

Statement of Rashad Hussain, Ambassador-at-Large Nominee for
International Religious Freedom
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 26, 2021

Good morning Chairman Merkley, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee. It is an honor to appear before you as the President's nominee for Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for placing their trust in me to pursue this work on behalf of the American people. I would also like to thank my family- my parents, my sister Lubna and my brother Saad, my wife Isra, and our children, Sulaiman, Safiyyah, Sumayyah, and our youngest, Safurah, who turns 26 days old today. I am blessed to have your endless advice, support, and patience.

Religious freedom is enshrined in our First Amendment and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it is a core American value and human right. And I am humbled to be charged with the sacred calling to protect the freedom of religion of people all over the world.

My family came to the United States from India, where my father was raised in a village with no electricity. I was born in Wyoming, where my father worked in the mining industry, and I grew up in Texas. My mother, who is a physician, always encouraged me to use my life to serve others. I have spent nearly 15 years as a public servant working in all three branches of government under Democratic and Republican administrations upholding our constitution, including as an attorney and a diplomat. Collaborating with civil society from across the political spectrum to protect international religious freedom and alleviate human suffering has been some of the most meaningful and rewarding work of my life.

During my time at the State Department, I worked in close partnership with civil society leaders on the Marrakesh Declaration, a landmark

initiative on the protection of Christians and other religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries. As part of our opposition to blasphemy laws and the criminalization of free speech, I led a process to end the annual passage of a UN resolution that harmed religious minorities around the world. And along with the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, I traveled twice to the Holocaust sites with Imams from the United States and many other countries to address anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. My work protecting human rights has taken me around the globe, where I have met with civil society leaders, heads of state, and other senior government officials in countries such as the Central African Republic, Egypt, Pakistan, India, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and China, which continues its oppression of religious communities, including the ongoing genocide of the Uyghurs. And I saw firsthand the trauma of Rohingya living in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar and heard stories of the horrendous acts of violence and mass atrocities they endured.

Respected Members of the Committee, I was on Capitol Hill on September 11, 2001 as staff member of the House Judiciary Committee. Since that day, I have been determined to do everything I can to protect our country and our national security interests. While at the Justice Department and State, I worked on the prosecution of terrorism and national security cases and other counterterrorism efforts, including countering terrorist propaganda often used to target religious minorities. And as a Muslim American, I have seen the impact of bigotry and guilt by association tactics used against minority communities, including the message it sends and dangers it poses to young people.

Far too many people around the world continue to face arrest, torture, discrimination, and even death on account of their beliefs. Antisemitism, Christian persecution, anti-Muslim hatred, and other forms of intolerance are on the rise. A staggering eighty percent of people worldwide live in environments with high or severe restrictions on religious freedom. These are not just statistics and bad laws – these

are individuals taken from their families: the plight of the patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church unable to leave his home to tend to his flock; the Saudi government whipping and jailing blogger Raif Badawi for encouraging debate online; the Nigerian government letting atheist Mubarak Bala sit in prison without charge for months; the Panchen Lama disappeared by the PRC and stolen from the global Tibetan Buddhist community; and the stories of Christians in Vietnam, the Ahmaddiya in Pakistan, and the Baha'i in Yemen. Their faiths may be different, but they share a common experience of persecution. I am committed to fighting, day in and day out, for their rights.

Congress has stood at the forefront of this work since the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 was passed on an overwhelming, bipartisan basis. I am honored by the support of civil society and faith organizations from all across the political and religious spectrum, and I look forward to our continued partnership. In an era of vigorous partisan debates, Americans continue to be largely of one mind regarding the importance of defending international religious freedom. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Members of this Committee and your staffs to extend this right to all.

I will also leverage my existing relationships within Muslim-majority countries to protect the rights of religious minorities there. I will redouble efforts to broaden the coalition to hold China accountable for its horrific crimes against the Uyghurs and its repression of other ethnic and religious minorities.

I look to build on the impressive work of Ambassador Sam Brownback—who expanded partnerships through the IRF Ministerial and the International Religious Freedom Alliance – and the groundbreaking efforts of Ambassador David Saperstein, who institutionalized relationships with USCIRF and civil society organizations.

Tomorrow, the United States commemorates International Religious Freedom Day. Our country was founded on the conviction that

everyone should be free to believe what they choose. Our own experience, our own example, is what compels us to advocate for the rights of the marginalized, vulnerable, and underrepresented peoples the world over. If confirmed, with the support of the American people, I intend to carry out the United States' abiding commitment to championing international religious freedom for everyone everywhere.

Thank you for your consideration.