

# INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ROUNDTABLE

## PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE WORKING GROUP

The Prisoners of Conscience Working Group is organized under the International Religious Freedom Roundtable. We aim to advocate on behalf of prisoners of conscience suffering violations of their religious freedom throughout the world in order to improve their conditions of confinement and ultimately secure their release.

**The best way you as a member of Congress can help is to become an advocate for a prisoner of conscience.**

### **Who are prisoners of conscience?**

Within the context of religious freedom, prisoners of conscience are individuals imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their religious beliefs, and who have neither used nor advocated violence. These are men and women who have been targeted not for crimes, but for pursuing their right to believe or not to believe.

### **Becoming an advocate for a prisoner of conscience.**

When members of Congress become advocates for prisoners of conscience, the world listens. Congressional support has helped secure the release of prisoners in many cases, as well as improve the conditions under which prisoners are held. By working with the Prisoners of Conscience Working Group, you will be able to draw attention to the cases of individual prisoners and hold their governments accountable for severe violations of religious freedom.

### **What you can do.**

The Prisoners of Conscience Working Group will assist you with advocacy at every step of the way when you become an advocate for a prisoner of conscience so that your advocacy will be as easy and effective as possible. Tools for advocacy may include highlighting the prisoner on your Congressional website or on social media, raising the prisoner's story during speeches, direct engagement with the foreign government, sponsoring relevant legislation, and other appropriate means. We highly encourage you to become an advocate through the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's Defending Freedoms Project, and to consider the Prisoners of Conscience Working Group as a primary resource. We also encourage you to join the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.

We encourage you to become an advocate for a prisoner of conscience. You have the opportunity to give a voice to those suffering in silence. With your voice, freedom for the persecuted is possible.

#### **Prisoners of Conscience Working Group Co-Chairs**

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**PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE IN NEED OF ADVOCATES**

**Yahaya Sharif-Aminu**

Nigeria. Sufi musician detained since March 2020 on allegations of blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed after sharing song lyrics via WhatsApp. Appealing his case to the Supreme Court of Nigeria while facing a potential death penalty.


**Gao Zhisheng**

China. Human rights lawyer forcibly disappeared in 2017 from his home in Jia County, Yulin Municipality, Shaanxi Province. Current whereabouts and condition unknown. Well-known for representing Christians and Falun Gong practitioners, and criticizing the Chinese government's treatment of them.

Previously advocated for via Defending Freedoms Project by Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA, Ret.).


**Uyghur Muslim and Montagnard Christian Detainees in Thailand**

Thailand. 48 Uyghur Muslims are currently detained in Thailand and under threat of being deported back to China imminently. Also being detained under an extradition request in Thailand is Y Quynh Bdap, a Vietnamese Montagnard

Christian refugee, previously detained and tortured in Vietnam for his faith and advocacy. These cases are serious examples of transnational repression.


**Rohan Ahmad and others**

Pakistan. Ahmadiyya Muslim missionary detained since May 2020 after accusations of sharing allegedly blasphemous religious materials on social media. Charged with "inciting interfaith hatred" and "desecrating the Qur'an," among others. Four others have been charged in related allegations.


**Fayzulla Agzamov**

Uzbekistan. Muslim arrested and convicted in 2001 and sentenced for 17 years for vague charges based on his religious beliefs and activity of belonging to a "banned" organization and "attempts to overthrow the constitutional order." Sentence extended an additional 16 years in 2014. His family members were also imprisoned, but have been released.

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