



US Religious Freedom Designations

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Why in News?

The United States Secretary of State recently declared a **list of countries designated as "Countries of Particular Concern(CPCs)", 'Special Watch List (SWL)' countries and 'Entities of Particular Concern(EPCs)'** due to **violations of religious freedom.**

What are the US Religious Freedom Designations?

▪ About:

- The [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom \(USCIRF\)](#) recommends countries to the Secretary of State for designation as CPCs.
 - The US acknowledges ongoing religious freedom violations in countries not officially designated. Governments are urged to **halt abuses such as attacks on religious minorities**, communal violence, prolonged imprisonments for peaceful expression, transnational repression, and calls to violence against religious communities.

Note

- Earlier, the [USCIRF in its 2023 report](#), **designated India as a CPC, citing severe violations of religious freedom** against various religious minorities, **especially Muslims, Christians, and Dalits.**
 - The report also criticized some of the laws and policies of the Indian government, such as the [Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act, 2019](#), the [National Register of Citizens \(NRC\)](#), as well as the alleged harassment, violence, and discrimination faced by religious dissenters and activists.
- The **Indian government rejected the report** as 'biased and motivated'. The government also defended its commitment to protect and promote the rights and freedoms of all its citizens, regardless of their faith.
- **Criteria for the Designation:**
 - The US emphasizes that **promoting the freedom of religion or belief** has been a **fundamental goal of US foreign policy** since the enactment of the **International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in 1998.**
- **Criteria for Designation of Countries in Different Categories**
 - **CPCs:** When the governments of the countries engage in or tolerate "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations" of the right to freedom of religion or belief under IRFA 1998.
 - **SWL:** It is based on the governments' perpetration or toleration of severe religious freedom violations.
 - **EPCs:** For systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations.
- **Countries Designated for Religious Freedom Violations in 2024:**
 - **Countries of Particular Concern:**
 - The designated countries include China, North Korea, Pakistan, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran,

Nicaragua, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Myanmar.

- **Special Watch List Countries:**
 - Algeria, Azerbaijan, the Central African Republic, Comoros, and Vietnam are labeled as "Special Watch List countries".
- **Entities of Particular Concern:**
 - Terrorist organizations such as al-Shabab, Boko Haram, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Houthis, ISIS-Sahel, ISIS-West Africa, al-Qa'ida affiliate Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin, and the Taliban are designated as "Entities of Particular Concern."

State of Freedom of Religion

▪ India:

- The **Indian Constitution's Articles 25-28 guarantee freedom of religion as a fundamental right.** The Constitution also states that India is a secular state and does not declare any religion as the country's official religion.
 - [Article 25 \(Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion\).](#)
 - [Article 26 \(Freedom to manage religious affairs\).](#)
 - [Article 27 \(Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any religion\).](#)
 - [Article 28 \(Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions\).](#)
- Further, [Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution](#) deal with the protection of interests of minorities.

▪ Globally:

- **Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** affirms that, "Everyone has the right to **freedom of thought, conscience and religion**; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

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