



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The First 25 Years: IRFA Accomplishments and Next Steps

**Monday, October 23, 2023
3:00-5:00 pm ET**

**Kennedy Caucus Room
325 Russell Senate Office Building**

REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Vice Chair Fred Davie:

Thank you, Chair Cooper. I'm Fred Davie and I am honored to serve as USCIRF Vice Chair.

Preparing for this event has given us an opportunity to reflect on IRFA's and USCIRF's impact, both over time and in recent years, and we've shared some highlights in a USCIRF Factsheet that's available in the room.

Since we celebrated IRFA's 20th anniversary in 2018, we have seen robust use of newly available tools in the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act and the Global Magnitsky Act, including designations of "Special Watch List" countries and "entities of particular concern" and the imposition of targeted sanctions against religious freedom abusers. In addition, both President Joseph Biden and then President Donald Trump nominated their Ambassadors at Large for IRF in record time, six months into each new administration. Then President

Trump also appointed, for the first time, a Director for IRF on the National Security Council staff and issued an important Executive Order on the issue, which the Biden administration continues to implement. The past five years also saw the founding of the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, or IRFBA, and the launch of regular IRF Ministerials.

We also have been gratified to see foreign governments make improvements on religious freedom issues in response to U.S. concerns. To give two recent examples, both Sudan, during its period of civilian-led transitional rule, and Uzbekistan engaged closely with USCIRF and the State Department in their efforts to amend restrictive laws and make other positive changes. This led to progress sufficient for USCIRF to conclude that “country of particular concern,” or CPC, recommendations were no longer warranted for either country as of 2020. But with the civilian government no longer in power in Sudan and recent backsliding in Uzbekistan, USCIRF continues to closely monitor both countries.

As we reflect today on the past 25 years’ many accomplishments, we cannot be complacent. State and nonstate actors around the globe continue to perpetrate or tolerate severe religious persecution. In too many countries, individuals and communities are still targeted for their religious beliefs, activity, or identity, or for their religious freedom advocacy. Those individuals and communities are why IRFA was enacted. And they are why the global efforts to promote freedom of religion or belief for all remain essential today and in the future.

To start our discussion today, we are so pleased to hear from three of the key sponsors of the legislative effort to promote international religious freedom, who will share their personal reflections on IRFA's creation and trajectory.

First, we will see video remarks from former Senator Joseph Lieberman, who sends his regrets that he is unable to join us here today. He served in the Senate from 1989 to 2013, representing Connecticut. He is now Senior Counsel to the law firm of Kazowitz Benson Torres in New York.

Our next speaker will be Commissioner and former Congressman Frank Wolf, who served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1981 to 2015, representing the 10th district of Virginia. Commissioner Wolf was appointed to USCIRF by then House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy in 2020.

And finally, we will hear former Senator Don Nickles, who represented Oklahoma in the Senate from 1981 to 2005. He currently is Chairman and CEO of the Nickles Group in Washington DC.