

IMAP Colorado, USA: Courageous Women Call for End to Religious Persecution

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WOMEN STANDING FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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Moriko Hori
International
President, Women's
Federation for
World Peace



Elfidar Iltebir
President, Uyghur
American
Association



Frances Hui
Policy and Advocacy
Coordinator, The
Committee for
Freedom in Hong
Kong Foundation



Peggy Yujiri
Moderator
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IMAP-United States – The issue of religious freedom around the world was addressed at the monthly webinar of the International Media Association for Peace (IMAP) on February 27, 2024. Three courageous women, who have been promoting religious freedom and have spoken out against persecution and discrimination, joined as panelists and outlined the efforts they have made and the problems they are confronting in their nations.

Ms. Moriko Hori, our first panelist, serves as the international president of the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) and oversees their international service projects in over 50 countries. Many of the WFWP supporters are members of the Family Federation, a religious group which has been subjected to a witch hunt in Japan since the assassination of Prime Minister Abe in 2022. The Family Federation has been blamed for this criminal act because the assassin asserted that he was motivated by hatred for the church.

A classic example of blaming the victim, the discrimination has been fanned by a liberal media to the point that anyone with any relationship to the church is being harassed, Ms. Mori explained. WFWP has been barred from using public facilities, and faces the loss of financial support for their work in Africa and throughout the third world, which benefits tens of thousands of underserved women and children.

Ms. Elfidar Iltebir, president of the Uyghur American Association, outlined the mistreatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China. She explained the shocking confinement of millions of Uyghurs in detention centers, where they live under deplorable conditions. In addition, she detailed widespread forced abortions and sterilizations, the forced labor transfer of over 1.6 million people, forced marriage to Han Chinese, and a systematic separation of children from their parents in state-controlled orphanages where they are re-educated to be loyal Chinese citizens.

Ms. Iltebir attributes the persecution of Uyghurs to the policy of the Chinese Communist Party that requires citizens to be loyal first and foremost to the state. Authorities have tried to suppress all religious belief and practice, but have been especially tough on the Muslim Uyghurs. Signs on mosques have been changed from "Thanks to Allah, the one God" to "We give thanks for the Chinese Communist Party and Xi Jinping." The Uyghur language and culture are being systematically eliminated, she said.

The last panelist, **Ms. Frances Hui**, serves as the policy and advocacy coordinator for the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation. A participant in Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement since 2014, she was the first person from Hong Kong to receive political asylum in the United States, and is among 13 overseas activists on the government's wanted list, with a HK\$1 million (approx. US\$128,000) bounty on her head.

Frances focused on the plight of religious communities in Hong Kong and the increasing government repression and control. Over the past decade the officially atheist Chinese Communist Party has promoted the Sinicization of religion in China, and this is being extended to Hong Kong. Religious groups are required to align with socialist and communist doctrines, customs and morality. The purpose is to anchor their ideology within faith communities and use their influence to propagate their political agenda. Last month Frances and the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation published a report entitled, "Hostile Takeover: The Chinese Communist Party and Hong Kong's Religious Communities."

All panelists expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have their stories heard. They also suggested that listeners can support their fight by sharing the situation in their nations and contacting members of Congress, asking them to support efforts to protect these communities.