

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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### **Ranking Member Robert Garcia** **Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs** **Hearing on “Faith Under Fire: An Examination of Global Religious Persecution”** **October 25, 2023**

Thank you, Chairman Grothman.

Across the world, minority communities—including Uyghurs, Rohingya, Muslims, Jewish people, Christians, Bahá’ís, Yezidis, atheists, and humanists—continue to face intimidation, violence, and unequal protection under the law.

This month, we have seen disturbing anti-Semitic attacks and incidents all over the world.

Wadea Al Fayoume, who was only six years old, was stabbed 26 times Saturday by his family’s landlord in Plainfield Township, Illinois, for being a Muslim. His mother, Hanaan Shahin, also suffered more than a dozen stab wounds. My heart breaks for them.

**As a proud Catholic, and as the first LGBTQ immigrant to serve in Congress, I know how vulnerable minority communities abroad can be. That means, the United States has to be a critical voice.**

**I think President Biden said it well in his inaugural address: We’ll lead, not merely by the example of our power, but by the power of our example. And freedom of religion is at the core of who we are.**

**Our first amendment says that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. Every member of the Committee took an oath to uphold that constitutional principle. And I’m proud that in the last years, we have expanded the cause of religious freedom.**

**We are rebuilding the State Department, which was decimated under the previous administration’s mismanagement. We’ve restored our global standing so that we can lead global coalitions of righteousness again. We halted discrimination on the basis of religion in the U.S. immigration system, by ending the bigoted Muslim ban.**

**The President established the Protecting Places of Worship Interagency Policy Committee, and Congressional Democrats voted to provide the largest-ever increase in funding for the physical security of non-profits—including churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other houses of worship.**

Deborah Lipstadt, a Holocaust expert, is serving as the first Ambassador-level Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism. Her work is needed now, more than ever.

**The Administration has done outstanding global faith-based outreach, like launching USAID's First-Ever Strategic Religious Engagement Policy.** Religious engagement abroad is furthering key priority programs, including PEPFAR, or the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which has saved millions of lives with support from its faith and community initiative.

**Extremist groups, and authoritarian governments work hard to spread their message of hate and to attack the vulnerable. And we will confront them, wherever they are.**

As we work to protect innocent people in danger, wherever they are, we will confront Hamas's antisemitic cause. We will stand up to China as they continue to repress the Uyghurs. The Democratic Congress passed the bipartisan Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which was signed and implemented by President Biden. And we will continue to confront domestic extremist groups which threaten our religious or constitutional freedoms.

Violent religious nationalism has been used to fuel human rights violations all over the world, from the Rohingya in Burma, to the role of the Russian Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow's role in legitimizing the Russian War in Ukraine.

Even in America, the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol heard evidence on the role of so-called Christian nationalism in motivating the attempt to overturn the 2020 election.

As a Catholic, I find Christian nationalist ideology both disgusting and unrecognizable. And because I am a Catholic—I do want to touch on a troubling narrative that seems to be growing in sections of the far right.

I have heard attempts to smear the Justice Department as an anti-Catholic organization.

And actually Members attempted to Confront Attorney General Garland, whose family escaped religious persecution in Europe, with this disgusting allegation in hearings just last month.

The DOJ has never targeted traditional Catholics, and never will. I believe this attack is yet another attempt by the far right to discredit the Department of Justice to shield Donald Trump from Accountability.

The idea that an Administration run by President Biden, who has spoken powerfully about his faith and his Irish Catholic background, is opposed to Christians is outrageous.

**Religious freedom is too important to be used as a political football. I hope that our discussion today is a grounded and concrete discussion about actual policy measures we can take to protect people of faith from unjust persecution.**

I yield back.

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