

Status of Human Rights in the United States of America for the 53rd Session of the Universal Periodic Review

Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the United States of America (United States) for the 53rd session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. The United States is a country located in North America and has a population of approximately 331.4 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Christian, with approximately 70.6% identifying as Christian, 22.8% as unaffiliated, 1.9% as Jewish, 0.9% as Muslim, 0.7% as Buddhist, and 0.7% as Hindu.²

3. The United States' last review was scheduled as part of the 50th session of the UPR, which it boycotted. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the report we filed in April 2025. In that report, we addressed the issues of religious freedom and protections for life and conscientious objectors. In this report, we will also discuss the sanctions placed on UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese.

Legal Framework

4. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution enshrines the fundamental right to religious freedom. Under the First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech"³

5. Additionally, the United States is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).⁴ Under Article 18 of the ICCPR:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

¹ Adam Gopnik et al., *United States*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States> (last updated Apr. 2, 2025).

² *Religious Landscape Study*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/database/>.

³ U.S. CONST. amend. 1.

⁴ *Ratification Status for the United States of America*, OHCHR, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=187&Lang=EN.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.⁵

Abortion

6. In the United States, the Declaration of Independence enshrines the principle that all humans are equal. It states: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”⁶

7. Article 6 of the ICCPR states that “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.”⁷ Also, under Article 19, “[e]veryone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.”⁸

8. In addition, the United States has a responsibility to uphold pro-life principles enshrined in other international agreements, such as the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development.

Religious Freedom

9. Since taking office in 2025, President Trump has been steadfast in protecting religious freedom. In May 2025, President Trump established the Religious Liberty Commission.⁹ The purpose of creating this new policy is to “enforce the historic and robust protections for religious liberty enshrined in Federal law.”¹⁰ This commission is composed of members from different sectors who offer perspectives on how the Government can uphold religious freedom for everyone.¹¹

10. In February 2025, President Trump created the White House Faith Office.¹² This Office consults with experts and various faith leaders to make recommendations to the President regarding policies, programs, and practices that “affect the ability of faith-based entities, community organizations, and houses of worship to serve families and communities.”¹³

⁵ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

⁶ THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE para. 2 (U.S. 1776).

⁷ ICCPR art 6, *supra* note 9.

⁸ *Id.* art. 19.

⁹ *Establishment of the Religious Liberty Commission*, THE WHITE HOUSE (May 1, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/establishment-of-the-religious-liberty-commission/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Establishment of the White House Faith Office*, THE WHITE HOUSE (Feb. 7, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/establishment-of-the-white-house-faith-office/>.

¹³ *Id.*

11. That same month, President Trump issued an executive order aimed at addressing anti-Christian biases in the federal government.¹⁴ The Executive Order states that the administration “will not tolerate anti-Christian weaponization of government or unlawful conduct targeting Christians”¹⁵ and that the administration “will ensure that any unlawful and improper conduct, policies, or practices that target Christians are identified, terminated, and rectified.”¹⁶

12. In January 2025, President Trump signed another Executive Order aimed at combating antisemitism.¹⁷ The Executive Order states that its purpose is to “combat anti-Semitism vigorously, using all available and appropriate legal tools, to prosecute, remove, or otherwise hold to account the perpetrators of unlawful anti-Semitic harassment and violence.”¹⁸ This Executive Order also created additional measures to combat antisemitism on college campuses and to identify actions that can be used to combat antisemitism at institutions of higher education.¹⁹

13. In addition to promoting religious freedom domestically, the U.S. government also took steps to combat international persecution, particularly in Nigeria. In just the first sixth months of 2025, an estimated 7,087 Christians were killed in Nigeria because of their faith.²⁰ Because of the ongoing persecution of Christians in Nigeria, in November 2026, President Trump designated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC).²¹ This designation sends a message to Nigeria that it must make efforts to address the ongoing persecution and killing of Christians.²²

14. Additionally, in our last report, we reported on a Christian pastor who was prevented from holding Bible studies and grief support gatherings in a community meeting room in Massachusetts.²³ Since that report an agreement was reached with the town to allow the pastor to use the meeting room regularly.²⁴

¹⁴ *Eradicating Ant-Christian Bias*, THE WHITE HOUSE (Feb. 6, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/eradicating-anti-christian-bias/>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism*, THE WHITE HOUSE (Jan. 29, 2025), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/additional-measures-to-combat-anti-semitism/>.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Ngala Killiam Chimtom, *Report States an Average of 30 Christians Murdered Each Day in Nigeria in 2025*, THE CATHOLIC WORLD REPORT (Aug. 11, 2025), <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2025/08/12/report-states-an-average-of-30-christians-murdered-each-day-in-nigeria-in-2025/>.

²¹ Mike Pompeo, *President Trump’s Righteous Action on Behalf of Nigeria’s Christians*, ACLJ (Nov. 7, 2025), <https://aclj.org/persecuted-church/president-trumps-righteous-action-on-behalf-of-nigerias-christians>.

²² *Id.*

²³ Nathan Moelker, *ACLJ Takes Action After Government Blocks Church From Using Public Library Meeting Space and Orders Newspaper to Remove Church’s Ad*, ACLJ (Aug. 15, 2024), <https://aclj.org/religious-liberty/aclj-takes-action-after-government-blocks-church-from-using-public-library-meeting-space-and-orders-newspaper-to-remove-churchs-ad>.

²⁴ Nathan Moelker, *Town Wages War on Local Christian Pastor – ACLJ Secures Legal Victory*, ACLJ (Nov. 1, 2024), <https://aclj.org/religious-liberty/town-wages-war-on-local-christian-pastor-aclj-secures-legal-victory>.

15. We also previously reported about a school teacher who had gathered with friends and other teachers to pray at the school flagpole in 2023.²⁵ She was informed by the principal that they could not pray at the pole or in the presence of students.²⁶ Since our last report, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled that the principal violated the teacher's rights and that she had a constitutional right to pray on school grounds.²⁷

Protections for Life and Conscientious Objectors

16. In our last report for the United States, we encouraged the United States government to protect the unborn. Thankfully, the Trump Administration has made efforts to do that. A Presidential statement issued on January 22, 2026, stated:

Today, we uphold the eternal truth that every human being is created in the holy image and likeness of God, blessed with infinite worth and boundless potential. We celebrate the heroic leaders, parents, students, and everyday citizens — including those gathering for the March for Life in Washington, D.C., this weekend — who have courageously advocated for the most vulnerable and stood up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. As President, I pledge to always be a voice for the voiceless and to never tire in fighting to protect the intrinsic dignity of every child, born and unborn.

Today, I call on the American people to join me in honoring the dignity of every human life, including those not yet born, to continue to care for women in unexpected pregnancies, and to support adoption and foster care in a more meaningful way so every child can have a loving home. Finally, I ask every citizen of this great Nation to listen to the sound of silence caused by a generation lost to us and then to raise their voices for all affected by abortion, both seen and unseen.²⁸

17. The Trump Administration's commitment to respecting the sanctity of life and protecting preborn babies was also echoed in a statement by Vice President Vance:

The mark of barbarism is that we treat babies like inconveniences to be discarded rather than the blessings to cherish that they are, but the inheritance of our civilization is something else — the fact that, as Scripture tells us, each life is fearfully and wonderfully made by our Creator.²⁹

²⁵ Nathan Moelker, *ACLJ Wins Victory for Teacher to Have Right to Pray at the Pole*, ACLJ (Sep. 24, 2024), <https://aclj.org/religious-liberty/aclj-wins-victory-for-teacher-to-have-right-to-pray-at-the-pole>.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Nathan Moelker, *Unanimously Protects Teacher's Right to Pray*, ACLJ (Mar. 10, 2024), <https://aclj.org/religious-liberty/aclj-landmark-victory-federal-appeals-court-unanimously-protects-teachers-right-to-pray>.

²⁸ *Presidential Message on National Sanctity of Human Life Day, 2026*, THE WHITE HOUSE (Jan. 22, 2026), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2026/01/presidential-message-on-national-sanctity-of-human-life-day-2026/>.

²⁹ *President Trump is the Most Pro-Life President in History*, THE WHITE HOUSE (Jan. 23, 2026), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/releases/2026/01/president-trump-is-the-most-pro-life-president-in-history/>.

18. In January 2026, the National Institute of Health (NIH) enacted a new policy that would end the use of aborted human fetal tissue in research supported by the NIH.³⁰ Ending human fetal tissue research not only reinforces the U.S. government's commitment to respecting the sanctity of human life, but it will also allow for the NIH to modernize biomedical science research and speed up innovation.³¹

19. The government has also taken action to protect medical professionals who are being forced to participate in abortion, in violation of their conscience.³² In May 2025, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office for Civil Rights (OCR) started the review of a hospital to ensure that the hospital was complying with federal law that protects the conscience rights of health care workers.³³ This particular hospital was accused of requiring health care workers to participate in abortions, even when the workers had religious objections.³⁴ Acting OCR Director, Anthony Archeval, shared the department's commitment to protecting the rights of conscience and religious exercise, stating that "[h]ealth care professionals should not be coerced into, fired for, or driven out of the profession for declining to perform procedures that Federal law says they do not have to perform based on their religious beliefs or moral convictions."³⁵

20. In January 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14182 in order to enforce the Hyde Amendment and prevent federal funding from going towards elective abortion.³⁶ The Hyde Amendment is critical in ensuring that American citizens are not being forced to pay for elective abortions.³⁷ In addition to enforcing the Hyde Amendment, President Trump also reinstated the Mexico City Policy to prevent organizations that receive federal global health funding from providing abortions.³⁸ These policies have been enacted to ensure that the taxpayers freedom of belief is not violated by being forced to pay for abortions.

21. We would also like to provide an update regarding a case we highlighted in our last report, regarding a pro-life supporter who was arrested for public disturbance while protesting outside an abortion clinic.³⁹ The prosecution dismissed the charges against the pro-life

³⁰ *NIH Announces Major Policy Shift to End Use of Human Fetal Tissue in NIH-Supported Research*, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH (Jan. 22, 2026), <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/nih-announces-major-policy-shift-end-use-human-fetal-tissue-nih-supported-research>.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *HHS Acts to Protect Health Care Workers' Conscience Rights*, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (May 12, 2025), <https://www.hhs.gov/press-room/hhs-protects-workers-conscience-rights.html>.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ Jordan Sekulow, *Trump's HHS Launches Investigation Into Hospital After Researching Out to ACLJ Regarding Defense of 5 Medical Professionals Who Were Being Forced to Participate in Abortions*, ACLJ (May 13, 2025), <https://aclj.org/pro-life/trumps-hhs-launches-investigation-into-hospital-after-aclj-defended-5-medical-professionals-from-being-forced-to-participate-in-abortions>.

³⁵ *HHS Acts to Protect Health Care Workers' Conscience Rights*, *supra* note 36.

³⁶ Executive Order 14182, FEDERAL REGISTER (Jan. 24, 2025), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/31/2025-02175/enforcing-the-hyde-amendment>.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Katie Keith, *Trump Reinstates Mexico City Policy, Prioritizes Hyde Amendment Enforcement*, HEALTH AFFAIRS (Jan. 26, 2025), <https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/trump-reinstates-mexico-city-policy-prioritizes-hyde-amendment-enforcement>.

³⁹ *A Growing Threat to Pro-Life Advocates: Challenging Unconstitutional, Weaponized Prosecution*, ACLJ (Jan. 8, 2025), <https://aclj.org/pro-life/a-growing-threat-to-pro-life-advocates-challenging-unconstitutional-weaponized-prosecution>.

supporter entirely.⁴⁰

Sanctions against Francesca Albanese

22. Since our last report on the United States, UN human rights experts criticized the United States for sanctioning Francesca Albanese, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories.⁴¹ The United States defended this decision, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio citing Albanese's antisemitic remarks, support for terrorism, and her contempt towards the United States and Israel.⁴²

23. In 2025, the United States imposed sanctions against Francesca Albanese, pursuant to Executive Order 14203, "Imposing Sanctions on the International Criminal Court."⁴³ As Special Rapporteur, Albanese has spewed antisemitism and has supported terrorism, showing contempt for both the United States and Israel.⁴⁴ She also has directly called for the ICC to investigate, arrest, detain, and prosecute nationals from the United States and Israel, without their consent.⁴⁵ It is important to note that neither the United States nor Israel is a party to the Rome Statute, which makes this an infringement on their sovereignty.⁴⁶ The United States has an absolute right to defend its sovereignty.

Recommendations

24. In our last report, we expressed hope that the United States and the Trump Administration would take steps to both advance religious freedom and protect human life. As shown above, the Trump Administration has taken several steps to do just that. We want to commend the United States for its strong stance protecting fundamental human rights and encourage it to continue what it has already started and remain steadfast in protecting the rights to religious freedom and life.

25. We would also encourage the United States to continue to protect its sovereignty and national security from biased and malicious attacks using all legal actions available.

⁴⁰ Liam Harell, *Government Folds: Charges Dropped for Pro-Lifer Unconstitutionally Charged for Free Speech Defending Life*, ACLJ (May 12, 2025), <https://aclj.org/pro-life/government-folds-charges-dropped-for-pro-lifer-unconstitutionally-charged-for-free-speech-defending-life>.

⁴¹ *US Sanctions on Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese Threaten Human Rights System: UN Experts*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2025/08/us-sanctions-special-rapporteur-francesca-albanese-threaten-human-rights-system> (Aug. 8, 2025).

⁴² Tom Bateman, *US Sanctions UN Expert Francesca Albanese, Critic of Israel's Gaza Offensive*, BBC (July 9, 2025), <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70rllxr0kyo>.

⁴³ Marco Rubio, *Sanctioning Lawfare that Targets U.S. and Israeli Persons*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (July 9, 2025), <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/07/sanctioning-lawfare-that-targets-u-s-and-israeli-persons>.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*