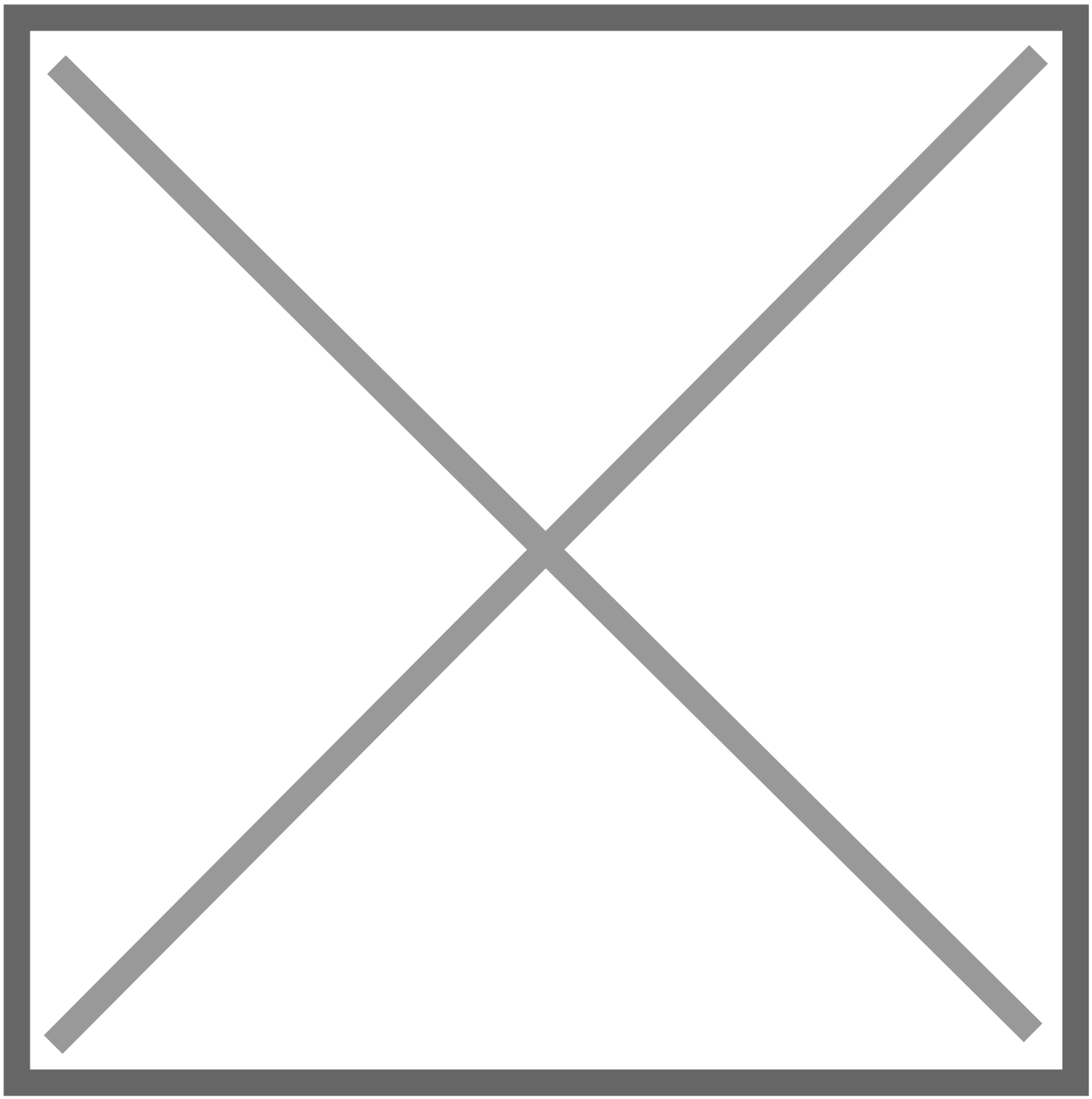
News



Stephen Schneck is seen on the campus of The Catholic University of America in Washington in this 2017 file photo. (CNS photo/Tyler Orsburn)



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Stephen Schneck, a Catholic activist and retired professor, was appointed June 15 by President Joe Biden to serve on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent federal watchdog group that monitors religious freedom violations.

In a tweet that day announcing his new role, Schneck said he was "honored by the appointment to engage in this critical work."

He also told Catholic News Service in June 15 email that he was grateful to be appointed to this work and said that as a Catholic, his understanding of church teaching on "social justice, solidarity, the common good and peace building can only help in better understanding" ongoing challenges to religious freedom in today's world.

"Let me stress that the work of the commission is nonpartisan," he said, adding that its "'clients' are the persecuted religious believers of the world."

Schneck said the commission's job is to "plead the case of these persecuted to the president and Congress. And, at this moment, the situation for religious freedom is very much jeopardized in dozens of nations by war, ethnic strife and by a spreading political attitude that demonizes those who are deemed 'different.'"

The commission was formed in 1998 to monitor religious freedom violations worldwide and make recommendations to the president, State Department and Congress, which it does in annual reports.

This year's report, documenting religious freedom violations in several countries in 2021, highlighted 15 countries of particular concern: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, Syria and Vietnam.

It also put another 12 countries on a watch list, urging the U.S. government to respond with sanctions and other tools to hold perpetrators accountable.

Schneck was described in the White House biography material as a "political philosopher by training." He retired from The Catholic University of America in 2017, after more than 30 years as a professor, department chair and dean. He also was the founder and longtime director of the university's Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies.

He currently serves on the governing boards of the Catholic Climate Covenant, which advocates for environmental justice and care for creation, and the Catholic Mobilizing Network, an organization that seeks an end to the death penalty and promotes restorative justice.

Previously, he was executive director of Franciscan Action Network, advocating on justice issues for Franciscan communities in the U.S.

Schneck was a member of the White House Advisory Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships during President Barack Obama's administration and served as the national co-chair of Catholics for Biden in 2020.

When he retired from Catholic University, Schneck told CNS that he wanted to find new ways to emphasize that politics must be a moral endeavor working for the common good, stressing that he hoped to bridge the polarizing gaps across political party lines and within the church.

"If we can't figure out a way to achieve solidarity or find a way of healing this rift, then I worry profoundly about both American political life and our church," he said.

"This I think is the biggest task, the biggest challenge facing us. There are lots of challenges, but none of those challenges can be addressed until we address this and

find a way to work together with one another."

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