
CONCLUSION

This guidebook has been written by practitioners working in the field of international religious freedom advocacy. They represent the variety of opportunities available to would-be advocates, from drafting press releases for a small NGO to lobbying at the highest levels of international power. The book has covered the work of international bodies, U.S. government entities, and NGOs as they work together to advance religious freedom around the world.

But in reality, religious freedom advocacy is rarely as simple as carrying out the mission of an NGO, or utilizing a complaint mechanism of the UN, or lobbying a congressional representative. Though all of these actions are important, none can occur in isolation, and none can guarantee that a repressive government will enact long-term, sustainable change in its religion policies. To see that kind of change occur, the mechanisms described must be used in concert with one another over a period of time, by advocates who are creative, innovative, committed, and sensitive to the subtleties of international affairs. Timing of advocacy actions is important, ideally coinciding with momentum already in place in foreign governments. To meet these conditions, advocates must not only be earnest but also well informed and able to contextualize and empathize. They must understand not only how a government restricts religious freedom but also why. In today's world of religiously motivated terror, shifting economic power, and unprecedented movement of ideas, people, and goods, the reasons for repression are varied and complex, as are their solutions.

This trend will not change in the near future, as religiously based conflicts continue to arise. In these situations, religious freedom abuses often go beyond individual rights, as the repression of a religious community or the forceful application of religious dogma onto a minority group can transform a religious dispute into a larger political conflict and lead to widespread destabilization. As sociologist Peter L. Berger wrote in *The Desecularization of*

the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics, “the assumption we live in a secularized world is false. . . . The world today is as furiously religious as it ever was.” Consequently, religious persecution against believers and nonbelievers alike will be a recurring problem in the twenty-first century.

Examples of these complexities abound, as this text has already shown in the case studies for Turkmenistan and Vietnam. Other examples arise from around the world:

- Western European countries, traditionally among the freest in the world, are violating religious freedom as they deal with an influx of Muslim immigrants. Some citizens and policymakers see these immigrants as a threat not only to national identity but potentially to national security, making displays of religiosity (such as the headscarf for Muslim women) extremely provocative. Countries’ commitments to freedom are being tested in new ways, resulting in laws banning religious garments or inflammatory religious rhetoric.
- China has a contentious history with the majority-Muslim population of its western province of Xinjiang. Most Xinjiang Muslims belong to minority ethnic groups, such as Hui, Uighur, Tajik, and Kazakh. The province is home to a separatist movement that wants independence from China and has resorted to terrorist tactics in the past. The region also borders Central Asian states with their own terrorist networks, and Chinese authorities fear the influx of radical groups and ideologies across its borders. Stability in this region is not only important to combat the threat of terror and secession, but also to secure access to China’s oil-rich western neighbors, a high priority in China’s growing, energy-hungry economy. Even if the central government loosened its grip on Xinjiang’s Muslims, the region is so remote and undeveloped that policies would still be logistically difficult to implement, and local officials’ biases dictate local politics, raising the question of how policies would exacerbate existing tensions.
- Pakistan’s North West Frontier Province (NWFP) is a study in contradictions. Its population is overwhelmingly conservative Muslim; it borders Afghanistan and Pakistan’s lawless tribal areas; it is the birthplace of the Taliban and al Qaeda and is believed to be the hiding place of Osama bin Laden; and until recently it was governed by a conservative Islamist political party. Despite these conditions, the region has a history of religious tolerance with few incidents of violence against religious minorities. Even under Islamist rule, Christian minorities were protected, new churches built, and interfaith dialogues hosted. However, the region’s religious minorities face a deeper, more subtle

discrimination in the form of economic and educational disempowerment. Advocates' efforts to improve religious minorities' conditions are hindered by inhospitable terrain, depressed economic conditions, strong anti-Western sentiment, security risks, and the region's importance in the global war against terrorists.

In the examples above, considerations of security, economy, and identity seem to clash with the ideal of religious freedom, and one would encounter similarly complex motivations behind repressive policies in other repressive countries. Advocates must therefore act carefully and respectfully, understanding countries' concerns while subtly introducing alternative policies that better help them achieve their goals while protecting religious freedom. This work is the challenge that faces religious freedom advocates in a complex and changing world.