



News Item

Rep. Smith Warns on Religious Freedom Violations

Washington, Dec 20, 2019 | Jeff Sagnip ((202) 225-3765)

Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ) today released the following statement in response to the US State Department's designation of the world's worst violators of religious freedom:

"I welcome the State Department's designation of Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan as Countries of Particular Concern (CPC), given their systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom.

"Congress has spoken out in particular with respect to Xi Jinping's all-out effort to "Sinicize" all religion in China, advancing legislation to protect Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists and other believers. I further hope that the Executive Office for Immigration Review pays special attention to the designation of Eritrea as a CPC, and withholds removal of those fleeing persecution from that country.

"Additionally, I welcome the inclusion of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Nigeria and Sudan on the Special Watch List for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom, joining prior designees Comoros, Russia and Uzbekistan. However, the jury is still out as to whether Sudan deserves its upgrade from CPC status.

"We will pay particular attention to Nigeria and the deteriorating situation under the government of President Muhammadu Buhari in the year ahead. President Buhari must address the murderous attacks conducted by Fulani extremists on Christians in the Middle Belt and the oppression of Shia Muslims in Kaduna State. I also call upon the State Department to monitor the actions of Miyetti Allah with regard to its complicity in attacks by Fulani extremists.

"Finally, I question the absence of India and Turkey on the Special Watch List.

"India's government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has become especially intolerant toward religious minorities, notwithstanding the promise of India's secular constitution which guaranties equality of all its citizens, regardless of their faith tradition.

"Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues to impose unjustifiable restrictions on the internal practices of the Greek Orthodox Church, particularly by controlling who can participate in the Church's Holy Synod to elect the Patriarch and in failing to reopen the Halki Seminary, despite pledges to do so. According to the United Nations Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights, Turkey has engaged in wholesale destruction and looting of the religious and cultural patrimony of occupied Cyprus, and its decision to convert the Church of St. Savior of Chora into as mosque – which signals an intent to do the same with the Hagia Sophia, a world treasure – merits its inclusion on the Special Watch List."