

Diplomatic boycott of Olympics in China draws praise

December 8, 2021

Advocates for international religious freedom applauded the Biden Administration's call for a diplomatic boycott of the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing due to China's human rights record.

The White House announced Dec. 6 the United States will not send any diplomatic or official representatives to the Winter Olympics. U.S. athletes still will be allowed to compete.

Within two days, the United Kingdom and Australia joined in the diplomatic boycott.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki cited China's "ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and other human rights abuses." Xinjiang Province is home to the Uyghur Muslims, a persecuted ethnic and religious minority.

'Hold China to account for its egregious violations'

The [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) had recommended that the United States not send official representatives to the Beijing Olympics due to the Chinese government's crackdown on religious freedom.

James W. Carr, chair of the commission, called China "one of the worst violators of religious freedom in the world."

The diplomatic boycott sends “a strong and unequivocal message to the Chinese government: the international community condemns and does not tolerate its egregious policies that actively persecute religious minorities,” Carr said.

Nury Turkel, vice chair of the commission, commended the Biden Administration for implementing the diplomatic boycott and “demonstrating the United States’ unwavering commitment to religious freedom.”

“The Chinese government’s systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom and other human rights of Uyghur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, Falun Gong practitioners, and many others betray the Olympic spirit. In fact, a genocidal regime should not have been granted the privilege to host the Olympics in the first place,” Turkel said.

Mervyn Thomas, founder of [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#), a United Kingdom-based human rights organization focused on freedom of religion and conscience, similarly applauded the diplomatic boycott.

“Uyghurs, Christians, Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Falun Gong practitioners and others continue to suffer under a grave and ongoing crackdown on religion or belief across the country, while the authorities also target anyone who stands up for human rights,” Thomas said.

“As long as this goes on, governments should take this opportunity to demonstrate that there can be no business as usual while these atrocities are taking place, and states must continue to hold China to account for its egregious violations at every opportunity both in public and in private.”

Urging House of Representatives to act

While the diplomatic boycott has drawn widespread praise, some

individuals have criticized the U.S. House of Representatives for [delaying action](#) on the Uyghur Forced Labor Protection Act.

The bill passed the U.S. Senate in July, but it has failed to advance in the House.

Brent Leatherwood, acting president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission wrote a letter Dec. 3 to Secretary of State Antony Blinken urging him to "do everything within his power" to expedite the bill's passage.

"The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act is a necessary step for the United States to rightly prioritize human dignity in China," Leatherwood wrote.