

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

April 10, 2024

The Honorable Ambassador Nicholas Burns  
United States Ambassador to China  
No. 55 An Jia Lou Road  
Chaoyang, Beijing

Dear Ambassador Burns:

We write with concern regarding your recent Easter Sunday post on X (formerly known as Twitter), urge you to promote and protect religious freedom in China and work to gain the release of individuals currently jailed for their religious activities.

On Easter Sunday, when tens of millions of Chinese Christians held services deemed illegal by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), you posted “[u]plifting Easter Morning Mass at the Catholic North Church in Beijing.” The church in question, the Church of the Savior, Beijing, is operated by the CCP-run Catholic Patriotic Association, and lacks full communion with the Catholic Church. Your post only amplified the CCP-narrative that religious freedom in China is prominent, and allowed Shen Shiwei, a propagandist who works at state-run CGTN, to reply, “U.S. ambassador to China experiences the religious freedom in China.”

As you know, the Catholic Patriotic Association, the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, and the Three-Self Patriotic Church, are state-run religious entities which answer directly to the CCP and are a key mechanism by which the CCP’s United Front controls and distorts religion for its own benefit. The CCP’s goal is to “Sinicize” religion; that is, completely abrogate the independence of all religious entities in China and incorporate themes that support the Party’s official ideologies, such as Marxism-Leninism and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. To this end, Beijing has gone to great lengths to shape religion for its own benefit, such as editing Christian biblical teachings in such a way that would repel Christians worldwide. For example, in 2020, a Chinese government entity falsified an account of John 8: 3-11, where Jesus saved the life of a woman and pardoned her sins. In Beijing’s version, Jesus instead stones the woman and pledges fealty to “the law,” implying that He answers to a temporal authority—a message that perverts the essential Christian themes of grace and forgiveness.

While we understand the difficult position you and other U.S. diplomats face when wishing to attend religious services in China, especially the desire to not put the underground faithful in harm’s way, we encourage you to recognize that the CCP’s state-run religious entities are Potemkin institutions with no legitimacy which exist to hide Beijing’s ongoing repression of religious freedom in China and to bring all institutions within the ambit of the CCP and in conformity with its ideological doctrine. While we empathize with your desire to attend Mass, we encourage you to distance from state-controlled entities that are seen by most of the Christian faithful as purveyors of CCP suppression. Publicizing your attendance, something you have done

on other occasions as well, only allows propagandists to use your participation in worship to distort the reality of religious persecution.

In light of this, we believe that a public statement condemning the CCP's persecution of individuals trying to live out their faith would send a strong message of solidarity with the oppressed. This week's Eid al-Fitr might provide an opportunity to raise objections to the CCP's policy of leveling Arab-style domes and minarets from mosques throughout China, and its persecution of predominantly-Muslim Central Asian ethnic groups, such as the Uyghurs.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio'.

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Smith'.

Chris Smith  
Member of Congress