

# Press Releases: Designations Under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998

Press Statement  
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In far too many places around the globe, people continue to be persecuted, unjustly prosecuted, or imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of religion or belief. Today, a number of governments infringe upon individuals' ability to adopt, change, or renounce their religion or belief, worship in accordance with their religion or beliefs, or be free from coercion to practice a particular religion or belief.

In accordance with the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the Secretary of State annually designates governments that have engaged in or tolerated systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom as "Countries of Particular Concern". Today, the Department of State announces that the Secretary of State re-designated Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan as Countries of Particular Concern on December 22, 2017. The Secretary also placed Pakistan on a Special Watch List for severe violations of religious freedom.

The protection of religious freedom is vital to peace, stability, and prosperity. These designations are aimed at improving the respect for religious freedom in these countries. We recognize that several designated countries are working to improve their respect for religious freedom; we welcome these initiatives and look forward to continued dialogue. The United States remains committed to working with governments, civil society organizations, and religious leaders to advance religious freedom around the world.

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