

# Press Releases: Interview With Lauren Ashburn of EWTN

Interview  
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Treaty Room  
Washington, DC  
July 19, 2018

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**QUESTION:** Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, welcome to News Nightly. Thank you for joining us.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** It's wonderful to be with you.

**QUESTION:** This has been quite a week. President Putin and President Trump gave a press conference that was condemned by the left and right. Was that press conference criticism warranted?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** There's been a lot of heat and very little light following that press conference. I was there. I watched the President's interaction with President Putin after their one-on-one meeting. The President had the objective of taking two countries that'd been on a bad path and trying to redirect that. There's no illusion about the challenges that Russia presents to the United States. But in places like counterterrorism and – these are two nuclear-armed nations, if we can reduce the risk from those nuclear weapons. The President was aiming towards creating a channel for communication and dialogue, and he achieved that.

**QUESTION:** Did you advise him to retract his statements?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** I don't talk about the things I give the President advice on. But I'm always very candid about what it is I think we need to do to make sure to keep America safe. And the President has always been gracious in allowing me to say my piece.

**QUESTION:** Will we see transcripts from either the North Korea meeting or the Russia meeting?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** I'd be very surprised if we see transcripts from either. That would be ahistorical. There are conversations that I've had with the North Koreans, conversations that government officials have all across the

USG that aren't appropriate for public release.

**QUESTION:** Let's move on to religious freedom. You have convened a ministerial to talk about religious freedom all around the world. Let's start with Russia. Russia, especially when it comes to Jehovah's Witnesses, is very bad at allowing people to practice their faith. Will religious freedom be on the table when negotiating with Russia?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Well, thanks for mentioning the ministerial that's going to (inaudible). It's truly historic. It's the first time the State Department has led such a discussion. We'll have over 80 delegations from countries around the world, many, many religious organizations, NGOs. It should be a great gathering where we will make the point that religious freedom is a human right and that every individual ought to have their right to practice their particular religion, or if they have no faith, to not be punished for that either.

**QUESTION:** Will there be sanctions if they do not come to the table with religious freedom changes?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So with Russia in particular, we have a very complex set of relationships. There are many things that are on the table. I think your viewers ought to know that the State Department takes this issue of religious freedom very seriously. In conversations with countries that don't live up to the standards of religious freedom that they ought to have, we raise that issue, sometimes privately if we think that's the most effective way to achieve the change that we're looking for, and sometimes publicly if we think that will accomplish our goal.

**QUESTION:** When you announced this ministerial, you said that you would bring like-minded countries together. People made a big deal about that. Will Russia be at the table? Will Syria? Will Iran?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** There's lots of folks coming. I haven't seen the final RSVP tally. And I'm sure there'll be countries here that we have deep disagreements with. But the – when I said like-minded, I meant those countries that are prepared to begin their walk towards the religious freedom that we have enshrined in our Constitution and that our nation so values and cherishes.

**QUESTION:** American pastor Andrew Brunson is imprisoned in Turkey on false charges of terrorism and espionage. He's awaiting his fourth hearing.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yeah, we need to get him out. He needs to come home.

**QUESTION:** Well, you brought the North Korea hostages home. Why can't we bring Brunson home?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** We're working it. It's a priority. We're in conversations every day in the State Department with elements of the Turkish Government. We are – we remain hopeful and prayerful that Pastor Brunson will be able to return home before too terribly long.

**QUESTION:** I visited the Nineveh Plains in Iraq. We've seen the destruction in a place where the U.S. declared genocide. I walked into bombed-out churches. People have nowhere to live. Total towns are decimated. The U.S. is providing aid to that area, to both Christians and others. How does the U.S. convince governments, not just in the Middle East, to respect religious freedom for all citizens, including Saudi Arabia, where you're not allowed to practice another religion?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yes, ma'am. The Trump administration has been incredibly strong in promoting religious freedom. It is the case that there are many countries – indeed countries that we often work alongside, who are allies in other places – we work to demonstrate to them that religious tolerance and freedom is good for them. It's good for their country; it's good for their government. It'll bring investors; it'll make their people more productive. We think these are all – this fundamental human right, this concept that every individual ought to have the right to practice their own faith, we think makes their countries stronger too. And we work to make that case both by speaking to them about it and, in America, demonstrating that in the way that we act and operate and the way that when U.S. Government officials are out and about we respect each of their capacity to worship in the way that they desire.

**QUESTION:** There are issues of religious freedom here in the U.S. How can you take the moral high ground unless those are addressed?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** My faith teaches me that imperfection is all around us, and when it comes to government that's certainly the case as well. I think the United States stands as an enormous beacon of religious freedom. I'm confident that we can always do better. We ought to do that here as well. But we stand strong here in the United States for religious tolerance and freedom, and I think that's an important demonstration to the world of how valuable that fundamental human right can be to a strong and successful nation.

**QUESTION:** U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, thank you for joining me.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** It's great to be with you.

**QUESTION:** For coming on EWTN News Nightly.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

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# Press Releases: Interview With Nike Ching of VOA

Interview  
Michael R. Pompeo  
  
Secretary of State

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**QUESTION:** Secretary Pompeo, thank you very much for talking to Voice of America.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** It's great to be with you on Voice of America. Thank you. Thank you for having me on today.

**QUESTION:** On the ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya Muslims, with the Buddhists being the majority in Myanmar, the purge against Rohingya is sometimes characterized by some as religious cleansing. At the same time, killing is the worst crime for Buddhism and for many religion. Would you go further to identify the Rohingya crisis as the religious cleansing?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Well, the State Department made a decision at the end of last year to make the important statement about ethnic cleansing, and we know that there is a religious connection there. It's incredibly important that we're careful in the language that we use, and so we'll continue to review it. But as you well know, the State Department considers religious freedom at the center of its activity. We make that a priority in all of the work that we do, and in places in Asia, that is absolutely no exception.

**QUESTION:** Would you consider a comprehensive arms embargo and more targeted financial sanctions against tough Burmese military leaders for their involvement of the Rohingya purge?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** I don't want to get out ahead of the President on this, but you should know we take these issues incredibly seriously and your viewers should know that as well. There are many things that are under consideration by this administration. We want to see the course changing; we want to see the directional change here. We have not seen that yet, and so there are many

things that are being considered by the United States Government to ensure that everyone understands that their behavior is not acceptable.

**QUESTION:** In China, the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report documented the repression against the Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. First of all, would you – how would you respond to the assertion from the Chinese Government that some of the groups are separatist? And secondly, would you consider a travel ban or working with the Treasury Department to freeze the U.S. assets of those Chinese officials who are involved in such repression?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So the State Department has made clear that with respect to this issue, we think they're on the wrong side of religious freedom, that they're a country of concern connected to that. We understand that religious freedom is at risk in many places in the world, and yet the United States has complex, broad relationships with many countries, including China, across economic and military and political sets of issues.

Your viewers should know the United States also puts religious freedom, this fundamental human right, at the very center of our discussions with every country with whom we interact.

**QUESTION:** Religious freedom is a universal value, as you mentioned. How would you respond to the Chinese assertion that some of the surveillance program is to prevent a terrorist attack?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Well, I don't want to comment. Every country does work to make sure that their citizens are safe, but we should never – no country should ever use that effort, the guise of a counterterrorism investigation, to persecute religious freedom. Religious freedom is separate and apart from that. Every human, by nature of their dignity as a human being, deserves the capacity to worship in the way that they want to worship, or if they choose not to – to worship at all, so be it. No one should be punished by their government for their religious beliefs or the religious activities connected to those beliefs.

**QUESTION:** We – while we are sitting here, critics, including State Department's own report, said that in eastern Ukraine, Russia-led forces continue to occupy religious buildings of religious minority groups for the use of – for the military facilities. You were at Helsinki. Was that a good meeting, and how has Russia's activities in eastern Ukraine been discussed?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** So I've seen those reports about the Russians' use of religious facilities. That's never acceptable. It violates all sorts of central premises of how nations ought to be able to use religious facilities to protect your forces, creates real challenges.

With respect to Helsinki, President Trump made clear to Vladimir Putin that their activities in eastern Ukraine weren't in Russia's best interest. This administration's been incredibly tough. We've provided support to the Ukrainian forces there in southeast Ukraine that the previous administration repeatedly refused to do. We think this creates a space for the Ukrainian

people to have a successful election come 2019, and we are very, very hopeful that that situation will resolve itself as America has made its continued commitment to support the Ukrainian people's desires.

**QUESTION:** The time is running out, so for the last question, you mentioned Russia. So there has been a lot of concern over Russia proposal to question former Ambassador McFaul. Do you have any –

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Yeah, let me just stop you. It's not going to happen. The Russians made a proposal about a number of things during the course of the conversations between President Trump and President Putin. There were suggestions, comments, thoughts by President Putin with respect to that inquiry. President Trump was very clear we're not going to force Americans to go to Russia to be interrogated by the Russians. There's been a lot of noise about that; I don't know why. Just – the American people should rest assured.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much for talking to VOA.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Great, thank you. It was wonderful to be with you.

**QUESTION:** Sure.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Thank you, ma'am.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

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## [Press Releases: Interview With Tony Perkins of FRC Radio](#)

Interview  
Michael R. Pompeo

Secretary of State

Via Telephone  
July 19, 2018

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**QUESTION:** Welcome back to Washington Watch. I'm your host, Tony Perkins. So glad to have you with us. Wednesday, we had one of my fellow commissioners from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Kristina, join us from Turkey with the news that American pastor Andrew Brunson was not going to be released from prison in Turkey, where he has been held for the last two years.

Now, Pastor Brunson's case is reflective of a growing threat to religious freedom and the spread of religious persecution around the globe that really has reached historic proportions, so much so that the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has called for the first-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, which will take place next week. The three-day event will bring together government officials, representatives of international organizations, religious leaders, rights advocates, and members of civil society organizations from around the world, and I'll be there as well.

With us now is the host of the event, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Secretary, welcome to Washington Watch.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Tony, it's great to be back on with you.

**QUESTION:** It's been a while. And it's great to have you on in this new capacity. And let me first just commend you for one of your first actions as Secretary is to call for this gathering of international leaders to discuss religious freedom.

I want to start with the obvious question: Why?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Tony, it's incredibly important in our administration, in President Trump's administration, to make the case and sound the clarion call for religious freedom all around the world. You mentioned Pastor Brunson. There are many countries in which religious freedom is not available. And we believe that by gathering citizens from around the world – we'll have over 80 delegations from different countries; forty-plus of my counterparts at the foreign minister level will be in attendance – and religious leaders like yourself all brought together to highlight the central nature of religious freedom, and it's important to individuals and countries.

We believe that religious freedom is important for every citizen around the world and we want to bring everyone together to discuss how all faiths have the right – people, individuals have the right to worship in the way that they choose, or if they choose not to. And every country ought to honor that.

**QUESTION:** Now, Mr. Secretary, you and I have been around government for quite some time. And a lot of times there's a lot of meetings and there's not always tangible outcomes. I know you're a man of action. What do you hope will be the tangible outcomes of this gathering?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** We expect, Tony, this to be far more than just talk. We do

believe that just putting people together from all across the world in a room and talking about this topic will empower them to go back to their home country and advocate for religious freedom as well. It's difficult, Tony, as you know, in many countries to even speak about religious freedom. And so we hope to provide a support system and a basis for some of them to head back to their own countries.

But we'll announce a number of initiatives. The Vice President will be speaking; Ambassador Brownback will be speaking there. And we will be laying out a path where we are hopeful that the State Department here in the United States can lead a process where religious freedom is raised as a priority for the citizens of every country. And we will have our teams in the subsequent weeks and months in the field talking about religious freedom on a continued basis. We'll have just three days here, but this will be a mission of the State Department every day.

**QUESTION:** Now, Secretary Pompeo, this is the first ever, and I don't want this to be lost on our listeners. As you pointed out, this issue of religious freedom, both domestically and from a foreign policy standpoint, is a priority for this administration. This is much more than lip service. I mean, this administration takes this serious.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** You've seen that with President Trump very clearly. Look, we want people of all faiths – Christians, Muslims, Jews, people of all different faiths – we think that this forum will reinforce for countries that enjoy that religious freedom and encourage those that are on the cusp, who are in a place where it's more challenging, will help provide them a courage to continue to make religious freedom a priority for the citizens of their own countries as well. This was laid out in the President's National Security Strategy, which is unique and different from previous administrations. We do place a high priority on religious freedom and we can – we will continue to fight for it every place that we travel.

**QUESTION:** What has been the response from your counterparts around the globe?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** It's been remarkable. I literally, as I was traveling this past week – I think I was in six or eight different places – I had foreign ministers say, "I'm going to be there," and I hadn't seen the list. They're excited to come be around others who believe religious freedom is important. I was in Muslim countries; I was in places with religions very different than my own Christian faith. But every one of those leaders was excited about the opportunity to gather with likeminded individuals who share the desire, the quest for every individual to be able to practice their faith in their country in the way that they wish to do.

**QUESTION:** And I know from my role at USCIRF that there's actually countries that are on a waiting list. There's people wanting to get to the –

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** (Laughter.) It is indeed oversubscribed, Tony, which we consider an enormous blessing.

**QUESTION:** It is.



**SECRETARY POMPEO:** And we're going to do our best to accommodate each and every one of them so that they can come be part of this. And it bodes well for continuity for a program like this as well, not just these three days but to make sure that there are real actions that follow from this event.

**QUESTION:** One final question for you, Mr. Secretary. I know you've got a busy schedule. What can the average American do to bring greater awareness to this issue of religious freedom? Not just as an American right, but as the State Department and the United States Government recognizes this is a human right. What can we be doing?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** It is deeply a human right. I think we can do a number of things. I think those of us who believe in faith and prayer can pray. I think it's important for every individual to demand of their elected officials that they consider religious freedom among one of their priorities as they seek to lead and to be part of government service. And then I just think it's important that groups – we have dozens and dozens of NGOs that will be attending this – to support groups like that and nongovernmental organizations that are prepared to help fight for religious freedom all around the world.

**QUESTION:** Do you anticipate seeing movement in countries like Turkey, like North Korea? I mean, do you really think this – during this Trump administration that we're going to see movement?

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** We've seen some already. A good case in point would be Uzbekistan that has begun to move in the right direction. Tony, you know this is a long march, but absent leadership, absent the State Department engaging in this as an important priority, we know that the likelihood of it happening is less so. So we'll work in every place to raise the awareness of the centrality of religious freedom not only for individual human dignity, but for success of nations as well.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for coming back on Washington Watch in your new capacity, and I look forward to seeing you next week at the ministerial.

**SECRETARY POMPEO:** Bless you, Tony. I look forward to seeing you next week as well. So long, sir.

**QUESTION:** All right. Thanks so much.

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## **Press Releases: United States and India to Hold 2+2 Dialogue on September 6**

Press Statement  
Heather Nauert

Department Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
July 19, 2018

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The United States is pleased to announce that the inaugural U.S.-India “2+2” Dialogue will be held in New Delhi, India, on September 6. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo and Secretary of Defense James Mattis look forward to meeting with their Indian counterparts, Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj and Minister of Defense Nirmala Sitharaman, to discuss strengthening strategic, security, and defense cooperation as the United States and India jointly address challenges in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

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## **Press Releases: Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Carl Risch**

# Travels to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras

Media Note  
Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC  
July 19, 2018

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Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Carl Risch will travel to El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras July 23-27 to meet with counterparts to discuss a range of consular issues, including the importance of deterring and reducing illegal immigration. While in the region, the Assistant Secretary also plans to review consular operations at our U.S. Embassies in San Salvador, Guatemala City, and Tegucigalpa, and to meet with interagency partners.

The United States is committed to long-term partnership with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to reduce insecurity and violence, enhance economic opportunity, and improve governance.

For press inquiries please contact [CAPRESSREQUESTS@state.gov](mailto:CAPRESSREQUESTS@state.gov) or (202) 485-6150.

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