

Uyghur activist Nury Turkel to head US religious freedom commission

by [Dawn Araujo-Hawkins](#) in the [July 27, 2022](#) issue



(Courtesy of the Hudson Institute)

Nury Turkel was unanimously elected chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom on June 21. Turkel, who House Speaker Nancy Pelosi first appointed to the commission in 2020, is the first Uyghur American to serve on the USCIRF.

Turkel was born in a Chinese reeducation camp in 1970 but left China in 1995 to attend graduate school in the United States, where he was later granted asylum. Turkel earned a masters in international relations from American University before ultimately graduating from the university's Washington College of Law.

Turkel currently works as a lawyer and foreign policy expert. He is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, where he specializes in national security, digital authoritarianism, and issues of forced labor. He is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Turkel has devoted much of his professional life to advocating for Uyghur human rights.

In 2003, he cofounded the Uyghur Human Rights Project, which he currently chairs, and has served as an adviser to presidents of the World Uyghur Congress. As president of the Uyghur American Association, Turkel was an integral part of the 2005 campaign that freed Uyghur prisoner of conscience Rebiya Kadeer. He has also provided legal representation to Uyghur political refugees seeking asylum in the United States.

“I am truly honored to be elected as Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and privileged to lead the Commission as we work towards addressing threats to freedom of religion and belief around the world—a fundamental human right,” Turkel said in a statement.