

China has no religious freedom, commission says

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WASHINGTON (BP)—China has tightened its control of religion, creating such crimes as genocide, mass arrests and enforced disappearances, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said in a Sept. 23 [fact sheet](#), days after China released long-imprisoned American Protestant pastor David Lin.

“Sinicization, or the complete subordination of religious groups to the CCP’s (Chinese Communist Party’s) political agenda and Marxist vision for religion, has become the core driving principle of the government’s management of religious affairs,” the commission said in its fact sheet.

“Through regulations and state-controlled religious organizations, authorities incorporate CCP ideology into every facet of religious life for Buddhists, Catholic and Protestant Christians, Muslims, and Taoists.

“Enforcement of such sinicization policies has consistently resulted in systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom and related human rights, including genocide, crimes against humanity, mass incarceration, enforced disappearances, and the destruction of cultural and religious heritage.”

Lin, who had worked as a house church pastor in Beijing, had been imprisoned since 2006 on charges of contract fraud based on his efforts to raise money to build a church, the commission said in 2019.

Originally sentenced to life in prison, he was due for release in 2030 after commutation and a reduction in his sentence. The 68-year-old has returned to the United States and reunited with his family, U.S. State Department

spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a Sept. 16 press briefing.

USCIRF Chair Stephen Schneck commended the U.S. government for securing Lin's release, in a post on X, emphasizing Lin was "simply living out his religious beliefs and supporting house church communities."

Continued advocacy needed for religious prisoners

Commissioner Maureen Ferguson encouraged continued advocacy for the religious prisoners who remain in China, mentioning Protestant house church leaders, underground Catholics, Muslim Uyghurs, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and many others, and linking to a [list](#) of 521 prisoners.



Bob Fu

Bob Fu, founder and president of Midland-based China Aid, who also advocated for Lin's release, also said Lin's freedom in no way signifies a relaxation in China's sinicization.

"China continues to imprison many Christians who are discriminated against simply for practicing their faith. These individuals are denied the freedom to choose their beliefs and endure constant surveillance, raids, arrests, and other coercive measures," Fu wrote Sept. 24 at ChinaAid.org.

"The authorities' actions are politically motivated, but for the persecuted, it is a matter of their faith."

Miller named at least two Americans—Mark Swidan and Kai Li—who remain unjustly imprisoned in China on false charges unrelated to religion.

But perhaps 200 to 300 Americans remain imprisoned there, Fu wrote.

‘All-encompassing scope of sinicization’

In its report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom pointed to several February amendments to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Religious Affairs Regulations as an example of China’s “all-encompassing scope of sinicization on religious life.”

Those amendments, among other regulations, require religions to “practice the core values of socialism,” to interpret religious teachings in line with “traditional Chinese culture” and China’s contemporary requirements for “development and progress,” and require religious schools to cultivate “patriotic religious talents” and interpret religious doctrine in line with CCP thought and policies.

Even the architectural style of churches and other houses of worship is controlled. They are required to “reflect Chinese characteristics and style in terms of architecture, sculptures, paintings, and decorations.”

Grassroots government members have the authority to report to government authorities and religious affairs bureaus transgressions including “illegal religious organizations, illegal preachers, illegal religious activities, or the use of religion to interfere in grassroots public affairs.”

Protestants, Catholics and remaining officially recognized religions—Buddhists, Muslims and Taoists—must register with the government and submit to intrusive supervision, USCIRF wrote.

In “Five-Year Sinicization Work Plans” effective through 2027, the five religious groups are guided in patriotism, loyalty to the CCP and China’s political system, and conformity of religious doctrines, sermons, rituals and

architectural styles of houses of worship in line with the CCP's ideological requirements, USCIRF said.

"Sinicization entrenches the CCP's control and its vision for the modern Chinese state into every aspect of religious life by forcing groups from the five officially recognized religions to conform their beliefs, activities, expression, attire, leadership, language, houses of worship and more to CCP ideology," USCIRF wrote.

"The government creates policies and regulatory measures to sinicize religion and authorizes state-controlled religious organizations to oversee their implementation."

While exact numbers are difficult, USCIRF said, the U.S. government estimated in 2021 that 5 percent of China's 1.4 billion people was Christian. Buddhist comprised the largest chunk at 18 percent, followed by 2 percent Muslim and a mix of adherents of Taoism, Falun Gong, folk religious practices and the nonreligious.

China is included in the State Department's 2023 List of Countries of Particular Concern, indicating China engaged in or tolerated "particularly severe violations of religious freedom" under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.