

June 11, 2013

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

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write as an informal group of organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious leaders, human rights advocates and practitioners to respectfully ask that you designate “countries of particular concern” for particularly severe violations of religious freedom either perpetrated or tolerated by foreign governments. According to the Pew Research Center, about 75% of the world’s population lives in countries where governments, social groups or individuals restrict people’s ability to freely practice their faith, and such restrictions are on the rise. Given these facts, it is critical that the United States make annual CPC designations as a way to encourage reforms and prevent abuses. Doing so early in your tenure as Secretary of State would make clear that this issue will be a top foreign policy priority of the United States.

We note that it has been almost two years since the State Department last made CPC recommendations, when eight countries were designated -- Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan. According to the International Religious Freedom Act, the actions associated with these designations expire two years after their issuance. It is therefore critical that you make CPC designations before August of this year.

In addition, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recently made recommendations as to which countries should be designated as CPCs. In addition to agreeing with the current eight CPC countries, USCIRF also found that seven other countries meet the CPC threshold and should be so designated: Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam. We ask that you review USCIRF’s recommendations when considering which countries to designate.

We know of your commitment to this issue and look forward to working with you. As you said during your confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, religious freedom is “at the core of who we are” and has “got to be front and center in our dialogue.” Designating “countries of particular concern” is one opportunity to place this issue front and center. It will shine a light on egregious violators, press them to reform, and signify our unwavering commitment to this foundational human right and bedrock American value.

Sincerely,

ORGANIZATIONS

AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY WORLDWIDE – UNITED KINGDOM

FRANCISCAN ACTION NETWORK

HIAS

HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION

HUMAN FRIENDS ORGANIZATION INTERNATIONAL

HUMAN RIGHTS LAW FOUNDATION

INSTITUTE FOR GILGIT BALTISTAN STUDIES

INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET (ICT)

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN (ICC)

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

INTERNATIONAL UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY FOUNDATION

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX AUTONOMOUS CHURCH OF AMERICA

SECULAR COALITION FOR AMERICA

UNION OF COUNCILS FOR JEWS OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

UNION FOR REFORM JUDAISM

UNITED MACEDONIAN DIASPORA

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International Coalition for Religious Freedom

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Jeff King
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International Christian Concern

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Amb. Mark P. Lagon
Professor and MSFS International Relations Chair
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Larry Lerner
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Union of Councils for Jews of the Former Soviet Union

Greg Mitchell
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Dr. Russell Moore
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