

# Russia added to list of worst religious liberty violators

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—The U.S. State Department has added Russia to its list of nations it considers among the world’s most egregious violators of religious freedom.

Russia joins Myanmar (also known as Burma), China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan on the [list of “countries of particular concern.”](#)

## Nigeria omitted from list

Nigeria, which was on the list last year, is not included, as of Nov. 15. The [U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) expressed its disappointment in the omission and urged the State Department to reconsider.

“USCIRF is disappointed that the State Department did not adopt our recommendations in designating the countries that are the worst violators of religious freedom,” said USCIRF Chair Nadine Maenza.

“While the State Department took steps forward on some designations, USCIRF is especially displeased with the removal of Nigeria from its CPC designation, where it was rightfully placed last year, as well as the omission of India, Syria, and Vietnam. We urge the State Department to reconsider its designations based on facts presented in its own reporting.”

Russia had been on the second-tier “special watch list” in the 2020 designation. Algeria is now listed on the second-tier list, joining Comoros,

Cuba and Nicaragua, which were also listed in 2020.

“In far too many places around the world, we continue to see governments harass, arrest, threaten, jail and kill individuals simply for seeking to live their lives in accordance with their beliefs,” Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said Wednesday.

“This administration is committed to supporting every individual’s right to freedom of religion or belief, including by confronting and combating violators and abusers of this human right,” he added.

## **Entities of particular concern named**

Blinken also redesignated these militant groups as “entities of particular concern”: al-Shabab; Boko Haram; Hayat Tahrir al-Sham; the Houthis; the Islamic State group, or ISIS; ISIS-Greater Sahara; ISIS-West Africa; Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin; and the Taliban.

Earlier in November, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom reiterated its [recommendations](#) for the State Department’s designations. Russia, along with Syria, India and Vietnam, was among its suggestions for the CPC list.

“For years, the Russian government has conducted a purge of ‘non-traditional’ religions, frequently labeling as ‘extremists’ and imprisoning peaceful Jehovah’s Witnesses, and readers of the moderate Islamic theologian Said Nursi,” USCIRF stated in a November [fact sheet](#).

“Russian courts continue to deliver harsher and more numerous prison sentences for Jehovah’s Witnesses seeking to practice their faith.”

*With additional reporting by Managing Editor Ken Camp.*