

115TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. RES. 1024

Reaffirming the commitment of the United States to promote international religious freedom and marking the 20th anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 24, 2018

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on Ways and Means, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

RESOLUTION

Reaffirming the commitment of the United States to promote international religious freedom and marking the 20th anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

Whereas religious freedom is a universally recognized human right and the protection and promotion of this right globally attracts broad support;

Whereas the United States has a long tradition of advancing and protecting religious freedom, understanding that this fundamental right is critical for a flourishing society and essential to protect human dignity and national stability;

Whereas religious freedom includes the right of an individual to worship, think, speak, and act, including in public and in private, in accordance with the beliefs of the individual;

Whereas the free exercise of religion must stand for the right to practice any faith or to choose no faith at all;

Whereas this year marks the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”;

Whereas this year also marks the 20th anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6401 et seq.), which made religious freedom a United States foreign policy priority and created the position of Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom at the Department of State and the bipartisan United States Commission on International Religious Freedom;

Whereas given the United States commitment to advance religious freedom and to the international covenants that guarantee it as the inalienable right of every human being, United States foreign policy is committed to—

(1) promoting freedom of religion globally as a fundamental human right and as a source of stability and prosperity for all countries;

(2) assisting emerging democracies to implement freedom of religion and to protect individual conscience;

(3) assisting nongovernment organizations to promote religious freedom and to sponsor reconciliation and other programs in disputes which divide groups along the lines of religious identity; and

(4) identifying countries and nonstate actors that are severe persecutors on the basis of religious belief and undertaking diplomatic or other actions to address religious freedom violations, in order to protect fundamental national interests;

Whereas despite efforts to advance and protect religious freedom over the past two decades, the world is experiencing a religious freedom crisis, creating millions of victims and undermining liberty, prosperity, and peace in places vital to the national interests of the United States and our allies and posing direct challenges in the Middle East, Russia, China, South and Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa;

Whereas an estimated 83 percent of the world's population lives in countries where freedom of religion and conscience is highly restricted, either by the government or by social groups, according to the latest Pew Research Center's Study of Global Restrictions on Religion;

Whereas the absence of fundamental human rights, including religious freedom, contributes to political instability, violence against religious and ethnic minorities, religious extremism, and terrorism;

Whereas research demonstrates that where religious freedom is protected and advanced as a universally recognized human right there is greater peace, political and social stability, economic innovation and development, democratization, women's empowerment, and less violent religious extremism and terrorism;

Whereas the United States Congress affirmed in 2016, with passage of the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (Public Law 114–281), that because the promotion of international religious freedom protects human rights, advances democracy abroad, and advances United States interests in stability, security, and development globally, the promotion of international religious freedom requires new and evolving policies and diplomatic responses that are drawn from the expertise of the national security agencies, the diplomatic services, and other governmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations, and are coordinated across and carried out by the entire range of Federal agencies;

Whereas the 2018 National Security Strategy of the United States recognized the strategic importance of international religious freedom, making the advancement of religious freedom and the protection of religious minorities from violence a “priority” of the Administration’s foreign policy;

Whereas in the annual proclamation recognizing “Religious Freedom Day” on January 16, 2018, President Trump affirmed that the “United States is . . . the paramount champion for religious freedom around the world because we do not believe that conscience rights are only for Americans. . . . We will be undeterred in our commitment to monitor religious persecution and implement policies that promote religious freedom. Through these efforts, we strive for the day when people of all faiths can follow their hearts and worship according to their consciences.”; and

Whereas Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, announced a first ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom which will

be held from July 24 to July 26, 2018, as foreign ministers, civil society, and parliamentarians will convene to discuss shared strategies to advance and protect international religious freedom: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) marks the 20th anniversary of the passage
3 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998
4 (22 U.S.C. 6401 et seq.) by reaffirming the commit-
5 ment of the United States to advance religious free-
6 dom as a fundamental part of United States foreign
7 policy;

8 (2) commends the Administration for its strong
9 commitment to protect religious freedom globally
10 and efforts to prioritize the protection of religious
11 minorities from violence and other serious human
12 rights abuses;

13 (3) commends the Department of State, the
14 Secretary of State, and the Ambassador-at-Large for
15 International Religious Freedom for hosting the
16 Ministerial to Advance International Religious Free-
17 dom from July 24 to July 26, 2018, and for all their
18 efforts to engage like-minded allies globally to ad-
19 vance religious freedom and protect vulnerable reli-
20 gious minorities;

21 (4) commends United States allies that are
22 working to protect religious freedom globally and

1 those providing humanitarian aid and technical as-
2 sistance to vulnerable religious minorities;

3 (5) calls on the President, the Secretary of
4 State, the Ambassador-at-Large for International
5 Religious Freedom, and Members of Congress to le-
6 verage the growing network of foreign religious free-
7 dom focused institutions and parliamentary groups
8 including such bodies as the International Contact
9 Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the Panel
10 of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief at the
11 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and
12 Human Rights, the European Parliament Intergroup
13 on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tol-
14 erance, the International Panel of Parliamentarians
15 for Freedom of Religion or Belief, and the Common-
16 wealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief,
17 among others;

18 (6) calls on the President and the Secretary of
19 State, in accordance with the International Religious
20 Freedom Act of 1998, as amended by the Frank R.
21 Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016
22 (Public Law 114–281), to continue strengthening
23 United States religious freedom diplomacy and the
24 training of United States diplomats in religious free-
25 dom;

1 (7) reaffirms the commitment of Congress to
2 work with the Administration to carry out the reli-
3 gious freedom priorities made in the 2018 National
4 Security Strategy of the United States and develop
5 a coordinated strategy to advance international reli-
6 gious freedom and protect vulnerable religious mi-
7 norities globally;

8 (8) calls on the President, the Secretary of
9 State, the Secretary of Defense, the Ambassador-at-
10 Large for International Religious Freedom, and
11 other relevant agencies, and working closely with
12 like-minded allies, to develop a comprehensive re-
13 sponse plan to protect and assist the victims of
14 genocide, crimes against humanity, forced disloca-
15 tions, mass detentions, and violence from extremist
16 actors or terrorists, including in, among other
17 places, Iraq, Syria, China, Burma, North Korea, Ni-
18 geria, and Somalia; and

19 (9) calls on the President, the Secretary of
20 State, and the United States Trade Representative
21 to ensure that trade negotiations include religious
22 freedom conditions as mandated by the Bipartisan
23 Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability
24 Act of 2015 (title I of Public Law 114–26).

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