

Government leaders join faith leaders for the Third International Religious Freedom Summit held in Washington, DC

More than a thousand religious freedom advocates from government and civil society came together to speak out against religious persecution worldwide

WASHINGTON, DC, USA, February 15, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Over a thousand religious freedom advocates from the US and many other parts of the world came together this last week in a global [summit](#) to decry the persecution of citizens solely for their religious beliefs. Throughout the conference individuals from severely persecuted faiths shared their heart-wrenching personal stories of imprisonment, family separations, rape, and torture.

The Summit, led by former US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and former Senator Sam Brownback and his co-chair Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, President of the Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice and former Chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), put all partisan issues aside and focused solely on the agreement that religious persecution must cease. Joining the chairs were over 70 sponsoring partners showing their support of the summit.

The US Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#) shared his views by video saying, "Freedom of religion is a bedrock American value - the very first freedom in the First Amendment to our Constitution.

"It's enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a fundamental right for all people.



Plenary panel from right to left: Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX) , Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA), Tony Perkins, President Family Research Council, and Dr. Simran Jeet Singh, Executive Director Aspen Institute Religion and Society Program

“That right to think and worship in our own way, to follow our conscience, and to change our beliefs – is inextricably linked to so many rights we hold dear.

“The right to express ourselves freely. To assemble peacefully. To participate fully in society. When religious liberty is at risk those other freedoms are jeopardized as well.

“Yet some 80 percent of the world’s population still cannot practice their faith without serious restrictions or risks.

“For this reason, protecting and promoting religious freedom is vital to safeguarding America’s national security, and continues to be a central part of our diplomacy around the world.”

Following the Secretary of State, congressional religious freedom advocates, despite their political differences, [added their voices in solidarity](#) against religious persecution.

“The United States must continue to be a voice for the voiceless who are persecuted for their beliefs,” said Representative Mike McCaul (R-TX). McCaul concluded, “Protecting religious freedom is not just about doing what’s right, it’s also a matter of national security. By resolving conflict, we can help prevent terrorism at home and abroad. As religious freedoms advance, conflict recedes.”

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We must have religious freedom for everyone, everywhere, all the time. Working together we can accomplish this.”

Former Ambassador for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback

Representative Jim McGovern (D-MA) added, “In our very diverse world, unless the right to religious freedom exists for everyone, it doesn’t truly exist for anyone.”

Faith leaders from many organizations shared their stories and views during the two day summit, including Baptists, Evangelical Christians, Catholics, Scientologists, Baha’is,

Hindus, Falun Gong, and Uyghur Muslims.

The most moving presentations were from persecuted individuals sharing how members of their faith organizations have been abducted, raped, tortured, and incarcerated because of their



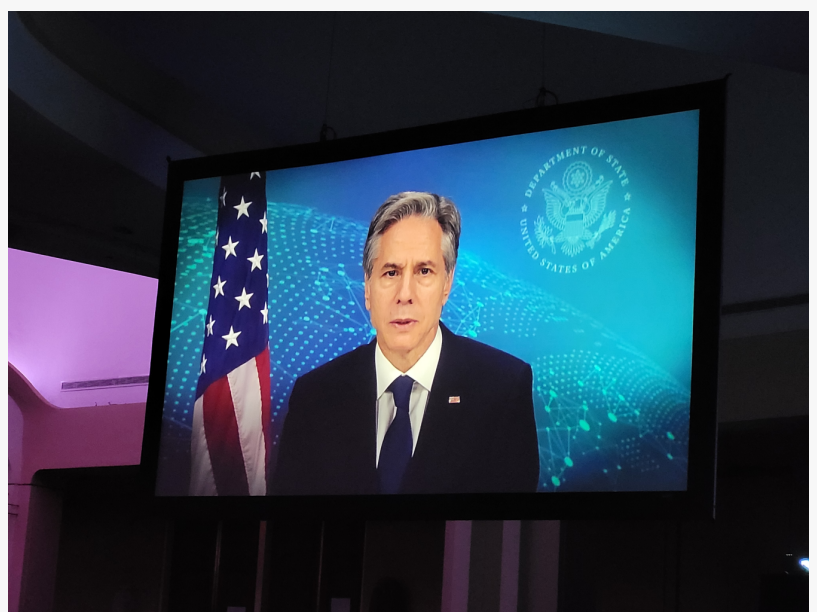
Greg Mitchell discussing the launch of the International Religious Freedom Secretariat at an event in the Dirksen Senate Office Building

religious affiliation.

One of the stories shared during a panel discussion was by Grace Chen, a member of the Falun Gong, who spoke about her parents' detention in China. Her parents were detained by the police in October 2020 and sentenced to unknown prison terms. Chen has been unable to speak to her parents for over two years. Her moving story can be seen on YouTube. Chen's parents were detained by police on October 27, 2020, along with 19 other Falun Gong practitioners. Chen's parents have both been previously imprisoned for their faith.

The IRF Summit was also honored to have Taiwan's Legislative Yuan President, You Si-kun, give a key note address. Expressing his great concern for religious freedom abuses in China, Mr. You said, "Although like me, all of you live in lands where there is respect for different faiths and where freedom, democracy, and human rights are defended, we all know that many people around the globe are repressed, denied freedom of choice, and live in fear for their lives.... Freedom of religion is the basis of human rights and is at the core of democratic values. We strongly believe that the people of China should breathe free air, and we ask that friends around the world take a collective interest in democratic development and religious freedom in China."

The two-day summit was flanked by several days of multifaith visits led by the IRF Roundtable's Congressional Working Group to congressional offices, sharing concerns about persecution and asking for assistance. Greg Mitchell, Chair of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable and founder and chair of its companion organization, the IRF Secretariat, held two large civil



US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, sent a video message on the importance of religious freedom in international affairs



Mr. You Si-kun, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan President, spoke at the Summit live with translation of his speech shown on stage screens

society gatherings in the Dirksen Senate Office Building. The first reviewed their decade's long work of accomplishments and the second looked to the future regarding establishing multiple global roundtables led by faith leaders and engaging government leaders to focus on ending religious persecution.

In closing out the summit, Ambassador Brownback repeated the summit's overarching message that we must have religious freedom for everyone, everywhere, all the time. Working together we can accomplish this.

Advocacy for religious freedom supports the ideals of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, which includes freedom of religion in Article 18: "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." Although the UDHR is having its 75th anniversary this year and is one of the founding documents of the United Nations, the concept of freedom of religion is still not broadly recognized around the world. Information on the UDHR is available from United for Human Rights at www.humanrights.com.

The Church of Scientology has engaged, throughout its existence, in activities to promote and protect religious freedom around the world for everyone. Scientologists are dedicated to this principle as evidenced by their pledge to support freedom of religion for the good of all. For more information go to: www.scientologyreligion.org

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Rev. Susan Taylor, from the Church of Scientology National Affairs Office, speaking about the International Religious Freedom Roundtable Congressional Working Group and their work in bringing religious freedom issues to the attention of Congress

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