



Written by [James Murphy](#) on November 15, 2021

## U.S. Congressmen: Finland Should Be Placed Under “Special Watch” for Religious Persecution

Last week, six GOP congressmen called upon the United States Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to place the nation of Finland on their “Special Watch List” of nations who are actively violating their citizens’ religious freedom.

At issue is a case brought in April, where the Finnish prosecutor general chose to formally bring charges against a Finnish member of Parliament and a Lutheran bishop for stating their Biblical beliefs in favor of traditional marriage and sexuality.

On Wednesday, the congressmen, led by Chip Roy (R-Texas), sent a [letter](#) to the USCIRF arguing that Finnish authorities overstepped when they began to prosecute Reverend Dr. Juhana Pohjola, and MP Dr. Päivi Räsänen, also the the country’s former minister of the interior, for what they called “ethnic agitation” for publicly stating their views against the LGBTQ agenda.

In addition to Roy, the letter was signed by Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.); Dr. Paul Gosar (R-Ariz.); Jody Hice (R-Georgia); Michael Cloud (R-Texas); and Byron Donalds (R-Florida).

“The Finnish government is currently prosecuting well-known Christians for publicly supporting long-standing Christian doctrine. The prosecutions of the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF), the Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola, and Dr. Päivi Räsänen, a Member of Parliament, are specific examples of the Finnish government’s violation of freedom of religion,” the letter from the GOP congressmen reads.

Both Räsänen and Pohjola are accused of “ethnic agitation” based on their contributions to a [pamphlet](#) originally released in 2004, which discussed sexuality from a Biblical perspective. In addition, Räsänen faces additional charges for remarks about sexuality on a TV show in 2018 and in a tweet in 2019.

The Finnish prosecutor general decided to pursue charges despite a previous investigation by Helsinki police that concluded that no laws had been broken. The trial is slated to begin in January, with Pohjola facing up to two years in prison for his role in the pamphlet, while Räsänen faces up to six years for her alleged “crimes.”

At the time charges were announced in April, Räsänen contended that the charges were ludicrous and vowed to keep contending for her faith.



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Helsinki, Finland



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"I cannot accept that voicing my religious beliefs could mean imprisonment. I do not consider myself guilty of threatening, slandering or insulting anyone," Räsänen said. "My statements were all based on the Bible's teachings on marriage and sexuality."

"I will defend my right to confess my faith, so that no one else would be deprived of their right to freedom of religion and speech," Räsänen continued. "I hold on to the view that my expressions are legal and they should not be censored. I will not back down from my views. I will not be intimidated into hiding my faith."

Meanwhile, in August, Pohjola was officially [consecrated](#) as a Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF).

In reaction to the charge against him, Pohjoa said, "As a Christian, I do not want to and cannot discriminate against or despise anyone created by God. Every human being, created by God and redeemed by Christ, is equally precious."

Pohjola continued: "This does not remove the fact that, according to the Bible and the Christian conception of man, homosexual relations are against the will of God, and marriage is intended only between a man and a woman. This is what the Christian church has always taught and will always teach."

The U.S. congressmen called the prosecution a "clear abuse of power."

"Punishing citizens for remarks made on social media and a booklet that has been in the public eye for more than 17 years is a clear abuse of government power," the representatives wrote. "These actions by the Finnish government will undoubtedly have a chilling effect on free speech in Finland and the West."

Further, the congressmen argued that they were not the only ones protesting the Finnish government's action: "We are not the only ones concerned with these violations of human rights. In May of this year, ten academics and human rights advocates sent a letter to USCIRF calling for the U.S. Secretary of Treasury to issue sanctions against Finland's top prosecutor for filing charges against Rev. Dr. Pohjola and Dr. Räsänen," the congressmen pointed out. "Additionally, the International Lutheran Council published a letter expressing their concerns regarding this situation."

"Citizens should never be forced to choose between a fundamental freedom — their faith — and legal persecution," the congressmen wrote.



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