



INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

An overview of events occurring 2017-2020

To date, the administration of President Donald Trump has taken significant action on international religious freedom:

2018

On January 24, [Sam Brownback](#) was confirmed as U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. In choosing Brownback for this role, President Trump demonstrated the administration's commitment to religious freedom by choosing someone with gravitas and experience on the issue.

On April 26, [Mike Pompeo](#) was confirmed as Secretary of State. In choosing Pompeo for this position, President Trump chose someone who cares deeply about religious liberty and will make it a priority to see the issue advanced through this administration.

On April 30, during a press conference with [Nigeria's president](#), President Trump raised the issue of religious freedom and the killing of Christians in that country - bringing attention to an issue that had largely been neglected by other government officials.

On July 24-26, the State Department held the first-ever [Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom](#). Political and civil society leaders from around the world gathered in Washington, D.C. for a three-day summit to discuss religious freedom issues and solutions. The Potomac Declaration, issued at the Ministerial, made a strong statement about the state of religious freedom around the globe and provided a plan of action for promoting global religious freedom. The U.S. also announced the International Religious Freedom Fund (to provide emergency assistance to victims of religiously motivated discrimination and abuse around the world) and the Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response Initiative (which has provided nearly \$373 million to help persecuted ethnic and religious minorities in northern Iraq restore their communities). The U.S. was among 25 countries who signed a statement condemning terrorism and the abuse of religious believers by non-state actors.

On August 1, the Trump administration relied on Executive Order 13818 (which builds on Global Magnitsky Act authority) to sanction two Turkish officials over the detention of American pastor [Andrew Brunson](#) due to his Christian faith. This

2019

Executive Order ultimately resulted in Pastor Brunson's release. On March 8, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback criticized China's poor religious freedom record in a [speech he delivered in Hong Kong](#).

On July 16-18, the State Department held the second [Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom](#). Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced a new global initiative, the International Religious Freedom Alliance, meant to provide a way for like-minded countries to work together to advance religious freedom. FCC Chairman Ajit Pai gave a compelling speech condemning the use of technology to track and control the lives of religious minorities. The United States was among 14 signatory countries on a statement of concern about technology and religious freedom. The U.S. was also one of 34 countries that signed a statement of concern on counterterrorism as a pretext for the repression of religious freedom; one of 27 countries that signed a statement condemning blasphemy, apostasy, or other laws that restrict religious freedom; and was one of 46 countries that signed a statement that called upon government officials to condemn attacks on places of worship and to work with religious communities to protect these places. At this event, the State Department and USAID also announced new religious freedom training programs for foreign service officers.

On July 16, the State Department placed targeted sanctions on Burmese military officials for their [human rights and religious freedom](#) violations committed against the Rohingya Muslim population.

On September 10, the State Department placed targeted sanctions on Russian officials for their [religious freedom violations](#) and torture of Jehovah's Witnesses. On September 23, President Trump hosted a meeting during the U.N. General Assembly and gave a [speech solely on the topic of religious freedom](#). During the speech, he announced a U.S. policy initiative to protect places of worship, pledging an additional \$25 million in funding to protect religious sites and relics. President Trump also announced the U.S. would form a coalition within the business community to protect religious freedom. This is the first time a U.S. president has hosted a meeting focused solely on religious freedom at the UN. On September 24, President Trump discussed the [need to protect religious freedom](#) during his UN General Assembly speech, in which he also discussed China and Iran – two major violators of religious freedom.

On October 7, the Department of Commerce [blacklisted](#) 28 Chinese companies whose surveillance technology products are used to systematically oppress and control – and violate the religious freedom – of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China.

On November 27, President Trump signed the [Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act](#) into law, which affirms Hong Kong's semi-autonomous status and protects against Chinese government encroachment, which is a threat to Hong Kong's religious freedom.

On December 19, the Treasury Department [sanctioned](#) two Iranian judges responsible for human rights violations. One of the judges was known to violate the rights of Iran's Christian and Baha'i religious minority communities

2020

In February, the Trump administration filled the role of [Special Adviser to the President on International Religious Freedom](#) within the National Security Council. This role was authorized by the [International Religious Freedom Act of 1998](#), but has remained unfilled for over 20 years since that law's enactment. President Trump is the first president to dedicate a full-time staffer to this role and fill it on a permanent basis.

On February 5, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo launched the [International Religious Freedom Alliance](#). The Alliance will unite government leaders from like-minded nations to strategize ways to promote religious freedom and protect religious minorities around the world.

On April 2, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback held a special briefing. He called upon China, North Korea, Iran, and Russia to [release their prisoners of conscience](#) in light of the contagious coronavirus. Many of these prisoners were imprisoned for their religious faith.

On June 2, President Trump signed an [Executive Order on Advancing International Religious Freedom](#), which recognized the promotion of international religious freedom as a moral and national security imperative for the United States.

On July 9, the Treasury Department [sanctioned](#) four current or former Chinese government officials and one Chinese government entity for their abuses against the Uyghur Muslim minority in China.

On July 31, the Treasury Department [sanctioned](#) a Chinese paramilitary organization in connection to their human rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims in China.

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