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JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States
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April 19, 2018

Honorable Samuel D. Brownback
Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom
2201 C Street, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Ambassador:

As you are aware, threats to religious freedom and the rise of extremism in Southeast Asia are of grave concern to the United States. These trends threaten our shared values with regional partners, jeopardizing the United States' soft power tools for engagement in the region. I appreciate your consideration of these concerns, and would appreciate your comments on the United States' strategy going forward.

Traditional partners like Indonesia and Malaysia have a blasphemy law; in Indonesia, religious protections only extend to six officially recognized religions; and in the Aceh province of Indonesia, the public is governed by sharia law. The blasphemy laws are regularly upheld, and religious minorities are continuously discriminated against. Human Rights Watch has reported 55 instances of Indonesians being targeted for blasphemy violations since the fall of 2016, and in Malaysia, there were 155 incidents of religious freedom violations in 2017. In 2018, two Indonesians have been flogged in public for violating sharia law in Aceh province, and in Malaysia, a court has refused to make a ruling on allowing four Christian converts to have their conversion officially recognized.

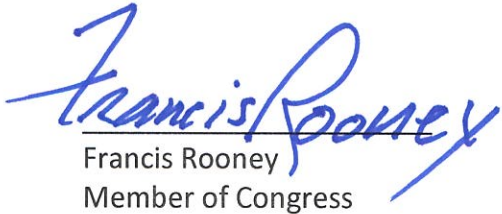
Equally concerning is the opening this intolerance makes for Islamist political parties to gain influence in upcoming elections in Indonesia and Malaysia. Eurasia Group reports increasing popularity of Islamist parties that have advocated for sharia law and capitalized on anti-minority sentiment across the region. Further, the threat of, and support for, terrorism has grown in the region. ISIS-inspired attacks have occurred in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines—where ISIS-linked militants seized control of the city of Marawi, and engaged in a five-month battle with Philippine security forces. These political trends, coupled with the susceptibility to extremism in the region, threaten the democratic societies of the region and jeopardize nations' partnerships with the United States.

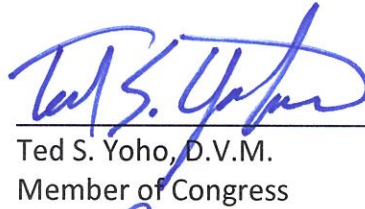
I would appreciate your insights on the following issues:

- What do shifts from religious freedom in the region mean for the United States' relationship with partners like Indonesia and Malaysia?
- What soft power tools can the United States use to stop these trends?
- What is the outlook for the region, and what are the United States' contingencies in the event these religious freedom trends becomes worse?

The maintenance of policies that foster religious freedom in partner nations like Malaysia and Indonesia are necessary for a sustainable relationship with the United States. In order to protect Americans' security, promote freedom abroad, and maintain strong geopolitical relationships in the region and advance American interests, the United States will hopefully address the shifting cultural, religious, and civic trends of the region. I thank you for your consideration of these concerns, and I look forward to your insights or advice.

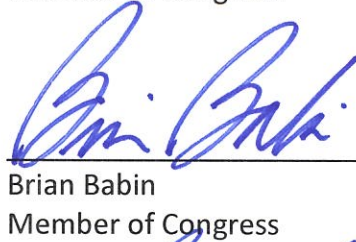
Sincerely,

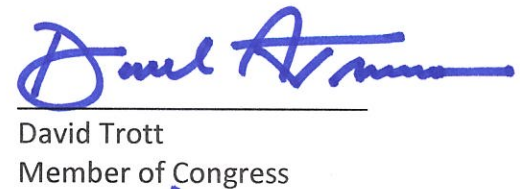

Francis Rooney
Member of Congress


Ted S. Yoho, D.V.M.
Member of Congress

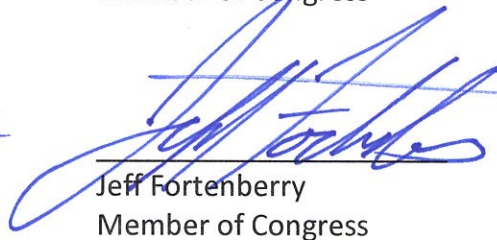

Edward R. Royce
Member of Congress

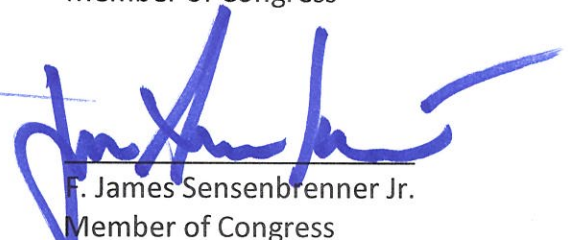

Ann Wagner
Member of Congress

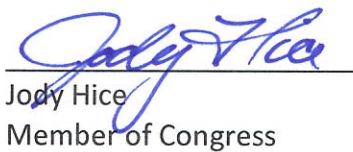

Brian Babin
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F. James Sensenbrenner Jr.
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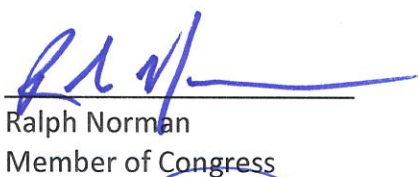

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress

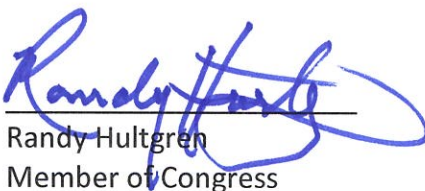

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Member of Congress

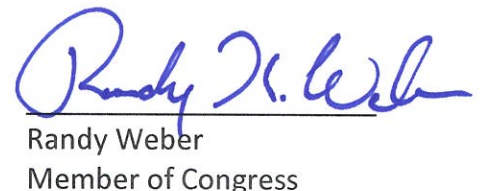

Mark Meadows
Member of Congress

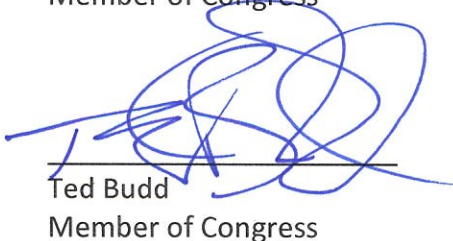

Mike Bost
Member of Congress

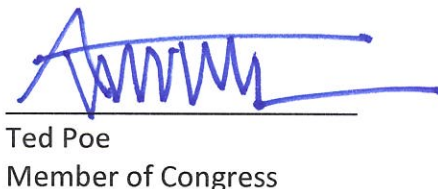

Michael Conaway
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Ralph Norman
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Randy Hultgren
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Randy Weber
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Ted Budd
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Ted Poe
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