

Proposed Senate Human Rights Commission applauded

March 5, 2021

WASHINGTON—Advocates for international religious freedom and human rights affirmed the bipartisan introduction of a U.S. Senate resolution establishing the Senate Human Rights Commission.

Three Republicans and three Democrats—Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C.; Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine; James Lankford, R-Okla.; Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del.; Dick Durbin, D-Ill.; and Chris Van Hollen, D-Md.—introduced [S. Res. 80](#).

If approved by the Senate, it will provide a platform for elevating efforts to protect and advance human rights globally. In practical terms, it will institutionalize the current Senate Human Rights Caucus—chaired by Tillis and Coons—and equip it with resources to support paid staff.

Making the caucus into a commission also will grant it power to conduct hearings, hold briefings and examine human rights violations around the world.

In many respects, the Senate commission would be modeled after the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in the U.S. House of Representatives. The House adopted a resolution in 2008 to institutionalize its Congressional Human Rights Caucus—founded by Rep. Tom Lantos and Rep. John Porter in 1983—as a commission.

“Global leadership on human rights requires more than words. It requires action and real engagement. My father understood that when he created the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, and I know he would be incredibly proud to see human rights elevated to the level of a commission in both chambers,” said Katrina Lantos Swett, president of the [Lantos](#)

[Foundation.](#)



Randel Everett

“The resolution to create a Senate Human Rights Commission signals the Congress’ willingness to dedicate real resources to advancing the bipartisan cause of human rights and fighting against human rights abuses worldwide.”

Randel Everett, president of [21Wilberforce](#), likewise affirmed the need for a Senate Human Rights Commission.

“The need for Congressional leadership to preserve and protect fundamental human rights around the world through U.S. foreign policy has never been more critical,” said Everett, former executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“A Senate Human Rights Commission would increase the volume and effectiveness of bipartisan work focused on human rights abuses across the world.”

‘Committed to individual universal freedoms’

Leaders of the [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) expressed gratitude the Senate is giving due attention to global human rights, including religious freedom.

“The Senate Commission would convene experts on various human rights situations taking place around the world and discuss solutions to very difficult problems, and it would serve as an important reminder that the

U.S. is committed to individual universal freedoms as a vital part of its foreign policy and engagement with the world,” said Gayle Manchin, chair of USCIRF.

“We look forward to the establishment of the Senate Commission and seeing its contribution to international religious freedom as it addresses the ongoing persecution of faith communities around the world.”

Vice Chair Tony Perkins likewise affirmed the proposed creation of the Senate commission.

“International religious freedom is one of many global human rights issues that must remain a bipartisan commitment in Congress,” Perkins said. “The Senate Human Rights Commission would be an important initiative for institutionalizing the kind of public discourse needed to highlight and find solutions for the most egregious situations facing our times, such as the Uyghurs in China, the Rohingya in Burma, and Christians in Nigeria.”

Matias Perttula, director of advocacy for [International Christian Concern](#), applauded the resolution and expressed hope it will pass with substantial bipartisan support.

“This commission has the potential to champion religious freedom priorities around the world, and I hope they will ensure that all individuals, including traditional Christians, have the freedom to follow their faith convictions in living out their lives,” Perttula said.