

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 3164

To state the policy of the United States with respect to religious freedom
in the People’s Republic of China, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 30, 2023

Mr. BUDD (for himself and Mr. TILLIS) introduced the following bill; which
was read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

A BILL

To state the policy of the United States with respect to
religious freedom in the People’s Republic of China, and
for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Combating the Perse-
5 cution of Religious Groups in China Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) According to estimates included in Inter-
9 national Religious Freedom reports issued by the
10 Department of State, Buddhists comprise 18.2 per-

1 cent of the total population in the People’s Republic
2 of China, Christians, 5.1 percent, Muslims, 1.8 per-
3 cent, followers of folk religions, 21 percent, and
4 atheists or unaffiliated persons, 52.12 percent, with
5 Hindus, Jews, and Taoists comprising less than 1
6 percent.

7 (2) The Government of the People’s Republic of
8 China recognizes 5 official religions, Buddhism, Tao-
9 ism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism (accord-
10 ing to an International Religious Freedom report
11 issued by the Department of State), and only reli-
12 gious groups belonging to 1 of the 5 sanctioned “pa-
13 triotic religious associations” representing those reli-
14 gions are permitted to register with the Government
15 and hold worship service, excluding all other faiths
16 and denying the ability to worship without being
17 registered with the Government.

18 (3) The activities of state-sanctioned religious
19 organizations in the People’s Republic of China are
20 regulated by the Chinese Communist Party, which
21 manages all aspects of religious life in the country.

22 (4) The Chinese Communist Party is actively
23 seeking to control, govern, and manipulate all as-
24 pects of faith through the “Sinicization of Religion”,
25 a process intended to shape religious traditions so

1 they conform with the objectives of the Chinese
2 Communist Party.

3 (5) On February 1, 2018, the Government of
4 the People's Republic of China implemented new re-
5 ligious regulations that imposed restrictions on Chi-
6 nese contacts with overseas religious organizations,
7 required Government approval for religious schools,
8 websites, and any online religious service, and effec-
9 tively banned unauthorized religious gatherings and
10 teachings.

11 (6) There are numerous reports that authorities
12 in the People's Republic of China have forced clo-
13 sures of Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and Taoist
14 houses of worship and destroyed public displays of
15 religious symbols throughout the country.

16 (7) Authorities of the People's Republic of
17 China have arrested and detained religious leaders
18 trying to hold services online.

19 (8) There are credible reports of Chinese au-
20 thorities raiding house churches and other places of
21 religious worship, removing and confiscating reli-
22 gious paraphernalia, installing surveillance cameras
23 on religious property, pressuring congregations to
24 sing songs of the Chinese Communist Party and dis-
25 play the national flag during worship, forcing

1 churches to replace images of Jesus Christ or the
2 Virgin Mary with pictures of General Secretary Xi
3 Jinping, and banning children and students from at-
4 tending religious services.

5 (9) It has been reported that the Government
6 of the People’s Republic of China is rewriting and
7 will issue a version of the Bible with the “correct
8 understanding” of the text according to the Chinese
9 Communist Party. Authorities continue to restrict
10 the printing and distribution of the Bible, Quran,
11 and other religious literature and penalize publishing
12 and copying businesses that handle religious mate-
13 rials.

14 (10) According to International Religious Free-
15 dom reports issued by the Department of State, the
16 Government of the People’s Republic of China has
17 imprisoned thousands of individuals of all faiths for
18 practicing their religious beliefs and often labels
19 groups of those individuals as “cults”.

20 (11) According to the Department of Labor, the
21 Government of the People’s Republic of China has
22 arbitrarily detained more than 1,000,000 Uyghurs
23 and other mostly Muslim minorities in China’s far
24 western Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

1 (12) It has been reported that the Government
2 of the People’s Republic of China engages in
3 transnational repression activities such as relent-
4 lessly intimidating diaspora religious communities
5 and others with ties to China.

6 (13) As of October 11, 2019, the Political Pris-
7 oner Database maintained by the Congressional-Ex-
8 ecutive Commission on China counted 1,598 cases
9 with information on political and religious prisoners
10 known or believed to be detained or imprisoned in
11 China.

12 (14) As of June 30, 2023, the Political Pris-
13 oner Database maintained by the human rights non-
14 governmental organization Dui Hua Foundation
15 counted 2,897 individuals imprisoned in China for
16 “organizing or using a ‘cult’ to undermine imple-
17 mentation of the law”.

18 (15) The United States Commission on Inter-
19 national Religious Freedom (USCIRF) maintains a
20 list of religious prisoners of conscience who were im-
21 prisoned in China for their religious belief or non-
22 belief, religious activity, religious freedom advocacy,
23 and other related issues. Those prisoners of con-
24 science include—

1 (A) the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedun
2 Choekyi Nyima, who has been held captive
3 along with his parents since May 17, 1995;

4 (B) Pastor Zhang Shaojie, a Three-Self
5 church pastor from Nanle County in central
6 Henan, who was sentenced in July 2014 to 12
7 years in prison for “gathering a crowd to dis-
8 rupt the public order”;

9 (C) Pastor John Cao, a United States per-
10 manent resident from Greensboro, North Caro-
11 lina, who was sentenced to 7 years in prison in
12 March 2018 under contrived charges of orga-
13 nizing illegal border crossings; and

14 (D) Pastor Wang Yi of the Early Rain
15 Covenant Church, who was arrested and sen-
16 tenced to 9 years in prison for “inciting to sub-
17 vert state power” and “illegal business oper-
18 ations”.

19 (16) Authorities of the People’s Republic of
20 China continue to detain Falun Gong practitioners
21 and subject them to harsh and inhumane treatment.

22 (17) Since 1999, the Department of State has
23 designated the People’s Republic of China as a coun-
24 try of particular concern for religious freedom under

1 the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998
2 (22 U.S.C. 6401 et seq.).

3 (18) On June 17, 2020, the Uyghur Human
4 Rights Policy Act of 2020 (Public Law 116–145)
5 came into force, requiring reporting on human rights
6 violations and abuses committed by the Government
7 of the People’s Republic of China against Uyghurs
8 and other Muslim minority groups in the Xinjiang
9 Uyghur Autonomous Region and calling for the use
10 of targeted sanctions against officials of the People’s
11 Republic of China found to have engaged in such
12 violations.

13 (19) On June 21, 2022, section 3 of Public
14 Law 117–78 (22 U.S.C. 6901 note) (commonly re-
15 ferred to as the “Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention
16 Act”) came into force, blocking products, goods, and
17 material originating from the Xinjiang Uyghur Au-
18 tonomous Region from entering the United States
19 due to the risk that such items were produced using
20 forced labor.

21 (20) The National Security Strategy of the
22 United States, issued in 2017, 2015, 2006, 2002,
23 1999, 1998, and 1997, committed the United States
24 to promoting international religious freedom to ad-

1 vance the security, economic, and other national in-
2 terests of the United States.

3 **SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.**

4 (a) HOLDING SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE PEOPLE'S
5 REPUBLIC OF CHINA RESPONSIBLE FOR RELIGIOUS
6 FREEDOM ATROCITIES.—It is the policy of the United
7 States to consider any senior official of the Government
8 of the People's Republic of China who is responsible for
9 or has directly carried out, at any time, atrocities includ-
10 ing arbitrary imprisonment, forced sterilization, torture,
11 forced labor, and draconian restrictions on freedom of reli-
12 gion, expression, and movement against religious minori-
13 ties, including Christians, Uyghurs, and Falun Gong, in
14 the People's Republic of China to have committed—

15 (1) a gross violation of internationally recog-
16 nized human rights for purposes of imposing sanc-
17 tions with respect to such official under the Global
18 Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (22
19 U.S.C. 10101 et seq.); and

20 (2) a particularly severe violation of religious
21 freedom for purposes of applying section
22 212(a)(2)(G) of the Immigration and Nationality
23 Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(2)(G)) with respect to such
24 official.

1 (b) DEPARTMENT OF STATE PROGRAMMING TO PRO-
2 MOTE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC
3 OF CHINA.—It is the policy of the United States—

4 (1) that the Ambassador at Large for Inter-
5 national Religious Freedom should support efforts to
6 protect and promote international religious freedom
7 in the People's Republic of China; and

8 (2) for programs of the Department of State to
9 protect religious minorities in the People's Republic
10 of China and combat transnational repression en-
11 gaged in by the People's Republic of China.

12 (c) DESIGNATION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF
13 CHINA AS A COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN FOR RE-
14 LIGIOUS FREEDOM.—It is the policy of the United States
15 to continue to designate the People's Republic of China
16 as a country of particular concern for religious freedom
17 under section 402(b)(1)(A)(ii) of the International Reli-
18 gious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6442(b)(1)(A)(ii))
19 as long as the Government of the People's Republic of
20 China continues to engage in particularly severe violations
21 of religious freedom (as defined in section 3 of such Act
22 (22 U.S.C. 6402)).

1 **SEC. 4. SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING PROMOTION OF**
2 **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE PEOPLE'S RE-**
3 **PUBLIC OF CHINA.**

4 It is the sense of Congress that the United States
5 should promote religious freedom in the People's Republic
6 of China by—

7 (1) strengthening diplomacy relating to reli-
8 gious freedom on behalf of Christians and other reli-
9 gious minorities facing restrictions in the People's
10 Republic of China, including through the widespread
11 engagement of international partners to combat the
12 violations against religious freedom committed by
13 the Government of the People's Republic of China;

14 (2) raising the cases of religious and political
15 prisoners at the highest levels with officials of the
16 People's Republic of China because experience dem-
17 onstrates that consistently raising prisoner cases can
18 result in reduced sentences, or in some cases, release
19 from custody, detention, or imprisonment;

20 (3) encouraging Members of Congress to be-
21 come advocates for prisoners of conscience in the
22 People's Republic of China through the Defending
23 Freedoms Project of the Tom Lantos Human Rights
24 Commission, raise the cases of those prisoners with
25 officials of the People's Republic of China, and work
26 publicly for their release;

1 (4) calling on the Government of the People's
2 Republic of China to unconditionally release reli-
3 gious and political prisoners and ensure that detain-
4 ees who have not yet been released are treated hu-
5 manely with—

6 (A) access to family, the lawyer of their
7 choice, independent medical care, and inter-
8 national monitoring mechanisms; and

9 (B) the ability to practice their faith while
10 in detention;

11 (5) encouraging the global faith community to
12 speak in solidarity with the persecuted religious
13 groups in the People's Republic of China; and

14 (6) hosting, once every 2 years, the Ministerial
15 to Advance Religious Freedom organized by the De-
16 partment of State in order to bring together leaders
17 from around the world to discuss the challenges fac-
18 ing religious freedom, identify means to address reli-
19 gious persecution and discrimination worldwide, and
20 promote great respect for and preservation of reli-
21 gious liberty.

22 **SEC. 5. SENSE OF CONGRESS REGARDING ACTION BY THE**
23 **UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL.**

24 It is the sense of Congress that the United Nations
25 Human Rights Council should issue a formal condemna-

1 tion of the People's Republic of China for the ongoing
2 genocide against Uyghurs and other religious and ethnic
3 minority groups and the persecution of Christians, Falun
4 Gong, and other religious groups.

