

2016 International Religious Freedom Report - Secretary's Preface

“From the beginning, America has been a place that has cherished the freedom of worship. Sadly, many around the globe do not enjoy this freedom... [W]e pray for the strength and wisdom to achieve a better tomorrow – one where good people of all faiths, Christians and Muslims and Jewish and Hindu, can follow their hearts and worship according to their conscience.”

- President Donald J. Trump

Religious freedom is a cherished American value and a universal human right.

It has been 19 years since the enactment of the International Religious Freedom Act, landmark legislation that placed the promotion of religious freedom as a central element of America's foreign policy. The United States promotes religious freedom as a moral imperative. As importantly, we promote religious freedom because countries that effectively safeguard this human right are more stable, economically vibrant, and peaceful. The failure of governments to protect this right breeds instability, terrorism, and violence.

This annual report to Congress provides a detailed and factual overview of the status of religious freedom in nearly 200 countries and territories, and documents reports of violations and abuses committed by governments, terrorist groups, and individuals.

America's promotion of international religious freedom demands standing up for the rights of the world's most vulnerable populations. ISIS' brutal treatment of religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East has drawn a great degree of attention over the last few years. The 2016 Annual Report details these atrocities.

ISIS has and continues to target members of multiple religions and ethnicities for rape, kidnapping, enslavement, and death. ISIS is clearly responsible for genocide against Yezidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims in areas it controlled. ISIS is also responsible for crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing directed at these same groups, and in some cases against Sunni Muslims, Kurds, and other minorities. The protection of these groups

– and others who are targets of violent extremism – remains a human rights priority for the Trump Administration.

This report serves as a resource for governments and citizens alike, helping to inform the work of faith leaders, lawmakers, rights advocates, academics, business leaders, multilateral institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

We are firmly committed to advancing the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The release of this report gives voice to all those worldwide seeking to live their lives peacefully in accordance with their conscience.

I hereby transmit the Department of State's 2016 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom to the United States Congress. I appreciate the longstanding Congressional support for international religious freedom, and I look forward to working with Congress to preserve and protect this universal human right.

Rex. W. Tillerson
Secretary of State