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Message from the Chair: *Now in its sixth year of operation, the Commission continues to draw the attention of policymakers to the growing strategic importance of the protection of religious freedom to U.S. national interests, raise greater public awareness as to why religious freedom is a critical component of how countries treat their own people and deal with the world around them, and work with Members of Congress in a truly bipartisan effort to promote religious freedom. The Commission began 2005 with the release of a major study on the Expedited Removal process, followed that with the release of a study on the constitutions of 44 Muslim countries, played an active role in the drafting process of Iraq's new constitution, recommended to Secretary Rice that Uzbekistan be designated as a new "country of particular concern," as well as Pakistan and Turkmenistan, made a two-week official visit to China, and released a study on religious freedom in North Korea. This issue of the Commission's newsletter chronicles those and other Commission efforts during 2005.*

– Michael Cromartie

Commissioners meet with President George W. Bush

President George W. Bush met with the Commissioners of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in February for an off-the-record discussion on a wide range of topics touching on international religious freedom and foreign policy. Commissioners attending the meeting were Preeta D. Bansal, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, Michael Cromartie, Felice D. Gaer, Elizabeth H. Prodromou, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, and Nina Shea, as well as Ex-Officio Commissioner Ambassador John Hanford.



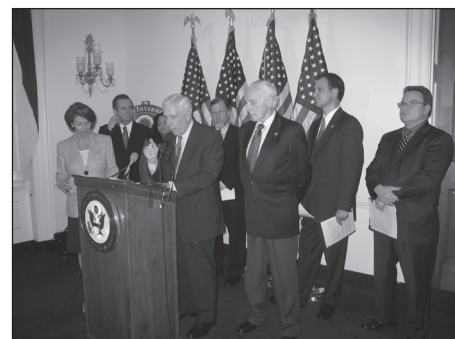
USCIRF meets with President George W. Bush

USCIRF visit to China; Policy Focus released at press conference with Congressional Members

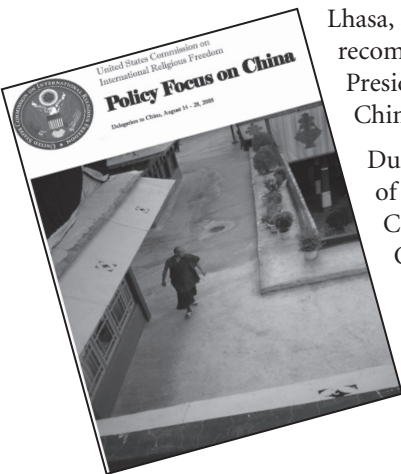
In November the Commission was joined by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA), Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA), Congressman Christopher Smith (R-NJ), and Congressman Mark Kennedy (R-MN) for the release of USCIRF's *Policy Focus on China* at a press conference in the Capitol. The findings and recommendations in *Policy Focus on China* are based on the Commission's August 2005 official two-week delegation to China, when the Commission traveled to Beijing, Urumqi, Kashgar, Chengdu, Lhasa, and Shanghai. The release of *Policy Focus on China* and its recommendations for U.S. policy were especially timely in light of President George W. Bush's November meeting in Beijing with Chinese President Hu Jintao.

During its extensive visit, which was the result of several years of diplomatic effort by the United States government, the Commission engaged Vice Premier Hui Liangyu, and senior Chinese officials at the national, provincial and local levels, who are responsible for the management of religious affairs and the protection of human rights. In addition, the Commission met with Chinese academics and lawyers, UN officials, and representatives

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USCIRF releases China Policy Focus at press conference with House Members (l-r) Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Frank Wolf (R-VA), Tom Lantos (D-CA), Mark Kennedy (R-MN), and Christopher Smith (R-NJ)



Commissioners

MICHAEL CROMARTIE, CHAIR
Vice President, Ethics and Public Policy Center

FELICE D. GAER, VICE CHAIR
Director, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights; The American Jewish Committee

NINA SHEA, VICE CHAIR
Director of the Center for Religious Freedom, Freedom House

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Partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom

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Archbishop of Denver

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RICHARD D. LAND, COMMISSIONER
President, Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

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Associate Director, Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs and Assistant Professor of International Relations, Boston University

BISHOP RICARDO RAMIREZ, COMMISSIONER
Bishop of the Diocese of Las Cruces, New Mexico

JOHN V. HANFORD III, EX-OFFICIO, NON-VOTING COMMISSIONER
Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State

JOSEPH R. CRAPA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Commission Reappointments and Election of Officers

In May Commissioners Felice D. Gaer, Nina Shea, and Bishop Ricardo Ramírez were re-appointed. Felice D. Gaer is the Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee. Nina Shea is the Director of the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House in Washington, D.C. Bishop Ricardo Ramírez is the bishop of the Diocese of Las Cruces, New Mexico, and member of the Committee on International Policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In July Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist appointed Dr. Richard D. Land to the Commission. Dr. Land, who previously served on the Commission as a White House appointee, is President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. He replaced Michael K. Young who served on the Commission since its inception in 1999.

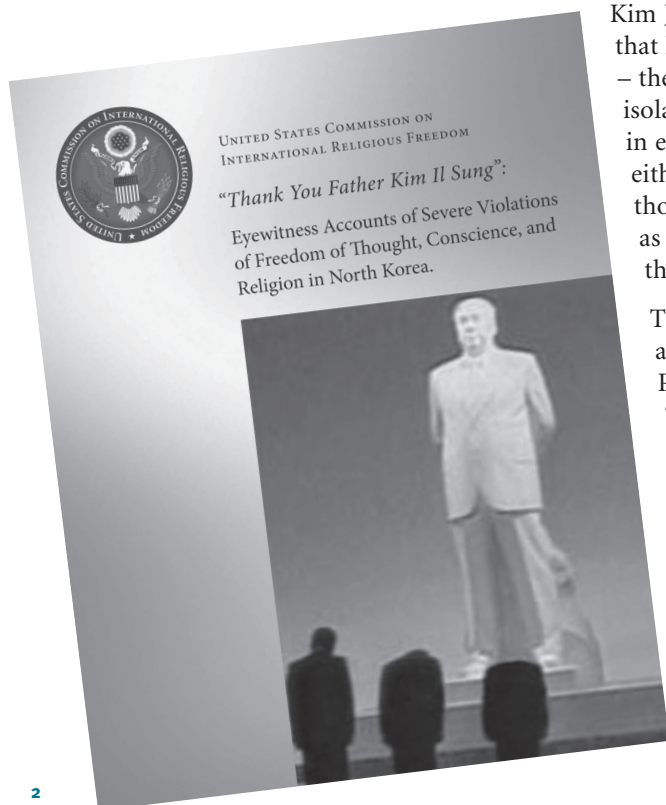
In July the USCIRF Commissioners elected Michael Cromartie to serve as Chair for 2005-2006. He is Vice President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C. Mr. Cromartie succeeded Commissioner Preeta D. Bansal as Chair. The election follows the Commission's practice of alternating the post of Chair yearly between Democratic and Republican appointees. The Commission also re-elected Felice D. Gaer and Nina Shea to serve as Vice Chairs.

Capitol Hill press conference for USCIRF North Korea study

In November, the Commission was joined by Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA), Congressman Christopher Smith (R-NJ), and Congressman Ed Royce (R-CA) at a press conference on Capitol Hill for the release of the USCIRF study "*Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung*": *Eyewitness Accounts of Severe Violations of Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion in North Korea*. The Commission's study, led by David Hawk, distinguished author of *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps*, presents evidence based on extensive, in-depth interviews with North Korean refugees and escapees on the policies used by the North Korean government to stamp out religious faith and practice, including eyewitness accounts of public executions of religious believers and indoctrination sessions at "Kim Il Sung Revolutionary Research Centers."

"*Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung*" tells the story of the systematic denigration of North Korea's once vibrant religious life, the conscious attempts to establish a quasi-religious cult of personality centered on Kim Il Sung and his son Kim Jong Il, and the survival of limited religious activity in North Korea. The study – the first of its kind by a U.S. government agency – reveals that Kim Jong Il fears that cross-border contacts will puncture the hermetic seal that he has tried, with considerable success, to place around North Korea – the seal that preserves the Kim dynasty and its 'divinity.' It is because of this isolationism that there is renewed interest by the North Korean government in ensuring that North Koreans coming back from China are not 'infected' either by South Korean democracy or any form of religious belief. Several of those interviewed for this study claim that faith in the "Dear Leader" is not as strong as it was before the famine of the 1990s, having been shaken by the crushing economic and other deprivations in North Korea.

The study, which was released on the eve of President Bush's trip to Asia and meetings with South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and Chinese President Hu Jintao, received front-page coverage in *The Los Angeles Times* on November 15. The Commission stresses in the study that as the international community deals with North Korea's nuclear aspirations, human rights objectives should not be put aside. Negotiations to end nuclear proliferation should include issues such as family reunification, abductions, rule-of-law development, market reforms, religious freedom, needs-based food distribution, and economic development. Toward that end, the study includes recommendations for U.S. policy, which can be found on the Commission's web site at www.uscirf.gov. (Staff contact: Scott Flipse)



COMPARATIVE MUSLIM CONSTITUTIONS STUDY

In March, the Commission released a major study—the first of its kind—on the constitutions of 44 predominantly Muslim nations in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In April, then-USCIRF Chair Preeta D. Bansal presented the findings of the study at a working session of Iraqi civil society in Amman, Jordan, convened under the auspices of the American Bar Association's (ABA) Iraq Legal Development Program. The Commission's study analyzes the constitutional provisions currently in place concerning the relationship between religion and the state, freedom of religion or belief, and other related human rights in predominantly Muslim countries.

The findings of the Commission's study include:

- More than half of the world's Muslim population (estimated at over 1.3 billion) lives in countries that are neither Islamic republics nor countries that have declared Islam to be the state religion. Thus, the majority of the world's Muslim population currently lives in countries that either proclaim the state to be secular, or that make no pronouncements concerning Islam to be the official state religion.
- Countries in which Islam is the declared state religion may provide constitutional guarantees of the right to freedom of religion or belief that compare favorably with international legal standards.
- Similarly, countries with Islam as the declared state religion may maintain constitutional provisions protecting the related rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly—or the rights of equality and nondiscrimination with regard to religion and gender—which compare favorably with international standards.
- A number of constitutions of predominantly Muslim countries incorporate or otherwise reference international human rights instruments and legal norms.

The study is available on the Commission's web site and was published in the *Georgetown Journal of International Law*. (Staff contact: Robert Blitt)



Commissioner Preeta D. Bansal with Sheikh Faith Al Kashif in Amman, Jordan

Egypt Briefing with Saad Eddin Ibrahim



Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Haleh Esfandiari, Commissioner Elizabeth H. Prodromou, and Vice Chair Nina Shea discuss USCIRF's Egypt Policy Focus, which was released at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

On June 1 at the Woodrow Wilson International Center in Washington, DC, the Commission released *Policy Focus on Egypt*. USCIRF Vice Chairs Felice D. Gaer and Nina Shea, and Commissioner Elizabeth Prodromou presented the findings of the *Policy Focus* and recommendations for U.S. policy. Prominent Egyptian human rights activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim was the commentator.

In its *Policy Focus on Egypt*, the Commission expresses serious concern about ongoing violations of the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief in Egypt, including widespread problems of discrimination and intolerance against members of minority Muslim, Christian, and other religious communities. These concerns led the Commission to include Egypt on its Watch List again this year.

Policy Focus on Egypt contains a number of recommendations for U.S. policy. Many of those recommendations were made on the basis of the Commission's July 2004 trip to Egypt, when the Commission met with senior Egyptian government officials—including Egypt's Foreign Minister—and religious leaders, human rights groups, women's rights advocates, scholars, educators, legal specialists, and others active in civil society, including Ibrahim.

Policy Focus on Egypt is available on the Commission's web site. (Staff contact: Dwight Bashir)



The Commission and Congress

Over the past year, the Commission has testified before and briefed Congress on numerous occasions about the conditions of religious freedom worldwide. In May Commission Chair Michael Cromartie testified before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on “Unrest in Uzbekistan: Crisis and Prospects.” In June Commission Vice Chair Nina Shea testified before the House International Relations Committee (HIRC) Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations at a hearing on human rights and religious freedom in Vietnam. In July Commission Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer testified before a Congressional Human Rights Caucus Members’ briefing on the human rights situation in Egypt. In October Commission Chair Michael Cromartie testified before a joint members’ briefing of the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam and the Congressional Human Rights Caucus on the ongoing religious freedom violations in Vietnam. In November Cromartie testified before the HIRC Human Rights Subcommittee on the State Department’s Annual Report on International Religious Freedom and its designation of “countries of particular concern” (CPCs). Also in November, Commissioner Prodromou testified before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus on “Religious Freedom in Egypt.”

In addition, the Commission’s findings and recommendations have been included in over 20 bills in the 109th Congress. All Commission Congressional testimony is available on the Commission web site at www.uscirf.gov. (Staff contact: Christy Klaassen)

HELSINKI COMMISSION AND CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT UZBEKISTAN EVENTS

In the midst of the crisis in Uzbekistan, Commissioner Michael Cromartie testified at a briefing of the United States Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, or Helsinki Commission, on “Unrest in Uzbekistan: Crisis and Prospects.” Senator Sam Brownback chaired the briefing. The briefing examined policy options for Washington and Tashkent in light of the events in Andijon, the causes of the crisis, the history of the regime, including its record of human rights abuses, and the regime’s relationship to the United States.

Commissioner Cromartie’s testimony was followed by the release of *Policy Focus on Uzbekistan* at a roundtable “Human Rights and Instability in Uzbekistan” held at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC. Commissioner Cromartie represented the Commission and was joined by Robert Templer, Director of the Asia Program at the International Crisis Group, who presented Crisis Group’s report, “Uzbekistan: the Andijon Uprising,” on recent events in Uzbekistan. The roundtable was chaired by Dr. Martha Brill Olcott, Senior Associate at Carnegie.

Policy Focus on Uzbekistan includes a number of recommendations for U.S. policy. Many of the

recommendations were formulated on the basis of a Commission trip to Uzbekistan in October 2004, when the Commission met with Uzbek government officials, human rights activists, religious leaders, and former prisoners in the Ferghana Valley, including in Andijon, as well as in Tashkent and Samarkand.

In April, the Commission for the first time recommended to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that the State Department designate Uzbekistan as a “country of particular concern.” CPC designation requires the U.S. government to take specific policy actions, which can include canceling economic and security assistance. The State Department has not named Pakistan, Turkmenistan, or Uzbekistan as CPCs.

Policy Focus on Uzbekistan is available on the Commission’s web site or through the Commission’s Communications Department. (Staff contact: Catherine Cosman)

USCIRF Commissioners participate in U.S. delegation to OSCE conference in Cordoba

Commissioner Archbishop Charles J. Chaput was named by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as a member of the nine-member U.S. delegation to the Conference on Anti-Semitism and on Other Forms of Intolerance sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which was held in June in Cordoba, Spain. USCIRF Vice Chair Nina Shea and Commissioner Michael Cromartie were named as advisors to the U.S. delegation, which was led by New York Governor George E. Pataki.

The Cordoba conference focused on practical steps to combat intolerance, including discrimination against religious and other minorities, building on last year’s OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism in Berlin and the Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination in Brussels. The OSCE consists of 55 nations, including the nations of Europe and Eurasia, the United States and Canada. (Staff contact: Catherine Cosman)

COMMISSIONER SHEA RECEIVES LELAND AWARD

On April 6, Commissioner Richard Land, accompanied by Dr. Barrett Duke, of the Southern Baptist Convention’s public policy arm, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, presented the 2002 John Leland Religious Liberty Award to Nina Shea at the offices of the Commission. The award was presented to Commissioner Shea in recognition of her lifetime achievements on behalf of advancing religious freedom worldwide.



Commissioner Richard D. Land presents USCIRF Vice Chair Nina Shea with the John Leland Religious Liberty Award

USCIRF Awaits Action by Homeland Security on Asylum Seekers Study



Commission and experts meet with Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, (l-r): Michael Cromartie, Bishop Ramirez, Allen Keller, Mark Hetfield, Preeta Bansal, Sec. Chertoff, Felice Gaer, Elizabeth Prodromou, Nina Shea, Kate Jastram, Joseph Crapa, Tad Stahnke

On February 8 at the National Press Club in Washington, the Commission released the findings of a *Report on Asylum Seekers in Expedited Removal* and recommendations for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The study received front-page coverage in *The New York Times*, and extensive coverage in major national media. On April 8, 2005, the Commission discussed the Study findings and recommendations with the leadership of the Executive Office for Immigration Review in DOJ, as well as with DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff. In July, Secretary Chertoff wrote the Commission that he planned to implement the recommendation that he appoint a high level official to coordinate refugee and asylum policy across agencies within DHS. A number of the Study recommendations were also raised in Reports by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, and during Senate confirmation hearings of a number of DHS appointees. The Commission, however, is still waiting for DHS to name the Senior Asylum Coordinator, and to issue its response to the remaining recommendations of the Study.

Expedited Removal, established by Congress in 1996, authorizes immigration officials to summarily return people to their country of origin if they arrive

in the United States without proper documentation. To prevent legitimate asylum seekers from being turned away, Congress established certain safeguards and authorized the Commission to appoint experts to study the treatment of asylum seekers subject to Expedited Removal.

Working with DHS and the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Commission secured unprecedented access to all aspects of the Expedited Removal process, including direct observations of immigration inspections, interviews with asylum seekers, analysis of over 1,000 alien files and records of proceedings, and a comprehensive statistical analysis of DHS and DOJ records. Members of the Commission participated in site visits to ports of entry, detention centers, and DHS offices during the Study.

The findings, set forth in two volumes exceeding 500 pages, uncovered flaws in the implementation of due process safeguards designed to protect those fleeing persecution, and documented the use of an inappropriate corrections-based model for detaining most non-criminal asylum seekers. In order to ensure that immigration officers and judges treat asylum seekers appropriately and respect the procedural safeguards promulgated to prevent improper removals, the Report recommends a number of improvements

to inter-agency coordination, quality assurance, access to legal advice, and conditions of detention.

The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) presented its 2005 Arthur C. Helton Human Rights Award to the Commission, its Expedited Removal Study experts, and their team of researchers. The Award was established in 1983 to recognize outstanding service in advancing the cause of human rights.

The Study is available on the Commission's web site or through the Commission's Communication's Department. (Staff contact: Mark Hetfield)



PAKISTAN HEARING ON CAPITOL HILL

In June the Commission held a hearing on Capitol Hill titled “The United States and Pakistan: Navigating a Complex Relationship.” The hearing examined the current state of U.S.-Pakistan relations. Commissioners heard testimony from Dr. Christine Fair of the U.S. Institute of Peace, Husain Haqqani of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Ambassador Karl Inderfurth of The George Washington University, and Danielle Pletka of the American Enterprise Institute.

Although the State Department continues to characterize Pakistan’s human rights record as “poor,” Pakistan is considered by the Administration to be a key ally in the war on terrorism and the country has received a substantial increase in U.S. assistance since 9/11. There is concern among some observers, however, that current U.S. policies have resulted in a muting of U.S. criticism of the Musharraf government’s democracy and human rights practices, which may ultimately be undermining U.S. anti-terrorism efforts.

Issues that witnesses addressed included: whether religious freedom and other human rights are being given the necessary focus in current U.S. policy toward Pakistan; whether the United States should be pressing the Pakistani government more strongly on its human rights concerns or whether such an action would threaten crucial U.S. counter-terrorism interests; whether the substantial increase in aid to Pakistan and other benefits, such as non-NATO ally status, are the right course of action; and whether the Musharraf government is doing enough to combat Islamic extremism and if not, what is the consequence for the U.S.’ war against terrorism. A full transcript of the hearing may be found on the Commission’s web site at www.uscirf.gov.

Since 2002, the Commission has recommended that Pakistan be named a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for severe violations of religious freedom. To date the State Department has not designated Pakistan a CPC. (Staff contact: Patricia Carley)



Expert witnesses Husain Haqqani, Christine Fair, Danielle Pletka, and Ambassador Karl Inderfurth deliver testimony to Commissioners

USCIRF URGES PAKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN AND TURKMENISTAN BE NAMED CPCs

On May 11 at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, the Commission announced its 2005 recommendations to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for “countries of particular concern,” or CPCs. CPCs are countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief. The Commission’s recommendations included for the first time Uzbekistan, where the Uzbek government’s policies on religious freedom foreshadowed the tragedy in Andijon. In addition, the Commission repeated its 2004 recommendations that the Secretary of State designate the following countries as CPCs: Burma, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), Eritrea, Iran, Pakistan, People’s Republic of China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam. India was removed from the Commission’s recommended list of CPC countries as a result of the positive developments taking place there since the 2004 elections.

The Commission also announced its Watch List countries. These are countries where conditions do not rise to the statutory level requiring CPC designation, but require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the governments. Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, and Nigeria remained on the Commission’s Watch List, and Bangladesh was added this year. Laos and Georgia were removed from the Watch List, although the Commission continues to monitor them closely. The Commission is also closely monitoring the situations in Afghanistan, India, Iraq, and Russia.

In addition to announcing CPCs, the Commission released its *2005 Annual Report* with recommendations on U.S. policy for the

President, Secretary of State, and Congress. The letter to Secretary Rice with CPC recommendations, background on the Commission’s CPC and Watch List countries, and USCIRF’s *2005 Annual Report* may be found on the Commission’s web site at www.uscirf.gov. Copies may also be obtained by contacting the Commission’s Communications Department at communications@uscirf.gov or (202) 523-3240, ext. 24. (Staff contact: Patricia Carley)

USCIRF ATTENDS UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS SESSION IN GENEVA

In April, USCIRF Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer and Commissioner Michael Cromartie presented the preliminary findings from the Commission’s North Korea study at a luncheon hosted in USCIRF’s honor by the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, during the annual meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Commissioners were joined by David Hawk, who was the Commission’s Project Manager for its North Korea study. Attendees included U.S. Ambassador Kevin Moley, former Senator Rudy Boschwitz, head of the U.S. delegation to the UN Commission on Human Rights, Ambassadors from 29 countries, and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour.

While in Geneva, Commissioners also discussed with U.S. and foreign officials USCIRF’s findings on severe violations of human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, in such countries as Belarus, Cuba, Turkmenistan, Sudan, Uzbekistan, and Iran.

Commissioners also met with Acting High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Wendy Chamberlin. They discussed ways to provide protection for North Korean refugees in China and Montagnard refugees in Cambodia. In addition, USCIRF met

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COMMISSIONER GAER DELEGATE TO WARSAW CONFERENCE

Commission Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer was an official member of the U.S. delegation to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meeting held in Warsaw, Poland in September. The U.S. delegation was headed by Lorne R. Craner, former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. The annual Warsaw meeting is Europe's largest human rights conference, and the OSCE's most important human rights event of the year. Its purpose is to examine implementation of the human rights commitments in OSCE's founding document, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, and other commitments made since then.

Participants from government and civil society devoted special attention to future planning to combat intolerance and discrimination, including antisemitism, discrimination against Muslims, xenophobia and related intolerance, including Christianophobia. These topics have been a special focus of USCIRF's concern in the OSCE. (Staff contact: Catherine Cosman)

COMMISSION TO TEXAS

Commission Chair Michael Cromartie and Commissioner Richard Land traveled to Houston, Texas in September to address the conference "Tolerance and Its Limits" at The Boniuk Center for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance at Rice University. In addition, the Commissioners met with the Editorial Board of *The Houston Chronicle* and attended a private roundtable with the Saudi Foreign Minister at the James A. Baker Institute for Public Policy.

ERITREA POLICY BRIEF

The Commission released its *Policy Focus on Eritrea* in May 5 testimony to the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations of the House International Relations Committee. The policy brief includes specific recommendations for U.S. policy, including actions the State Department should take as a consequence of designating Eritrea a "country of particular concern" in September 2004. The Commission had recommended that Eritrea be designated as a CPC.

In October 2004, the Commission sent a delegation to Eritrea to examine religious freedom conditions there and to gather information to aid in the development of recommendations for United States policy to promote freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief in Eritrea.

Policy Focus on Eritrea can be found on the Commission's web site or through the Commission's Communications Department. (Staff contact: Steve Snow)

ROUNDTABLES ON RUSSIA AND IRAN

In advance of the February 24 meeting between Presidents Bush and Putin, the Commission held a briefing on Capitol Hill in conjunction with the Kennan Institute on current Russian government policies towards religion and anti-Semitism in Russia. USCIRF Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer led the discussion featuring three experts on religion in Russia: Paul Goble, Nikolai Butkevich, and Lawrence A. Uzzell.

In April the Commission held a public briefing on the troubling rise of religious intolerance in Russia, and efforts that are being made to combat it, with the General Director of the Human Rights Institute, Moscow, and two representatives of The Climate of Trust program, an innovative religious tolerance program operating in Russia.

In May the Commission hosted members of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC), a non-partisan organization based in New Haven, Connecticut that seeks to remedy a deficit in the systematic, objective, and analytical documentation of human rights violations committed in Iran since the 1979 revolution. They discussed the deteriorating religious freedom situation in Iran, especially the plight of religious minorities and Muslim dissidents. In 2004, the U.S. Department of State provided \$1 million in funding for the IHRDC through its Human Rights and Democracy Fund to "promote respect for human rights and democracy in Iran." (Staff contacts: Catherine Cosman and Dwight Bashir)

COMMISSION AT CHAUTAUQUA

Commissioner and past Chair Preeta D. Bansal gave an address titled "Religious Freedom in U.S. Foreign Policy" at the Chautauqua Institution in New York in July. The program's theme was "The Law in Religion and Society." The Chautauqua Institution's nine-week session each summer is built around the four pillars of arts, education, religion and recreation, and attracts major international figures. Chautauqua seeks to "lay the groundwork not only for peace among the religions but for peace in the world."



USCIRF visit to China; Policy Focus released at press conference with Congressional Members

of government-sanctioned Buddhist, Catholic, Taoist, Islamic, and Protestant religious organizations.

The Commission raised questions on Chinese law and international human rights norms, the management of religious affairs in China, Chinese policies concerning religious education of minors and unregistered religious organizations, new regulations on cults and religious affairs, the unique situations in Tibet and Xinjiang, and the situation for North Korean asylum-seekers in China. The Commission also raised specific cases of concern with law enforcement officials and was allowed to meet with Tibetan Buddhist nun Phuntsog Nyidron during its visit to Lhasa. The Commission pressed Chinese authorities to restore her freedom of movement so that she could get needed medical attention outside of China.

The Commission continues to find that the Chinese government systematically violates the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, contravening both the Chinese constitution and international human rights norms. The room for political openness, public activism, and greater civil and individual freedoms is narrowing in China. Particularly vulnerable are Catholics and Protestants engaged in unregistered activities, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, and members of religious and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong.

Given the ongoing critical human rights problems in China, the Commission believes that these concerns must be raised at the highest levels and that U.S. officials should provide a consistent, candid, and coordinated message about human rights, including religious freedom, in their interactions with Chinese officials.

Policy Focus on China, which includes extensive recommendations for U.S. policy, is available on the Commission's web site at www.uscirf.gov. (Staff contact: Scott Flipse)



USCIRF delegation and Buddhist monks in Beijing



Commissioners Land, Gaer, Bansal, and Ramirez after meeting with Phuntsog Nyidron (center)

USCIRF Attends UN Commission on Human Rights Session in Geneva

with the Special Rapporteur for North Korea Vitit Muntabhorn and cited the need to address freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief more amply in his next report. (Staff contact: Scott Flipse)

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