise messaging tailored to specific religious communities in China;
- Prioritize funding for programs that seek to preserve the cultural and linguistic heritage and identity of religious and faith communities in China and to document the experiences of refugees and asylum-seekers from China who have suffered particularly severe violations of religious freedom;
- Coordinate with U.S. allies and partners, especially in Asia, on targeted sanctions, visa restrictions, public diplomacy, and other actions taken in response to China’s crackdown on religious freedom;
- Direct the State Department to work with foreign governments and the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees to prevent the refoulement of individuals from China seeking asylum on the basis of religious persecution; and
- Work with U.S. businesses, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions to counter Chinese government influence in the United States that are designed to suppress information about or advocacy in response to violations of religious freedom in China.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Support legislation that would increase restrictions on the export to China from the United States of advanced technology—including surveillance and biometric equipment—that has enhanced the Chinese government’s capacity to monitor and harass religious and ethnic communities; and raise the profile of religious freedom in the U.S.-China relationship.

COUNTRY FACTS

FULL NAME

People's Republic of China

GOVERNMENT

Communist State

POPULATION

1,384,688,986

GOVERNMENT-RECOGNIZED RELIGIONS/FAITHS

Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism; officially atheist

RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY*

18.2% Buddhist

5.1% Christian

1.8% Muslim

21.9% Folk Religions

52.2% Unaffiliated

OTHER GROUPS

Taoist, Hindu, Jewish, and others

*Estimates compiled from the CIA World Factbook

BACKGROUND

Article 36 of China's constitution grants citizens "freedom of religious belief" and directs the government to protect "normal religious activities." However, this freedom is limited by the requirement that religious activities cannot "disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system." The constitution also bans religious organizations that are "subject to any foreign domination," a provision the government has used to crack down on Uighur and other Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, and other religious groups.

In 2018, President Xi Jinping continued to consolidate power; in March, the National People's Congress voted to abolish presidential term limits, effectively allowing Xi to serve as president for life, and added "Xi Jinping Thought" to the national constitution. Throughout 2018, the government continued to crack down on human rights defenders and religious freedom advocates. For example, Gao Zhisheng, a prominent human rights lawyer known for defending religious minorities, remained disappeared in 2018 with no information available about his whereabouts and wellbeing. On February 26, 2018, Dr. Li Baiguang, a human rights lawyer who represented Chinese pastors and others targeted for exercising their right to freedom of reli-

gion, unexpectedly passed away. Also during the year, judicial authorities revoked or suspended the licenses of more than a dozen human rights lawyers, including those who represented defendants prosecuted for their religious activities. As of October 11, 2018, the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) counted at least 1,422 prisoners of conscience in Chinese prisons (not including the mass detention of Muslims in Xinjiang). Of those, approximately 700 prisoners—including 145 monks, priests, or other religious leaders—were detained, at least in part, for engaging in religious practices that the Chinese government deemed "unauthorized." The government also arrested dozens of journalists and contributors to news websites, including some who were charged with "divulging state secrets" for their coverage of religious freedom violations.

On February 1, the new Regulations on Religious Affairs came into effect, institutionalizing President Xi's policy on religion. The regulations detail strict registration criteria for religious organizations. Although registering allows religious groups to apply for status as legal persons, many groups refuse to register because doing so requires submitting to the direction of state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations. The regulations ban "unauthorized" religious teaching and expand the role of local authorities in controlling

religious activities. As a consequence, any religious activity conducted online must be reported to local religious affairs departments. Religious groups must also report any donations that exceed 100,000 yuan (\$15,900). The regulations effectively ended the legal gray area that had existed for independent religious activity since the early 1980s.

In March 2018, the Chinese government announced that it was transferring jurisdiction over religious affairs from the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA)—a government institution—to the United Front Work Department (UFWD), an organ of the CCP. For many religious groups, this meant the end of working relationships they might have had with SARA officials and the removal of a buffer—however limited—between religion and party. In September, the UFWD launched its first nationwide program to monitor the implementation of religious policies in provinces and municipalities across the country.

International criticism of China increased during the latter half of 2018 as the scale of the government’s crackdown on religious freedom and related human rights became more widely publicized. In August 2018, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD) [criticized](#) the Chinese government’s repressive policies in Xinjiang and Tibet. In September, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [called on](#) China to allow UN investigators to visit Xinjiang and other locations in China (this had not happened by the end of the reporting period). On November 6, 2018, the Chinese government went before the UN Human Rights Council for its [Universal Periodic Review](#). Representatives from 24 nations asked the Chinese government about religious freedom issues, but the Chinese delegation dismissed their questions as “not factual” and “politically driven.” At the end of the reporting period, several Muslim-majority countries—including Indonesia and Malaysia—had all publicly expressed concerns to the Chinese government about the mass incarceration of Uighur and other Muslims.

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM CONDITIONS 2018

In 2018, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) became increasingly hostile toward religion and what it deemed to be “foreign” influences on certain religious groups. At a conference in April, President Xi told party cadres that religious adherents must “subordinate themselves to, and serve, the highest interests of the country” and “actively practice socialist core values.” The government-affiliated Chinese Christian Council and Chinese Islamic Association announced five-year plans to “sinicize” Christianity and Islam, respectively. However, even followers of Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism (also spelled Daoism), faiths that the government generally has viewed as part of China’s “traditional cultures,” experienced greater restrictions on their religious activity. In 2018, local authorities also closed or demolished dozens of Buddhist and Taoist temples, as well as statues of the Buddha and Lao-Tzu.

Uighur and Other Muslims

According to the State Department, since April 2017 the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) government under Communist Party Secretary Chen Quanguo has detained 800,000 to possibly more than two million Uighur (also spelled Uyghur), Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and other Muslims in internment camps. The Chinese government initially denied the existence of the camps,

but later defended them as a means to combat terrorism and provide vocational training. However, the detention of prominent doctors, professors, businessmen, and other professionals belied the government’s justification for the camps.

According to Uighur human rights groups, among the detainees were at least 242 Uighur public intellectuals, including artists, journalists, and university professors, as well as 96 students. Most of the detainees have not been charged with a specific crime, but rather were detained for religious behavior deemed “extremist,” such as having an “abnormal” beard, wearing a veil, accessing religious materials online, or participating in other “illegal” religious activities. According to

former detainees, those in the camps were required to renounce Islam and swear loyalty to the CCP. Detainees routinely faced harsh treatment and unhygienic conditions in overcrowded facilities, leading to several reported deaths. Some were forced to work in privately owned, state-subsidized factories.

Outside the camps, the Chinese government continued to use intrusive measures to create an “open-air prison” in Xinjiang, including discriminatory profiling at armed checkpoints and police stations; travel restrictions both within and outside of China; and Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking systems, facial and iris recognition, DNA sampling, and voice pattern sampling to monitor Muslims. The regional capital Urumqi also banned stores from using halal (Muslim dietary laws) labels for nonfood products and services, and in October launched a campaign against halal food and restaurants. Thousands of mosques have been shuttered or destroyed. In November 2018, a Chinese court sentenced Abdughapar Abdurusul, a prominent Uighur businessman and philanthropist, to death for taking an unsanctioned pilgrimage to Mecca. Starting in December 2017, the Xinjiang UFDW launched the “Pair Up and Become Family” program, which deployed more than one million local government workers to live in Muslim households for at least five days every two months to assess each family’s ideological views and report on any religious activity. In an unprecedented level of intrusiveness, these “relatives” attended private family functions such as weddings and funerals, shared meals, posed in family photographs, and even slept in the same beds as their hosts. USCIRF received credible reports that Chinese security services and their affiliates attempted to harass and intimidate Uighur Muslims living overseas, including in the United States.

Gulmira Imin, a Uighur Muslim who was a local government employee at the time of her arrest, continued to serve a life sentence for her alleged role organizing protests in the regional capital, Urumqi, in July 2009—an allegation she denies. Throughout the year, USCIRF advocated on behalf of Ms.

Imin as part of the Commission’s [Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project](#).

Hui Muslims—a diverse group of around 10 million Chinese Muslims—have not experienced the same scale of repression as Uighur Muslims, but they did face increased restrictions on religious activities during the year. In December 2018, local authorities shut down three mosques in Yunnan Province, claiming they had conducted “illegal religious education.” In some cases, police physically attacked worshippers who protested the mosque closures. Authorities in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region had planned to demolish the newly built Weizhou Grand Mosque in August, but were forced to postpone the demolition after hundreds of Muslims protested. In Ningxia and Gansu provinces, local authorities removed Arabic signs from buildings and forcibly closed Arabic-language schools. Meanwhile, there were reports of anti-halal groups harassing Muslims and damaging halal restaurants. In December, Gansu and six other provinces abolished local halal food-identification standards, making it more difficult for Muslims to identify which foods are halal. In November, officials from Ningxia went to Xinjiang to study the internment camps and signed a “counter-terrorism co-operation” agreement with the XUAR government.

Tibetan Buddhists

In 2018, the Chinese government continued to pursue a strategy of forced assimilation and suppression of Tibetan Buddhism throughout Tibet. Authorities controlled monastic education, decided if religious venues could be built or repaired, and restricted religious gatherings. In

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some parts of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), local authorities banned schoolchildren from attending religious festivals during their holidays. In February 2018, the TAR Public Security Bureau published a list of “organized crimes,” which

effectively banned civil society initiatives to promote Tibetan language and culture. In August, the government introduced a policy requiring monks and nuns to demonstrate “political reliability,” “moral integrity,” and

willingness to “play an active role at critical moments”—a phrase human rights groups believe would require monks to oppose antigovernment protests. The government also selected a group of monks and nuns to attend a three-day training session during the summer to prepare them to conduct propaganda campaigns in their monasteries. On February 17, a large fire damaged Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, a [UNESCO \(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization\) world heritage site](#) that contains important Tibetan Buddhist relics. Citing satellite imagery, human rights groups alleged that the Chinese government suppressed information about the extent of the damage.

The Chinese government continued to accuse the Dalai Lama of blasphemy and “splittism,” and cracked down on anyone suspected of so-called “separatist” activities. Monks and nuns who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama or pledge loyalty to Beijing have been expelled from their monasteries, imprisoned, and tortured. The Chinese government protested foreign officials meeting the Dalai Lama. Authorities also tightened control over passports issued to Tibetans and blocked Tibetan pilgrims attempting to travel to Tibetan exile communities in India and Nepal. Several hundred Tibetans who attended teachings given by the Dalai Lama in Bodhgaya, India, had their Chinese passports confiscated and destroyed upon their return. Because of the Chinese government’s policies, the number of Tibetans from China who attended the Dalai Lama’s teachings in 2018 was estimated to have decreased significantly from previous years.

One prisoner whose whereabouts have been a secret for more than two decades is Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. Selected by the Dalai Lama at the age of six as the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun holds the second-highest position in Tibetan Buddhism. Throughout the year, USCIRF advocated on behalf of the Panchen Lama as part of the Commission’s [Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project](#). Dialogues between Beijing and the Dalai Lama have been stalled since January 2010. In protest of repressive government policies, at least 157 Tibetans have self-immolated since February

2009, including Drugkho, a former monk at Kirti Monastery, who set himself on fire on December 8, 2018, while chanting for the return of the Dalai Lama. Meanwhile, Chinese authorities harassed and arrested Tibetans who peacefully advocated for the protection of their religion and culture. In May 2018, renowned Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment connected to his March 2016 arrest and January 2017 indictment on alleged separatism charges; he remained in prison at the end of the reporting period.

In other parts of Tibet, the Chinese government maintained tight control on Tibetans and religious and educational centers focused on the study of Tibetan Buddhism. In recent years, authorities forcibly evicted thousands of monks, nuns, and laypersons living in the monastic communities of Larung Gar and Yachen Gar in Sichuan Province and forced many of them to attend “patriotic reeducation classes” for up to six months. In October 2018, Chinese authorities banned Larung Gar from holding the Dechen Shedrub festival—a major Tibetan prayer event—for the third year in a row. In December, authorities in Qinghai Province banned monasteries from teaching Tibetan language classes to children (previously, such restrictions applied only to schools in the TAR).

Christians

On September 22, 2018, the Vatican and China reached a provisional agreement under which the pope would rehabilitate seven bishops from the state-run Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) who had been excommunicated, in return for a veto over any future appointments by the Chinese government. The deal was controversial among Chinese Catholics, particularly because the Chinese government cited it as justification for pressuring clergy and members of the underground

church to join the CCPA (an estimated half of China’s Catholics worship in underground churches). In 2018, at least two underground bishops were replaced by government-approved bishops.

In October and November, four priests from an underground church in Hebei were taken into police custody

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and forced to meet with CCPA bishops, who attempted to persuade them to join the state-run church. On November 9, local authorities in Zhejiang Province detained Bishop Peter Shao Zhumin without charge; he was released 14 days later, along with Father Lu Danhua of Lishui, who was arrested in December 2017. In addition, there were widespread reports of Chinese authorities closing underground Catholic churches, destroying crosses, confiscating Bibles and other religious materials, and otherwise restricting or interfering in religious activities. The crackdown has been especially severe in Henan Province, where churches received notices stating that children under 18 were forbidden from attending services such as Sunday school.

The Chinese government also intensified its crackdown on Protestant groups that refused to join the state-run Three-Self Patriotic Movement (an estimated half to two-thirds of Protestants worship in unregistered house churches). According to religious freedom advocates, more than 5,000 Christians and 1,000 church leaders were arrested in 2018 because of their faith or religious practices (most of these arrests were short-term detentions that did not lead to criminal charges). Authorities closed down or demolished thousands of churches or religious sites, including Zion Church in Beijing; the Golden Lampstand Church in Shanxi Province; and the Bible Reformed Church, House of David Church, and Rongguili Lane Church in Guangdong Province. On December 9, police officers raided the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, and arrested Pastor Wang Yi and more than 100 congregants.

Some of the congregants who were later released claimed that police had beaten them and forced them to sign a pledge renouncing the church. In

December 2018, Pastor Wang and his wife were charged with inciting “subversion of state power”; at the end of the reporting period, they remained in secret detention while awaiting trial.

Even house churches that were not shut down faced increased restrictions on their ability to conduct religious activity, and in April, the government banned

online sales of the Bible. There were numerous reports throughout 2018 of authorities attempting to replace crosses, pictures of Jesus, and other symbols of the Christian faith with images of Xi Jinping. In Henan Province, local authorities required churches to remove the first commandment from lists of the Ten Commandments on the grounds that it placed loyalty to God above loyalty to the CCP.

Hu Shigen, a church leader and religious freedom advocate, who was sentenced in 2016 to a 7.5-year sentence for “subversion of government power,” remained in prison. Throughout the year, USCIRF advocated on behalf of Mr. Hu as part of the Commission’s [Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project](#).

Falun Gong and Xie Jiao Groups

The persecution of the Falun Gong was initiated in 1999 by then President Jiang Zemin, who also created the infamous 610 Office, an extrajudicial security apparatus wholly designed to eradicate the Falun Gong. The Chinese government has classified the Falun Gong as *xie jiao*, translated as either “evil cults” or “heterodox teachings.” Under article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code, belonging to one of these groups is punishable with three to seven years’ imprisonment or more. Throughout 2018, authorities harassed, detained, and intimidated Falun Gong practitioners simply for practicing their beliefs. There were reports that many of the detainees suffered physical violence, psychiatric abuse, sexual assault, forced drug administration, and sleep

deprivation. According to Falun Gong advocates, the government imprisoned at least 931 Falun Gong practitioners in 2018. During the summer, several Falun Gong practitioners were arrested for sending pro-Falun mes-

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sages over social media and for distributing Falun Gong pamphlets in a marketplace. In September, the Henan Province Department of Education issued a document instructing universities to intensify the anti-*xie jiao* campaign and required students to take an online test about *xie jiao* misconduct. Although the Chinese government claimed that as of January 1, 2015, it had ended

the practice of harvesting organs from prisoners (many of whom are believed to be Falun Gong practitioners), in 2018, human rights advocates, medical professionals, and investigative journalists presented additional evidence that the practice continued on a significant scale. In November, the Justice Bureau of Changsha, Hunan Province, suspended for six months the law licenses of two attorneys who defended Falun Gong practitioners because they “denied the nationally recognized nature of a cult organization” in court. Meanwhile, in 2018, the Chinese government harassed and arrested thousands of followers of other *xie jiao* groups, including the Church of Almighty God. Many of those detained during the year—whom the Church of Almighty God estimates to be in the thousands—suffered torture and other abuses, in some cases resulting in deaths or unexplained disappearances while in custody.

Forced Repatriation of North Korean Refugees

The Chinese government routinely violates its obligations under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol by forcibly returning individuals to North Korea without evaluating their cases to determine if they qualify for refugee status. Some of these individuals fled in part because of the North Korean government’s repression of religion and related human rights. After the new Regulations on Religious Affairs went into effect in February, there were reports that Chinese authorities had closed down several churches frequented by North Korean defectors and deported South Korean missionaries.

U.S. POLICY

In 2018, tensions between the United States and China escalated over concerns about Beijing’s [trade practices](#), [cybertheft](#) of U.S. intellectual property and national security secrets, and [military activities](#) in the region. In September 2018, the United States [announced](#) plans to levy tariffs of 10 percent on \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods, with an additional increase to 25 percent by the end of 2018. However, at the G20 Summit in December, the United States and China [reached](#) a temporary truce in the trade war and began trade negotiations that remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy continued

to conduct freedom-of-navigation operations in the South China Sea. On December 1, Canadian authorities [detained](#) Huawei’s chief financial officer at the request of the U.S. government, allegedly because the company had violated U.S. sanctions against Iran. U.S. officials also became increasingly concerned about Chinese government influence operations in the United States; in February 2019, after the reporting period, the Government Accountability Office released a [report](#) about Confucius Institutes at U.S. academic institutions.

Throughout 2018, U.S. government officials voiced concern about deteriorating religious freedom conditions in China. On May 23, Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo [raised](#) the issue of religious freedom when Chinese state councilor Wang Yi visited Washington, DC. A State Department spokesperson also condemned the Chinese government’s [conviction](#) of Tashi Wangchuk and its [harassment](#) of the Early Rain Covenant Church. At the July 2018 [Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom](#) held in Washington, DC, participating delegations issued a [Statement on China](#) concerning the government’s “significant restrictions on religious freedom.” In an October 2018 [speech](#), Vice President Michael R. Pence warned that “a new wave of persecution is crashing down on Chinese Christians, Buddhists, and Muslims.” In November, the United States also [expressed concern](#) about the Chinese government’s lack of adherence to its international obligations on religious freedom at the second U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue.

Also in November, during the UN Universal Periodic Review of China, the U.S. delegation [called upon](#) the Chinese government to release all Uighur Muslims held in arbitrary detention; release any human rights defenders currently imprisoned, including Tashi Wangchuk, Ilham Tohti, Huang Qi, and Wang Quanzhang; and cease interference in the selection and education of Tibetan religious leaders. The United States also asked about the Falun Gong and Christian church closures in [written questions](#) submitted in advance.

Congress continued to criticize China’s crack-down on religious freedom in 2018. In December, Congress passed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act ([P.L. 115-409](#)), which mandated appropriations for U.S. government efforts to counter China’s strategic influence and expressed “grave concern” about constraints

on religious freedom. Also in December, Congress passed the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act ([P.L. 115-330](#)), which requires the State Department to report on the level of access Chinese officials granted U.S. diplomats, journalists, and tourists to Tibetan areas, and to deny U.S. travel visas to Chinese officials involved in denying such access. In November, the House of Representatives and the Senate both introduced the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2018 ([H.R.7123 / S. 3622](#)), which would have required the secretary of state to appoint a special coordinator for Xinjiang and to consider imposing sanctions on individual Chinese officials; neither bill received a vote before the end of the 115th Congress, though both bills were reintroduced in early 2019, after the reporting period.

The State Department last redesignated China as a CPC in November 2018. At the same time, Secretary Pompeo extended the existing sanctions related to restrictions on exports of crime control and detection equipment.

INDIVIDUAL VIEWS OF CHAIR TENZIN DORJEE

If there is one country in the world that epitomizes CPC designation it is China. Religious freedom only exists in name but not in reality in China. China has sinicized and securitized religions for a political agenda. The worst cases are in Tibet and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. In Tibet, China has sinicized and politicized the reincarnation system and micro-managed the study of Buddhism in monasteries that are central to Tibetan Buddhism. Ironically, Chinese government officials assert the right to choose reincarnations of all Living Buddhas of Tibet only to serve their political agenda and domination. In this regard, China forcibly disappeared Panchen Gedhun Choekyi Nyima for decades and installed Gyaltsen Norbu for control and showcase. In a most recent interview with Reuters, His Holiness the Dalai Lama said his next reincarnation could come from “here” (India)—a free country. According to His Holiness, China appears to be more worried about his reincarnation than he is and nobody will actually trust and respect China’s selection, and that would be solely China’s problem. In the recent past, His Holiness mused that first China needs to subscribe to Buddhism and the reincarnation system, then find reincarnations of Chairman Mao and

Deng Xiaoping before it gets involved in finding his next reincarnation. Unlike the Panchen Lama, China cannot control the next reincarnation of the Dalai Lama because he will reincarnate in a free country as long as Sino-Tibetan issues persist. The winning card is in the hand of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people. Thus, the Sino-Tibetan conflict will persist. In its separate rating, Freedom House’s 2018 Report found the religious and human rights conditions in Tibet second to Syria and worse than even North Korea. Uighurs and Tibetans are the two most oppressed minorities in China today.

In Xinjiang, as many as two million Uighurs are estimated to have been detained in detention camps. China has been using state of the art technology to monitor social movement and religious activities of Uighurs and Tibetans, including children. China called the detention camps for Uighurs re-education camps, and also, in its new white paper on Tibet, called systematic and egregious violations of religious freedom and human rights in Tibet democratic reform in 60 years of ruling Tibet. I ask China to respect religious freedom, free all the Uighurs in detention camps, and call for the immediate release of Panchen Lama, Tashi Wangchuk, Gulmira Imin, and all prisoners of conscience. As required by the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, the State Department recently released its first “well-documented” report on reciprocal access restrictions to Tibet and also pushed back on China’s criticism of the report. The Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China released its position paper calling for unfettered access to the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas to gather accurate information on human rights conditions in those areas. I strongly recommend the U.S. government utilize the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act.

INDIVIDUAL VIEWS OF COMMISSIONER JOHNNIE MOORE

My personal opinion is that one of the most alarming incidents as it relates to religious freedom in the entire year was the decision by the Vatican to negotiate a diplomatic relationship with China that resulted in the recognition of government appointed bishops and which also—in effect—deposed prominent Chinese

religious leaders who had persevered through horrific persecution in previous generations in China, including China's most well-known Catholic leader.

Literally, within days of the Vatican negotiating its deal, the Chinese used it as cover to embark upon the closure of several of the nation's largest and most prominent unregistered church communities. That has continued. Being that the Vatican is both a Church and a State, it is my opinion that the Vatican now bears a significant moral and legal responsibility to help solve the problem which it helped created—albeit inadvertently—by providing China license to viciously crack down on Christian communities (as cited in this report), and by providing the Chinese government further cover to continue its incomprehensible, inexcusable and inhumane abuses of Muslim citizens in the western part of the country.

While I am entirely for direct engagement on these issues, including with the most severe violators in the world, that engagement must not result in these types of unintended consequences, as has been the case in China. The Vatican made a terrible mistake, which it must take seriously. This debacle must be dealt with urgently and seriously.