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LAWRENCE GOODRICH: Good morning. My name is Lawrence Goodrich. I am the Communications Director for the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and I'd like to introduce to you our Chairman, Elliott Abrams, who

will lead off with some opening remarks, after which we will be happy to take questions from members of the press.

ELLIOTT ABRAMS: Thank you. Good morning. As Larry Goodrich said, I'm Elliott Abrams, Chairman of the Commission this year and I just have an opening statement following which we will all respond to your questions.

Today, the Commission issues its second Annual Report as required by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. This report fulfills an important part of the Commission's mandate to provide independent policy advice to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress on ways to promote international religious freedom.

The report is the culmination of hours of work by the nine Commissioners, all of whom have – if you will – day jobs and serve without compensation. Let me introduce the members of the Commission. Professor Firuz Kazemzadeh is the Vice Chairman of the Commission, Professor Emeritus of history at Yale, and Special Advisor to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States. Dr. Laila Al-Marayati, past president of the Muslim Women's League. John Bolton, Senior Vice President of the American Enterprise Institute and Undersecretary of State Designate for Arms Control and International Security Affairs. Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, who is the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Washington, DC. Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reformed Judaism and the first Chairman of the Commission when it was formed two years ago. Nine Shea, Director of the Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom House and who just served as a public delegate on the U.S. delegation to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Justice Charles Z. Smith of the Supreme Court of the State of Washington. And Dean Michael Young, Dean of the George Washington University Law School, who was the first Vice Chairman of the Commission.

I'd like to add that we could not have produced a report of this magnitude without the efforts of the entire staff, led by our Executive Director Steven McFarland. As I noted a moment ago, this report consists of policy recommendations to the Executive branch and Congress. It is not a country-by-country review of every religious freedom violation we could find. That is the role of the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report, which is released each September.

Our job is to study that report and gather additional information through public hearings, meetings with nongovernmental and religious organizations, our own travel, and briefings by experts, and to come up with policy recommendations that the U.S. government can implement to promote religious freedom abroad.

Last year, we focused on three countries: China, Russia, and Sudan. This year, with a full year to work and the experience of our first report behind us, we were able to expand our activities greatly to cover more countries and some additional issues. This year's annual report touches on religious freedom issues in almost two dozen countries. Besides updating China, Russia, and Sudan, we have made specific recommendations on

India, Indonesia, Iran, North Korea, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Vietnam. We have additionally explored the right to persuade another person to change his or her religion and have made recommendations regarding U.S. capital markets and foreign assistance.

Some of these reports and recommendations were issued during the past year and we have updated them for inclusion in today's Annual Report. I should note here that the countries we report on today are not the entire list of serious violators of religious freedom, nor are all of them equally bad. Russia, despite its problems, enjoys a much larger degree of religious freedom than many of the others. In Indonesia and Nigeria, the problem is not a central government that violates religious freedom, but local or state officials and private citizens doing so in violation of the central government's wishes.

There is no way I can adequately summarize an almost 200-page report in just a couple of minutes this morning. Let me hit a few of the highlights. These observations and recommendations represent the consensus of Commissioners. China: the situation in China has grown worse over the past year, as the government has intensified its crackdown on the Falun Gong spiritual movement, on unregistered Protestant and Catholic Christians, on Tibetan Buddhists, and on Uighur Muslims. The Commission believes that the U.S. government must make religious freedom a higher priority in bilateral relations. We reiterate last years' recommendations, including that the U.S. government do all it can to ensure that Beijing is not selected as a site for the Olympic games.

India. In India, a disturbing increase in violence against minority Christians and Muslims committed mostly by Hindu nationalists has coincided with the accession to power of the ruling BJP government, which relies on these nationalists for its core support. The U.S. government must step up the human rights dialogue with the Indian government and bolster New Delhi's defense of religious minorities. U.S. foreign assistance funds should be used to support civic groups that teach and foster religious tolerance.

Indonesia. As Indonesia struggles with centrifugal forces trying to tear the country asunder, the most serious religious violence has occurred in the Moluccan Islands, where up to 8,000 Christians and Muslims have died in sectarian violence. The violence reached new and more deadly levels when a self-appointed militia of Muslim Laskar Jihad fighters arrived from outside the islands and stepped up attacks on Christians. The U.S. government must press Indonesia to disarm and remove all outside forces from the Moluccas and allow the forces of reconciliation and justice to prevail.

Iran. Like China, Iran has been named by the Secretary of State as a country of particular concern, one of the worst religious freedom violators. Baha'is, whom the government refuses to recognize as a religious minority, get the worst of it, but the situation is grim for Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and dissident Muslims as well. In its discussion with Iran, the U.S. must reemphasize that improvements in religious freedom and other human rights are a prerequisite for normalization of Iranian-American relations.

North Korea. The State Department notes that in North Korea, quote, “Genuine religious freedom does not exist,” close quote. The government imprisons, tortures, and sometimes executes religious believers and suppresses all religious activity except that which serves state interests. The U.S. government must insist on improvements in religious freedom and improved access for outside observers to monitor religious freedom conditions as a key part of any improvement in relations with Pyongyang.

Nigeria. Nigeria is, like Indonesia, a country returning to democracy and struggling to maintain it. Moves to implement Sharia as the criminal law in several northern states have exacerbated tensions between Christians and Muslims in the country and led to thousands of deaths and civil unrest. The U.S. government must bolster Nigeria’s resolve to prevent communal violence and bring those who engage in it to justice. U.S. foreign assistance should also be directed at building tolerance and Washington should press the Nigerian government to ensure equal treatment of all religious groups in the workplace, in education, and in access to broadcast media.

Pakistan. The government of Pakistan is clearly not doing enough to protect the country’s religious communities. Ahmadis are prevented by law from fully practicing their faith. Religious minorities are jailed or worse under the country’s blasphemy law, and a system of separate electorates for religious minorities politically marginalizes them. In addition, a campaign of violence by Sunni radicals targets Shi’a Muslims, who then engage in reprisal attacks. The U.S. should press Pakistan to scrap the separate electorate system, amend the blasphemy law, and repeal laws and practices targeting the Ahmadis.

Russia. Freedom of religion in Russia remains threatened with some 1,500 religious groups facing liquidation for failing to meet a December 31, 2000, registration deadline. While the Putin government appears to be committed to the principle of religious freedom, it remains to be seen how vigorous it will be in addressing the nation’s many religious freedom problems, which occur mainly at the local and regional levels. The Commission reaffirms its May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 recommendations regarding Russia and suggests a list of criteria for the Bush administration to use in deciding whether to certify under the Smith amendment that Russia is protecting religious freedom.

Sudan. The Commission has found that the government of Sudan is the world’s most violent abuser of the right to freedom of religion and belief and that it is committing genocidal atrocities against the civilian population in the south in the Nuba Mountains. Tragically, the situation in Sudan has grown worse in the 12 months since the release of last year’s Annual Report. The government of Sudan continues to commit egregious human rights abuses, including widespread bombing of civilian and humanitarian targets, abduction and enslavement of women and children by government-sponsored militias, manipulation of humanitarian assistance as a weapon of war, and severe restrictions on religious freedom. The relationship between oil and the government’s actions has become clearer.

The U.S. government should now step up humanitarian aid to southern Sudan and the National Democratic Alliance, the Sudanese opposition. Commissioner Al-Marayati

has issued a concurring separate opinion in this regard. The President should appoint a prominent, high-level envoy to work for a just and peaceful settlement of the war pursuant to the agreed declaration of principles and to press for an end to the Sudanese government's atrocities against civilians in the south, but the United States should not appoint an ambassador to Khartoum at this time. That would only reward the regime for increased abuses.

Foreign companies doing business in Sudan that want to offer securities in U.S. markets should be required to disclose the full extent of their dealings in that country. Foreign companies involved in developing Sudan's oil and gas fields should be barred from U.S. stock exchanges. And we believe the U.S. should stop importing gum arabic from Sudan.

Vietnam. In Vietnam, the government prohibits religious activity by those not affiliated with one of six officially recognized religious organizations. Individuals have been detained, fined, imprisoned, and kept under surveillance for engaging in illegal, that is to say, unauthorized, religious activities. In addition, the government uses that recognition process to monitor and control officially sanctioned religious groups. The U.S. Congress should ratify the pending bilateral trade agreement with Vietnam only after it passes a sense of the Congress resolution calling for the Vietnamese government to make substantial improvements in the protection of religious freedom or after the Vietnamese government undertakes obligations to the U.S. to make such improvements. We've suggested a set of criteria for measuring religious freedom conditions, and until Hanoi makes progress in this regard the U.S. should also withhold support for IMF and World Bank loans to Vietnam, except those for basic human needs.

One further point on the question of capital markets: the Commission proposes that any American or foreign issuer of securities be required to disclose its business activities in any country designated by the Secretary of State under the Religious Freedom Act as a country of particular concern. This disclosure would inform institutional and private American investors of all the risks involved in purchasing those countries' securities. And the U.S. government, including Congress, needs to study how foreign companies structure their securities offerings and manipulate corporate relationships to get around U.S. economic sanctions.

All of those findings and recommendations are set forth in much more detail in the report, which is available in hardcopy and at our website, which is [www.uscirf.gov](http://www.uscirf.gov). One last observation before everyone takes your questions: our terms – the terms of all of us on the Commission now expire in two weeks on May 14<sup>th</sup> under the Religious Freedom Act. The Commissioners are a politically, religiously, and professionally very diverse group of people, yet for two years we've worked harmoniously together to present first the Clinton Administration, now the Bush Administration, recommendations for promoting international religious freedom. That is not to say we haven't had disagreements, but despite these differences we have been able to come together in a bipartisan manner. We haven't had a single party-line vote in two years. I think that's

testimony to my fellow Commissioners' devotion to the cause of religious freedom, and I would like personally to thank all of them for their commitment and hard work.

We'd like to make, all of us, a final plea to President Bush, Senators Lott and Daschle, Speaker Hastert and Representative Gephardt to appoint new Commissioners as soon as possible so that they can take office May 15<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you, and we will all now take your questions.

MR. GOODRICH: For the benefit especially of our out-of-town Commissioners if the reporters could just quickly give their name and news organization, we'll take your questions now.

Yes, Mr. Kempster?

Q: Norman Kempster with the *Los Angeles Times*. Can you name some of the countries – or companies that are involved in the Sudan oil and gas fields – the companies that you want out of U.S. capital markets?

MR. ABRAMS: This may not be a fully inclusive list. The one that's gotten the most publicity recently is Talisman of Canada. Other companies involved, Total Fina Elf of France, Lundin Oil of Sweden, Petronas of Malaysia. All four of those companies have raised money – Petro China – have raised money on U.S. capital markets.

MR. GOODRICH: Sir?

Q: Yeah, the Chinese government – my name's – (inaudible) – I'm from Radio Free Asia. The Chinese government is to dismiss the reliability of this report also saying that this is religious right propaganda. Any comments on that?

MR. ABRAMS: Commissioner Nina Shea?

MS. SHEA: The Chinese – the question is does the Chinese government dismiss this report as religious propaganda. This primarily is not a fact-finding report. This is a policy recommendation report. We rely on the facts that are provided to us by the U.S. government, the State Department, and they found that the situation had worsened in China regarding religious freedom. We also heard from NGOs and others. And so while we did not do our own fact-finding and we couldn't because the Chinese government wouldn't let us into the country – would not allow us to come as a Commission – we're really looking at policy recommendations based on the reliable facts of others. It's not propaganda. It's indisputable that there are Catholic bishops being thrown into jail just this month. There are Falun Gong by the thousands that have been put in labor camps. The Uighur community, the Tibetan Buddhist community, the Protestant community all have suffered increased repression and that's why the document – (off mike).

Q: David Snyder with CBN. I want to ask, with all the many controversies characterizing divisions between the U.S. and China at the moment, how realistic is it to hope that religious freedom issues will become a more prominent issue in negotiations between the two countries?

MS. SHEA: Well, I think it is going to become prominent and it's already been made prominent by a statement recently of President Bush where he talked about – I think it was last week where he mentioned that he was very concerned about the increase of religious repression, typically in this case it was right after the Catholic bishops were imprisoned, so I think that we're going to see a greater concern particularly on religion because this has been the dominant issue not only with us, but with the press and reality in China.

There has been just a sharp deterioration that's very obvious to everyone and everyone is talking about it, so I think we can see the Administration taking it into consideration as it develops relations with China, certainly in its negotiations our hope is that it would raise it and then in Congress as well. And there are a number of committees formed and looking at the situation in China. I know there's a hearing this week on religious persecution in China.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes, sir?

Q: Tom Carter with the *Washington Times*. President Clinton delinked human rights from trade issues and other issues regarding China. Would you like to see human rights and religious freedom, and so forth, linked again, and also for Ms. Shea, do you think the Chinese link these issues? You just came back from Geneva I understand. I mean, it seems to be that they focus on it. I'd like your point of view.

MR. ABRAMS: I think we would like to see a linkage between religious freedom and every other part of the bilateral relationship the United States has with China. That does not – that is not to say that any particular piece of legislation, any particular American action, should have as a prerequisite some kind of Chinese actions on human rights.

It does mean, however, in our view that we need to have at least this minimum concern. When we act without regard for religious freedom, there is a danger that that action will be interpreted by the Chinese government or the Chinese people as a manifestation of indifference. The Commission last year urged Congress not to vote for PNTR without taking action on religious freedom, either beforehand or simultaneously. The reason we did that was precisely this: we said that there was a danger that the government of China will say, you see, when it comes to trade that trade trumps all and they're not interested in human rights. And in fact there's been a serious and visible deterioration, as Commissioner Shea just said, in religious freedom in China in the years since PNTR was voted.

We take this same view with respect to the bilateral trade agreement with Vietnam. We have not said – we have not urged Congress don't vote for the bilateral trade agreement. What we've said is do something about religious freedom in Vietnam beforehand or simultaneously to make sure that whatever else you're doing in the case of PNTR or the BTA with Vietnam – its trade – to make sure that those moves are not misinterpreted as an expression of indifference to religious freedom. So in that sense I think we would say there should always be a link between anything we do in religious freedom to make sure the message is driven home that for the American people, for Congress, for the Administration, religious freedom is a critical and fundamental value.

MS. SHEA: Tom, regarding your question about whether the Chinese link – yeah, I think it's pretty obvious openly done in a session at the plenary session of the UN Human Rights Commission when Romania voted with the United States against China's no-action motion which would insulate it from debate on its human rights record and in open session the Chinese threatened Romania and said that there would be reprisals. And I know that the American delegation – the U.S. delegation was very shocked about this.

Also, the UN Correspondents' Association hosted a briefing for Falun Gong and it was a press briefing and the UN Correspondents' Association organized it. I have the letter that the Chinese government sent to this Correspondents' Association and they threatened the president of it and again bullied and warned of reprisals and saying that he was a suspicious character. So they're quite open about taking reprisals and bullying tactics.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes, sir?

Q: – with *India Abroad*. Mr. Abrams, how would you want the U.S. to deal with democracies like India, for example, vis-à-vis religious persecution? Would you like them to take the same posture that you recommend in terms of an authoritarian government like China – linking trade with religious persecution? There are already sanctions for nuclear nonproliferation. Do you like those things to be extended in terms of religious persecution too?

MR. ABRAMS: No. What we've said about India is, first, that the subject should be a matter of dialogue with the government of India. That is, that American officials should make clear in conversations, in diplomatic discussions with officials of the government of India that there's a lot of attention being paid in the United States to this problem. It's getting more publicity rather than less and that it will affect the bilateral relationship. So, first, show how much concern we have.

Secondly, we have asked that – in our assistance programs with respect to India, we try to see if there are ways that organizations like AID or the National Endowment for Democracy can be helpful – can help organizations in India that are dedicated to and working on raising the level of communal harmony, of interreligious harmony, in fighting against the kind of tensions and worse yet violence that we've seen in the last couple of years.

So the approach in the case of India is to see if the United States can push harder to get the Indian government to crack down on violations, particularly of acts of violence, and also to see if there's a way for the United States to be more helpful in our own programs.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes?

Q: -- magazine. My question is for Dr. Al-Marayati. Could you comment on your individual opinion where you state that establishing objective criteria could eliminate the potential for bias and double standards in the future?

MR. ABRAMS: Commissioner Laila Al-Marayati.

LAILA AL-MARAYATI: I raised that point as something in terms of thinking about the future for the Commission as obviously the Commission expanded its scope of countries that it's looking at from three countries the first year to almost 10 this year that I think it's important when you do that because each country brings with it different issues that we -- that the Commission try to establish some standard or threshold by which a country must meet in order to be considered, whether it's the language that's already identified in the Religious Freedom Act or other criteria that the Commission establishes for itself, or some combination, but I think that would ensure that especially as they open up the discussion to show that the Commission is focusing on the countries who at least meet the minimum standards to be a subject of discussion for us.

Q: The idea of a special envoy in Sudan has been floated in Congress. Is there any reaction so far as we're aware from the State Department?

MR. : If I remember correctly, Secretary Powell was asked about this in testimony last week and he said he hadn't made up his mind, so of course there's no reaction to this report because it's only being released today. The idea is obviously floating around and has a good deal of support and we wanted to add our voices strongly to weigh in on the side that says a special envoy would be extremely useful.

Q: I wonder if we have anybody specifically in mind?

MR. : No, we've never discussed -- even internally we've never debated that question and we've made no suggestion.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. ABRAMS: Commissioner David Saperstein.

DAVID SAPERSTEIN: We do have certain criteria that we have recommended, however -- that it ought to be someone of significant presence, someone with access to the President and the Secretary of State, someone with the kind of prestige that can open

doors in other capitals and make that person an effective partner with the Secretary of State and on behalf of the President in terms of carrying out the efforts to reach some kind of accommodation to end the strife in Sudan, restore some kind of degree of tolerance and civic normality that is indispensable to religious life being able to be lived openly and publicly. So the characteristics of the kind of person that we were looking for have been –

Q: -- Which party or parties would you hope to come to the table on the side of the south?

MR. : Well, there are – there have been discussions ongoing for some time now and the umbrella group I guess is the National Democratic Alliance.

MR. GOODRICH: Mr. Kempster?

Q: On countries with democratic or semi-democratic governments like India, Russia, et cetera, you are calling for the United States to assist their efforts to crack down on religious persecution by individuals in the country.

Could I ask an analytical point? If the United States follows your recommendation and does this, will this then establish a benchmark as to how serious these other governments really are about stopping religious persecution?

MR. : Well, it is one way of measuring that. There are a number of cases where it seems to us much of the problem is at the local, provincial, regional level and the central government may be the solution rather than the problem. And the question then is how much energy – how much dedication will the central government put into trying to right these wrongs, trying to enforce its own laws, in many cases trying to prevent people at local levels from violating those laws. It is – from that point of view it's a very reasonable way of judging the commitment of those governments to improving the respect for religious freedom.

Any further questions?

Q: Al Milliken from Washington Independent Writers. Was there any kind of lobbying or any attempts at significantly trying to influence the report from individuals or even any governments – foreign governments?

MR. : No. We have had a number of cases in which governments have stated their cases to us in attempting to explain why they thought the situation was not as bad as we may have painted it or explained why the problem of religious freedom exists in that particular country, but there have been no efforts to influence the content of the Annual Report.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes, ma'am?

Q: Tracy (inaudible) with Associated Press TV. Have you any indication of how the Bush administration is going to receive this report? Have you had – has anyone worked with them in advance?

MR. : We have had – it would be unfair to ask Commissioner Bolton to respond. (Laughter.) We are sure that in a couple of days – we've had – we had many meetings with officials of the Clinton administration at all levels from the President and Secretary of State and National Security Advisor down to office director levels in the State Department and in other agencies.

We assume and anticipate that we will have such meetings with the Bush Administration. We have started having meetings, in fact, and meetings and less formal contacts and I would say we have no special information about the Administration's response other than the fact that, as I think Commissioner Shea mentioned, the President has referred to religious freedom problems in China and Sudan on several occasions. And we would anticipate having and hope to have the same access in this Administration that we did in the previous one.

MS. SHEA: Also, I want to refer you to, I think it was –

[TAPE CHANGE.]

-- holding up international financial institution laws because of religious persecution, but  
–

MR. : Any further questions from reporters?

Sir?

Q: Al Milliken again. Since some of the human rights violations by the United States government or military have been coming to light in recent months and have been dealt with in the media, and particularly in situations in Vietnam and Korea, how – is this anything that you've taken into effect or do you see that influencing these other governments in relation to the way they deal with human rights today as opposed to the way the United States is dealing with past human rights violations that are now known?

MR. : The United States deals with human rights violations here through a free press, an elected government, and an independent judiciary. Were it possible to deal with human rights violations in Vietnam today that way, the level of human rights violations there, including religious freedom violations, would certainly decrease.

I want to remind you that the Commission has only one area in which it's permitted to work under the International Religious Freedom Act and that's religious freedom. If there are other human rights violations in a country, for example the

violations of the freedom of the press or if there are not free elections in a country, unless there is a direct relationship to freedom of religion that is not something that the Commission would have anything to do with.

MR. GOODRICH: Yes, sir?

Q: Are U.S. – you seem to be implying that U.S. investors are subsidizing the repression of religious freedom in these countries. Is that accurate?

MR. ABRAMS: Well, there are some gaps in the securities laws as we see them, due to which American investors cannot always be sure precisely what the companies they are investing in are in fact doing in countries around the world. They may not know, for example, in investing in a company that it is involved in the oil industry in Sudan. That's why we call for more disclosure of any activity in a country designated by the Secretary of State as a country of particular concern.

With respect to the oil and gas interests in Sudan, we do call for barring those companies from the U.S. markets. In the last four or five months, that is to say this year, there's been an awful lot of information coming out about the role of the oil industry in Sudan. Recently, a delegation of Catholic bishops of the United States came back. The Harker Commission last year in Canada made reports. There was an article about two or three weeks ago in the "Economist" magazine. All of these have essentially the same conclusion that oil is now playing a central role in the human rights atrocities in Sudan.

The very least that we would hope is that Americans would think about that – would have the information that allows them to think about that before making those investments and then we go further and say that investing in the oil industry in Sudan should really be barred because we have reached the conclusion, as have so many other people around the world, that the development of the oil industry in Sudan is now both a cause and an incentive for human rights violations.

Q: Could you comment on China and its bid for the Olympics?

MR. : Last year, we said, and this year we reiterated, that we do not think it is right for the United States to support those Olympic games being in Beijing. It's not just a general symbolic question, although it is that; it's also true that there isn't any reason to believe that the people going to China for those games would in fact be able to practice their religions freely.

MR. ABRAMS: Any further questions from the press?

Okay, thank you very much and thank you to the Commissioners.

(END)