



U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing

**Religious Freedom in Southeast Asia: Techno-Authoritarianism and
Transnational Influences**

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Stephen Schneck, USCIRF Commissioner

Thank you, Vice Chair, Davie. I would like to join in welcoming everyone to today's hearing.

As has been mentioned by my colleagues, ASEAN countries are increasingly using new technologies to bolster authoritarian practices and consolidate power, often at the expense of religious minorities and religious expression. Unfortunately, powerful countries that have pioneered and perfected these kinds of authoritarian practices are now using their weight and influence to see these practices replicated in Southeast Asia.

For example, the Chinese government is a leading player in implementing and promoting techno-authoritarianism at home and abroad. Domestically, Chinese authorities have aggressively employed “smart city” technologies— including artificial intelligence (AI), big data, biometric collection, and facial, voice, and gait recognition—to carry out mass surveillance. They target Christians, Falun Gong practitioners, and ethno-religious groups like Uyghurs and Tibetans. The government exports its “smart city” technologies and underlying techno-authoritarian approach to Southeast Asia and around the world.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses. With that, I now pass the floor back to Chair Cooper.