



Written by [Steven Neill](#) on October 31, 2020

# China Continues Violating Religious Rights – But Vatican-China “Appointment of Bishops” Agreement Was Still Renewed

The ink was barely dry on the [Provisional Agreement’s](#) renewal on the secret Appointment of Bishops agreement between the Vatican and Communist China when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo criticized the regime’s continued human rights abuses on International Religious Freedom Day, October 27. The Appointment of Bishops agreement, signed in 2018 and renewed on October 22 of this year, has allowed for the appointment of two bishops in China over the last two years and, according to a Catholic Church [press release](#), has been “of great ecclesial and pastoral value” and “positive.”



Graphic: Anastasiia\_Guseva/iStock/Getty Images Plus

Yet an article in *L’Osservatore Romano*, daily newspaper of the Vatican City State, [acknowledges](#):

“We must recognize that there are still many situations of great suffering. The Holy See is deeply aware of this, takes it into account, and does not fail to draw the Chinese government’s attention to encourage a more fruitful exercise of religious freedom. The road is still long and not without difficulties.”

[Massimo Introvigne](#), writing for Bitter Winter, a Human Rights organization, noted:

“The path that may lead to real progress risks to be ‘long and difficult,’ is an allusion to the conscientious objectors who refuse to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. While not encouraging them, the Vatican stated in 2019 that they should be ‘respected.’ Instead, they are harassed and jailed.”

The *L’Osservatore Romano* article notes the Holy See’s “pastoral objective ... to help Chinese Catholics, long divided, to offer signs of reconciliation, collaboration and unity for a renewed and more effective proclamation of the Gospel in China.” But to what extent is that pastoral objective being met? Cardinal [Joseph Zen](#), the emeritus Bishop of Hong Kong (among [others](#)) is not [impressed](#) with the effect of the agreement on China’s human rights record: “It seems that to save the agreement, the Holy See is closing both eyes on all the injustices that the Communist Party inflicts on the Chinese people.”

In [September](#), U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted about the agreement prior to its renewal: “the CCP’s [Chinese Communist Party’s] abuse of the faithful has only gotten worse. The Vatican endangers its moral authority, should it renew the deal.”

And on October 27, International Religious Freedom Day, five days after the agreement’s renewal, [Pompeo](#) issued the following [statement](#):

Twenty-two years ago, today, the United States enacted the 1998 International Religious



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Freedom Act, reaffirming our commitment to promote and defend the fundamental right to religious freedom for all people everywhere. Born of America's founders' vision, our government understood that an individual, irrespective of their religion or beliefs, should be free to organize their lives in accordance with their consciences. Religious freedom and other human dignity themes are - and will always remain - a core US foreign policy priority. And the world has taken notice.

Yet today, three of the world's most egregious religious freedom abusers - the People's Republic of China (PRC), Iran, and North Korea - have tightened their coercive measures to silence their own people. Worse, the PRC has sought to eradicate all forms of faith and belief that don't align with Chinese Communist Party doctrine.

The International Religious Freedom Act established both the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom ([USCIRF](#)) and an [ambassador at large](#), currently held by Sam Brownback.

Brownback gave an interview in ShareAmerica, on October 22, [stating](#):

China has declared war on faith. We've seen increasing Chinese government abuse of believers of nearly all religions and from all parts of the mainland. In Xinjiang, China has detained more than a million ethnic Muslims in camps designed to strip away their culture, identity, and faith.

We share reports — that others make — that Chinese authorities have subjected prisoners of conscience, including Falun Gong, Uyghurs, Tibetan Buddhists, and underground Christians, to forcible organ harvesting. This should shock everyone's conscience.

China also continues to interfere in Tibetan Buddhist practices and Tibetan culture, including by interrupting the selection, education, and veneration of Tibetan Buddhist lamas. China has increased its repression of Christians, shutting down churches and arresting adherents for their peaceful religious practices. And to this, we say to China: Do not be mistaken; you will not win your war on faith. This will have consequences on your standing at home and around the world.

Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, who worked at the International Criminal Tribunal, investigated China's persecution of religious minorities and released its [findings](#) on June 17, 2019:

Forced organ harvesting has been committed for years throughout China on a significant scale and that Falun Gong practitioners have been one — and probably the main — source of organ supply.... The Tribunal has had no evidence that the significant infrastructure associated with China's transplantation industry has been dismantled, and absent a satisfactory explanation as to the source of readily available organs concludes that forced organ harvesting continues till today.

The fact that Joe Biden and so many other Democrats and Republican neoconservatives have close ties to China, and that Maoism is openly embraced by so many Americans today, should trouble anyone who believes in religious freedom.



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