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April 5, 2001

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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has written to Secretary of State Colin Powell and Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill recommending actions in response to religious-freedom violations in Vietnam.

The Commissioners recommended to Treasury Secretary O'Neill that the United States should withhold its support for International Monetary Fund and World Bank loans to the government of Vietnam (except those providing for basic human needs) until the government of Vietnam agrees to make substantial improvements in the protection of religious freedom. Press reports indicate such loans could be finalized this month.

In its letter to Secretary of State Powell, the Commission recommended that until religious freedom significantly improves in Vietnam, the U.S. government should initiate or support a resolution to censure Vietnam at the annual meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva and should engage in a sustained campaign to convince other governments to support it. In addition, the Commission respectfully urged the Secretary to use the opportunity of his July trip to engage the Vietnamese government in serious discussions of religious freedom in Vietnam. It further recommended that he impress upon Vietnamese officials that the promotion of religious freedom is indispensable to the continuation of healthy and increasingly close relations between Vietnam and the United States.

“Despite the increase in religious practice among the Vietnamese people in the last 10 years, the Vietnamese government suppresses organized religious activities forcefully and monitors and controls religious communities,” wrote Commission Chairman Elliott Abrams in both letters. “The government prohibits religious activity by those not affiliated with one of the six officially recognized religious organizations. Individuals have been detained, fined, imprisoned, and kept under close surveillance by security forces for engaging in “illegal” religious activities. In addition, the government uses the recognition process

to monitor and control officially sanctioned religious groups: restricting the procurement and distribution of religious literature, controlling religious training, and interfering with the selection of religious leaders."

The full text of the letters is available from the Commission's Communications office at the above telephone number. The Commission's letter to Secretary Powell can be viewed on-line [here](#) and the Commission's letter to Secretary O'Neill can be viewed on-line [here](#)

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

Hon. Elliott Abrams
- Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh