

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 27, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

Announcing the release of the 2016 International Religious Freedom Report on August 15, 2017, you stated religious freedom is “a core American value ... and universal human right,” and protecting religious groups from violent extremism “is a human rights priority for the Trump Administration.” We appreciate these statements and encourage you to use all the tools at your disposal to help ensure freedom of religion and belief is central in U.S. foreign policy.

The annual designation of “countries of particular concern” (CPCs) for severe violations of religious freedom is one such a tool. The Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 114-281) requires the president to make CPC designations no later than 90 days after the release of the annual report, and that Congress be notified no later than 90 days after these designations about the parties responsible for the violations prompting the designations, the actions the U.S. government has taken in response, and the effectiveness of these actions. We therefore expect to receive CPC designations by November 13, 2017, and the notification of the responsible parties, actions taken, and the effectiveness of these actions by February 11, 2018.

In making CPC designations, we urge you to take into consideration the recommendations of the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Its most recent annual report found that 16 countries met the CPC standard, compared to the 10 countries designated as CPCs by the State Department in 2016. We are especially mindful of Burma, which the State Department has designated as a CPC since 1999, most recently in October 2016. While Burma has taken some important steps in its transition from a military dictatorship, conditions for the country’s religious and ethnic minorities have severely deteriorated. Burmese security forces have killed hundreds of Rohingya Muslims and forced over half a million people to seek refuge in Bangladesh, creating a staggering humanitarian disaster which the United Nations has labeled ethnic cleansing. We strongly support redesignating Burma as a CPC and urge you to take into consideration USCIRF’s policy recommendations regarding this designation.

We also believe the State Department should designate Pakistan as a CPC, as USCIRF has long recommended. The government of Pakistan continues to perpetrate and tolerate systematic, ongoing and egregious religious freedom violations. Discriminatory constitutional provisions and laws, including the country’s blasphemy and anti-Ahmadiyya measures, continue to result in the unjust prosecution and imprisonment of individuals due to their faith. At least 40

people are currently sentenced to death or are serving life sentences for blasphemy. Religious minority communities, including Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and Shi'a Muslims, also experience religiously motivated and sectarian violence perpetrated by terrorist organizations and societal elements with relative impunity. Additionally, provincial textbooks with discriminatory content against minorities remain a significant concern.

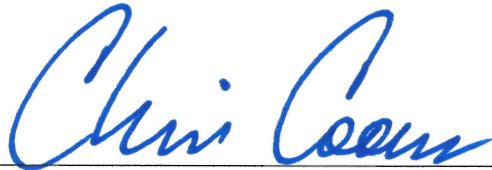
Along with mandating new CPC deadlines, the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act provides several new tools, including the "Special Watch List" and designations of "Entities of Particular Concern," which we urge the State Department to issue in a timely manner.

We believe promoting freedom of religion and belief is a moral imperative and encourages peace, stability, and economic vibrancy. We look forward to working with you to help ensure this precious freedom has a central role in U.S. foreign policy.

Sincerely,



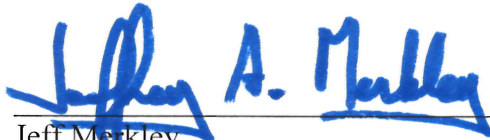
Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator



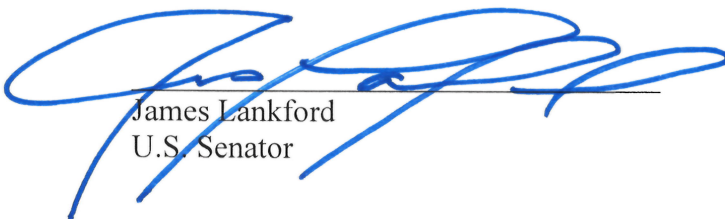
Christopher A. Coons  
U.S. Senator



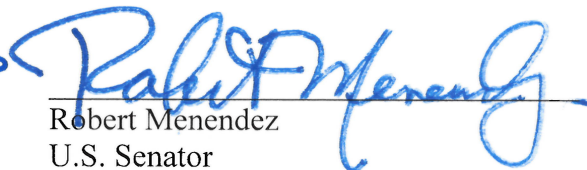
Todd Young  
U.S. Senator



Jeff Merkley  
U.S. Senator



James Lankford  
U.S. Senator



Robert Menendez  
U.S. Senator