

May 18, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

We write as a diverse coalition of nongovernmental and religious organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious leaders, human rights advocates, and practitioners to respectfully urge you to designate “countries of particular concern” concurrently with the release of the next *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*. We welcomed the joint issuance of the *Annual Report* and CPC designations last year, bringing these two processes back together. We urge you to make the joint issuance an annual policy.

As Ambassador Johnson Cook stated last year, CPC designations represent our government’s “principled stan[ce] for the values that all nations agree to uphold as members of the United Nations. The CPC list exposes persecutors to international scrutiny and can encourage much-needed reforms.” Bifurcating CPC designations from the *Annual Report*, sometimes with years between designations, weakens the intended effect for these two processes.

In 1998, when Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act and President Clinton signed it into law, it established the *Annual Report* to document abuses and the CPC designation to encourage reform. Under article 402(b)(1) of the Act, it requires that “each year” a review shall occur to determine whether governments have “engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom in that country,” after which any country meeting that standard shall be designated a CPC for its violations. The Act also provides that such a determination shall be based upon the *Annual Report*. The congressional drafters intended that these two processes—the CPC review and drafting of the *Annual Report*—work together and be issued together. Yet, CPC designations have not been made annually.

In October 2011, you simultaneously released the *Annual Report* and announced the first CPC designations of the Obama administration. We and others welcomed the reunion of these two announcements. For instance, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom referred to this as “a welcome change from past practice, when the two had been separated by years. CPC designations were made in 2006, 2009, and 2011.” We therefore encourage you to continue the practice of annually announcing CPC designations with the issuance of the *Annual Report*, as envisioned by the Act.

Madam Secretary, we know you understand the importance of religious freedom and value it as a foundational human right. The CPC designation is one tool in your toolkit and we support its judicious use. At the same time, if the statutory process is ignored, it sends the wrong message to abusive governments. We believe that annually designating “countries of particular concern” will send a clear message about the United States’ commitment to this core right in our foreign policy.

Respectfully,

ORGANIZATIONS

AMERICAN CENTER FOR LAW & JUSTICE

AMERICAN ISLAMIC CONGRESS

CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY

HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION

HUMAN FRIENDS ORGANIZATION INTERNATIONAL

HUMAN RIGHTS LAW FOUNDATION

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