

# APPENDIX 3 RELIGIOUS PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE PROJECT

Through the Religious Prisoners of Conscience (RPOC) Project, USCIRF seeks to raise awareness of individuals imprisoned for their religion or belief, reduce their numbers, and highlight the religious freedom conditions in their country of imprisonment. Current RPOCs, for whom USCIRF Commissioners are advocating, are only a fraction of the many individuals who have been unjustly imprisoned for their religious beliefs, actions, and/or advocacy.

## Current RPOCs

### CHINA

China pervasively tries to control and suppress various religious groups as it seeks to sinicize perceived foreign religions and crack down on religious beliefs and actors viewed as incompatible with Communist Party ideology.

#### GULMIRA IMIN



**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Anurima Bhargava

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Uyghur Muslim

**STATUS**

Detained since July 14, 2009; sentenced to life imprisonment, reduced to 19 years and eight months

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Moderator of Salkin, a Uyghur-language website; participated in demonstration protesting deaths of Uyghur migrant workers

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

"Splittism, leaking state secrets, and organizing an illegal demonstration"

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Reports of torture

**AGE**

45

#### JIMMY LAI



**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Tony Perkins

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Catholic Christian

**STATUS**

Detained since December 12, 2020; sentenced on May 28, 2021, to 14 months plus the six months already served; on December 13, 2021, sentenced to an additional 13 months for "unauthorized assembly" for participating in a June 2020 Tiananmen Square vigil

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Political activism and outspoken criticism of the government's human rights abuses, including abuses of religious freedom

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

Alleged collusion with foreign forces under National Security Law, as well as fraud

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Unknown

**AGE**

73

**CHINA** (continued)

<b>PANCHEN LAMA (GEDHUN CHOEKYI NYIMA)</b>		
	<p><b>USCIRF ADVOCATE</b> Nadine Maenza</p> <p><b>RELIGION OR BELIEF</b> Tibetan Buddhist</p> <p><b>STATUS</b> Unconfirmed since kidnapping May 17, 1995</p>	<p><b>REASON FOR PERSECUTION</b> Second-highest-ranking leader in Tibetan Buddhism</p> <p><b>CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST</b> N/A</p> <p><b>TREATMENT IN DETENTION</b> Unknown</p> <p><b>AGE</b> 33</p>
<b>HU SHIGEN</b>		
	<p><b>USCIRF ADVOCATE</b> Tony Perkins</p> <p><b>RELIGION OR BELIEF</b> Protestant Christian</p> <p><b>STATUS</b> Detained July 10, 2015; sentenced August 3, 2016, to 7 ½ years</p>	<p><b>REASON FOR PERSECUTION</b> Founding figure for China Free Democratic Party and the China Free Labor Union; leader of Protestant house churches</p> <p><b>CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST</b> “Subverting” state power through his religious activities</p> <p><b>TREATMENT IN DETENTION</b> In poor health because of ill treatment in prison; request for medical parole denied</p> <p><b>AGE</b> 66</p>
<b>ADIL TUNIYAZ</b>		
	<p><b>USCIRF ADVOCATE</b> Nury Turkel</p> <p><b>RELIGION OR BELIEF</b> Uyghur Muslim</p> <p><b>STATUS</b> Detained since December 25, 2017</p>	<p><b>REASON FOR PERSECUTION</b> Translated religious materials, including hadiths</p> <p><b>CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST</b> Unknown</p> <p><b>TREATMENT IN DETENTION</b> Unknown</p> <p><b>AGE</b> 51</p>

## IRAN

The Iranian government severely represses its citizens' freedom of religion, belief, and expression, often through legal amendments designed for persecuting specific religious minorities.

### GOLROKH EBRAHIMI IRAEE


**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Anurima Bhargava

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Shi'a Muslim

**STATUS**

Detained since October 2016; sentenced to six years in prison; sentenced to additional year in 2021

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Human and women's rights advocate; critic of the official policy of stoning women to death for adultery

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

"Insulting Islamic sanctities" and "spreading propaganda"

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Conducted hunger strike due to bad prison conditions; denied family visits and phone access; prohibited from visits with her husband, Arash Sadegj, who is ill with cancer.

**AGE**

41

### YOUCEF NADARKHANI


**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Nadine Maenza

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Evangelical Christian

**STATUS**

Originally sentenced July 6, 2017, to 10 years in prison and two years of internal exile; imprisoned July 22, 2018; sentence reduced to six years in prison in 2020

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Practicing Christianity as a convert from Islam

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

"Acting against national security" and promoting "Zionist Christianity"

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Conducted hunger strike

**AGE**

45

## MALAYSIA

The Malaysian government imposes a state-sponsored version of Sunni Islam through a vast network of state and federal religious laws. Non-Muslim communities face extreme pressure from authorities, and religious converts and those evangelizing face dire consequences. Malaysian authorities have continued to refuse to release the report of an official investigation into cases of enforced disappearances.

### PASTOR RAYMOND KOH


**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

James W. Carr

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Christian

**STATUS**

Disappeared February 13, 2017

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Humanitarian actions motivated by his Christian religious beliefs; allegations of proselytizing

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

N/A

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Unknown

**AGE**

67

**NIGERIA**

Both state and nonstate actors in Nigeria commit egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief, including the abduction and detention of individuals based on their beliefs. State courts have sentenced individuals to death for blasphemy and held individuals accused of blasphemy in prolonged detention, while militant Islamists have violently targeted individuals who do not share their religious beliefs.

**MUBARAK BALA**



**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Frederick A. Davie

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Humanist

**STATUS**

Arrested April 28, 2020

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Expression of humanist views

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

Formally charged in August 2021 for causing a public disturbance by posting “blasphemous” content

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Held incommunicado for several months; detained without charge for over a year; poor response to health issues while in detention

**AGE**

37

**LEAH SHARIBU**



**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Tony Perkins

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Christian

**PERPETRATOR**

Islamic State - West Africa Province (ISWAP)

**STATUS**

Abducted February 19, 2018

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Refused to convert to Islam

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

N/A

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Unconfirmed

**AGE**

18

**YAHAYA SHARIF-AMINU**



**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Frederick A. Davie

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Sufi Muslim; part of Tijaniyya Order

**STATUS**

Detained since March 2020; sentenced to death August 10, 2020; higher court ordered a retrial in January 2021

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Circulating a private audio message on WhatsApp

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

Blasphemy

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Held incommunicado for several months

**AGE**

23

## NORTH KOREA

Religious freedom conditions in North Korea are among the worst in the world, with the government viewing religion as a competing ideology that poses an existential threat to its absolute control.

### DEACON ZHANG WEN SHI (JANG MOON SEOK)


**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

James W. Carr

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Protestant Christian

**STATUS**

Kidnapped from China and detained since November 2014; sentenced to 15 years in prison

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Ministered to North Koreans who crossed into China

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

"Defaming the regime, attempting to incite subversion of state power, and providing aid and gospel to North Koreans"

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Unknown

**AGE**

Unknown

## RUSSIA

The Russian government views independent religious activity as a threat to its control and social and political stability, enforces laws restricting religious freedom, and persecutes religious and ethnic groups.

### DENNIS CHRISTENSEN


**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

James W. Carr

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Jehovah's Witness

**COUNTY OF ORIGIN**

Denmark

**STATUS**

Detained May 25, 2017; sentenced February 6, 2019, to six years in prison

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Peacefully expressing his faith

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

"Continuing the activities" of an extremist group

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Inadequate medical care; harassment and arbitrary reprimands

**AGE**

49

## TAJKISTAN

The Tajik government suppresses displays of public religiosity by people of all faiths, represses the country's Muslim majority, and persecutes minority communities.

### SHAMIL KHAKIMOV


**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Nury Turkel

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Jehovah's Witness

**STATUS**

Detained since February 26, 2019; sentenced to five years in prison

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Sharing his faith with others

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

"Inciting religious hatred"

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Health has deteriorated in detention

**AGE**

71

**VIETNAM**

The Vietnamese government systematically violates the religious freedom of government-recognized groups and especially independent religious minority communities, including Protestant Hmong and Montagnard Christians, Hoa Hao Buddhists, Unified Buddhists, Cao Dai followers, Catholics, and Falun Gong practitioners.

**NGUYEN BAC TRUYEN**



**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Anurima Bhargava

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Hoa Hao Buddhist

**STATUS**

Arrested July 30, 2017; sentenced April 5, 2018, to 11 years' imprisonment and three years' probation

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Human rights and religious freedom advocacy

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

"Carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the people's administration"

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Medical neglect

**AGE**

53

## Former RPOCs

### EGYPT

The Egyptian government uses its laws, regulations, and practices to target a wide range of religious minorities and their civil society allies.

#### REDA ABDEL RAHMAN


**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Sharon Kleinbaum

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Qur'anist Muslim

**STATUS**

Released February 27, 2022; detained August 2020

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Religious beliefs; blogging about Qur'anism; familial relationship with a prominent Qur'anist scholar

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

Joining the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and promoting religious extremism

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Denied adequate medical care

**AGE**

45

### ERITREA

The Eritrean government severely restricts the activities of officially recognized religious groups and systematically persecutes members of unregistered religious communities.

#### Patriarch Abune Antonios


**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

James W. Carr

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Eritrean Orthodox Christian

**STATUS**

Died under house arrest February 9, 2022

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Called for release of political prisoners and refused to excommunicate 3,000 parishioners who opposed the government

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

Unknown

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Unknown

**AGE**

94

### SAUDI ARABIA

The Saudi government imprisons dissenting members of the majority Sunni Muslim community, imposes harsh punishments on Shi'a Muslim detainees, and forbids non-Muslims from public communal worship.

#### RAIF BADAWI


**USCIRF ADVOCATE**

Nadine Maenza

**RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Muslim

**STATUS**

Released March 11, 2022; detained since June 17, 2012; sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes

**REASON FOR PERSECUTION**

Blogger who criticized Islam and the Saudi government

**CHARGES/BASIS OF ARREST**

Violating Islamic values and propagating liberal thought

**TREATMENT IN DETENTION**

Flogged 50 times January 9, 2015; deemed too unwell to endure more lashes; health has worsened since flogging; hunger strike in 2019

**AGE**

38