

**U.S. COMMISSION
ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

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MICHAEL YOUNG: Good morning. My name is Michael Young. I am Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom as well as the Dean of the George Washington University Law School. We're delighted to welcome you to this press conference today where we will release our Annual Report and describe, as briefly as we can, a bit about the contents of that report.

The format for today's conference is I will introduce our report and what we have done over the past year then turn the microphone over to my fellow Commissioners. We'll each talk in turn about a few of the countries with respect to which we have paid particular attention this year and made particular recommendations, after which we'd be delighted to open it up for questions and answers, if we may.

As you know, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom is an independent federal advisory commission created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. Its statutory mandate is to monitor freedom of religion around the world and to advise the President, the Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor and the Congress regarding ways in which U.S. foreign policy can be designed to help countries around the world further advance that particular ambition and goal, particularly as international religious freedom is defined in the UN conventions and the various international human rights treaties to which most countries in the world are parties.

It is the first commission, as far as we know, in the world – first government commission with this mandate to review and report and advise its government on these issues. Our design is to provide a public, reliable information analysis and creative and responsible policy recommendations to the U.S. government to help the United States government develop the tools to address this issue.

The Commission began its work in May of 1999, is not a part of the State Department, and is independent of the Executive branch. It's composed of 10 members, four of whom are here today. Three are appointed by the President, three are appointed by the president pro tem of the Senate, of which two are appointed upon the recommendation of the Senate minority leader and three are appointed by the Speaker of the House, of which two are appointed on the recommendation of the House minority leader.

We have with us today Commissioner Nina Shea, who is the Vice Chairman of the Commission and the Director for the Center for Religious Freedom of Freedom House. To her right is Archbishop Chaput, who is the Archbishop of the Denver diocese. And to my immediate right is Dr. Richard Land, who was President and CEO of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. These individuals, and the other Commissioners who are not with us today, bring a wealth of expertise in foreign affairs, human rights, religious freedom, and international law. Their

membership reflects not only the political diversity of the United States but the religious diversity as well.

In carrying out our mandate, we review the State Department's report on religious freedom and human rights. It's two reports. We review, extensively, information provided to us and available from other human rights organizations, from faith-based organizations that monitor these issues, as well as having our own research staff. We hold hearings. We have briefings. We also traveled to these countries in the past year – have traveled to a number of countries, again, to study these issues.

We have had, over the past year, the opportunity as well to meet and work closely with a number of senior officials in both the Executive and the Legislative branches. We have met frequently with members of Congress both on the House and the Senate side. We have met with senior administrative officials including the Deputy Secretary of State, the Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor and the President, all of which have given us occasions to talk about these issues as well as to press our concerns.

The Commission raises its issues and these findings and recommendations to the public through various speaking activities, public events, roundtables, opinion pieces that have been published in a variety of journals including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and we have traveled to different parts of the country to hold hearings on these issues as well.

While the work of the Commission is conducted year-round and our recommendations are made on a frequent basis, we are also statutorily mandated to compile our work in an Annual Report containing a summary of our policy recommendations in May and submit that to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress. This report, which we are releasing today, covers the period from May 1, 2003 to April 3rd of 2004.

Under the International Religious Freedom Act, one of the main tools available to the President is to single out and particularly identify those countries of particular concern, which are to say, under the statute, countries engaged in egregious, ongoing, systematic abuse of freedom of religion, thought, conscience and belief. In defining these violations, the International Religious Freedom Act specifically refers to the internationally recognized right to freedom of religion and religious belief, and practice is laid out in such international instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In that regard, we have recommended to Secretary Powell that he designate 11 countries as countries of particular concern, where in our judgment there is particular, systematic, egregious and ongoing abuse. They include Burma, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea, India – by majority vote of the Commission – Iran, Pakistan, the People's Republic of China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam. And we will briefly discuss each of those – most of those countries in turn in a moment.

The Commission has been unable to comment this year on the Secretary's designations of CPCs because those designations have not yet been made. When they are made, the Commission will also comment on those. In the past, some of those countries have been designated. Others have not. And we are urging with particular vigor this year that those that haven't been named are named this year, including particularly Vietnam, Turkmenistan, Saudi Arabia.

In addition, the International Religious Freedom Act also requires that upon naming of a country or observing these problems in other countries, that the State Department and the President take steps to deal with those abuses and to work with those countries to try to map out programs where those abuses can be reduced and eliminated. Those steps are to be listed in the State Department's Annual Human Rights Report.

It has been our observation in the past – and this year appears no different – that the steps taken with respect to most of those countries that in fact have been named as CPCs really are co-terminus with steps that the United States was already taking in those countries for other reasons, so this has been a disappointment to us in the past and it continues to be a disappointment to us, and we have urged additional steps, offered other policy recommendations which we urge the President and the Secretary to follow.

The statute itself lists a full range of options available to the President and the Secretary to do that, including some that are of a more negative nature and a number that are of a positive nature, and we strongly urge the President and the State Department to look at those countries that have been named as well as countries that should be named and design steps specifically with the purpose of advancing the statutory purposes designed.

We also in the past have created a Watch List of countries about which we are concerned, where the trend seems to be problematic, and countries that deserve special scrutiny during this period of time. This year Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria and Uzbekistan remain on our Watch List due to concerns about serious abuses in those countries and because the countries – the governments of those countries have not halted repression or violence against persons that amount to severe violations of the right of freedom of religion, thought, conscience and belief, or have failed to punish those who are responsible for such acts. Because freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief continues to be sharply curtailed in Cuba, and because of the deteriorating religious conditions in Belarus and Georgia, the Commission has decided this year to add those countries to the Watch List, and they will be matters of particular concern for the country before they're commissioned during the coming months. Also, in view of the continuing government interference with and restrictions on all religious communities in Laos, the Commission has placed Laos on its Watch List as well.

So let me turn now to specific countries. I will talk briefly about China, North Korea, Vietnam and then turn the podium over to my fellow Commissioners to talk about a few other countries.

China remains a country of enormous concern. For five years we have recommended that it be designated a country of particular concern. The State Department has happily, repeatedly followed that recommendation and has noted that this year, despite that, that conditions have deteriorated during the past year. Chinese government officials continue to control, monitor and restrain religious practice of all sorts and go far beyond any legitimate security need. Since 1999, the Chinese government has labeled Falun Gong a cult, effectively banning them and justifying a terrible, ongoing, brutal crackdown. In Tibet, tight controls and repression of Tibetan Buddhists continues and the Chinese government itself admits that over 100 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns are still being held in prison.

Muslim clerics and students have been extensively detained and held for, quote, “illegal” religious activities in that country. Mosques have been closed. Minors are forbidden religious instruction in that part of China and government workers and students cannot practice their faith for fear of oppression. Unregistered Catholic leaders and congregations continue to experience harassment, abuses and restrictions. At least 17 Catholic priests and seminarians were arrested during the past year. Ten Catholic bishops remain under arrest. Protestant house churches in various provinces also have been raided, their congregants detained and fined, pastors arrested and churches closed.

The commission itself, despite promises from the Chinese government, has had difficulties in the past year trying to schedule a visit to China. A Commission trip was promised as part of the 2002 human rights dialogue. However, two scheduled visits were cancelled due to unacceptable conditions placed on the Commission by the Chinese government.

In addition to recommending that China remain designated as a CPC, we also urge the United States government to establish a more formal presence, perhaps as a consulate, in Lhasa, Tibet and Urumqi, Xinjiang in order to monitor religious freedom and other human rights concerns; that we support the creation of a regular dialogue on religion and law with the U.S. government representatives, academic experts, members of the Commission with commensurate delegations from China, and that the United States continue to promote Hong Kong’s high degree of autonomy under Chinese sovereignty.

North Korea is another country of about which we have been enormously concerned. It is ground zero for some of the world’s worst human rights abuses. By all accounts there are absolutely no personal freedoms of any kind in North Korea, no protection for human rights. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief remains essentially nonexistent as the government severely represses all public and private expressions.

Failed economic policies and natural disasters have left over a million or more North Koreans dead during the past decade; 200,000 are held in gulags and between 100,000 and 300,000 have fled North Korea for China. North Korean refugees are repatriated from China, are subject to torture, arrest and abuse, and often death sentences, particularly if they have associated with Christian relief organizations. People found

carrying Bibles in public or distributing religious literature or possessing religious literature of any sort are subject to arrest and imprisonment. There continue to be reliable reports of torture and execution of religious believers.

The Commission believes strongly that it is essential that issues of human rights be a centerpiece of the six-party talks that are now discussing nuclear issues. Security issues and human rights issues are inseparably linked and it is imperative that that be part of those talks. We also have strongly urged the U.S. government to urge China and Russia and other members of the international community to grant refugee status to North Koreans and to urge the Chinese government to allow South Korean and international NGOs greater access to northern China and the refugees there. Also we have urged Congress to pass the North Korea Freedom Act and the North Korea Human Rights Act.

Finally, let me say two sentences about Vietnam – again, a country of great concern. Already poor religious freedom conditions have deteriorated during the past few months. Religious leaders have been harassed and detained and imprisoned. There has been a continuation of the crackdown. For two years the Commission has recommended Vietnam be designated a country of particular concern. The State Department has yet to name Vietnam a country of particular concern, something we do not understand.

In the last year, the government has restricted the activities of organized religious groups, particularly those deemed to disrupt national unity such as the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, the Protestant house church movement, and ethnic minority Christian groups. The UBCV has faced particularly severe repression despite promises by the prime minister in March of 2003 that arrests and harassment would decrease. Twenty-six of their leaders were detained after their October 2003 meeting. Its founders remain under house arrest facing charges ranging from espionage and other charges, some of which carry a death penalty with it.

Hmong Christians in the northern provinces of Vietnam are reportedly continuing to face pressure to renounce their faith, and the methods for doing this are often brutal and extreme. There are numerous religious prisoners in Vietnam, ranging from Hoa Hao Buddhists, to Hmong Protestants, to the Montagnard Christians in the Central Highlands, to 10 Catholic priests – and those include Father Ly, who was detained after he submitted testimony to our Commission.

We recommended that the United States government make clear to the government of Vietnam that continued progress in the area of religious freedom is essential to continued expansion of U.S.-Vietnamese relations along the political and the economic front; that we withhold support for loans to Vietnam from the international financial institutions except those dealing with basic human needs until these problems are addressed. We urge the Vietnamese government to provide unhindered access to members of all religious communities in Vietnam, particularly those in the Central Highlands.

So, with those few countries mentioned by me, let me now turn it over to Commissioner Shea for other comments.

NINA SHEA: I'd like to address Iraq and Afghanistan together. The individual dimension of the right to freedom of religion and belief is often overlooked, although the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion explicitly refers to the right of every individual. International attention has often been directed toward protecting the freedoms of religious groups or communities, and this is sometimes referred to, in shorthand, as freedom of worship, yet advancing the right to freedom of religion also protects individual members of a religion from suffering under the tyranny of a minority from their own faith.

A major focus of the Commission in the last year and a half has been Iraq and Afghanistan, in particular encouraging the development of new constitutions in those countries that explicitly uphold the right of every person to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief. The Commission has sought to concentrate the attention of U.S. policymakers on the need to ensure that religious freedom be enshrined in the new bill of rights in these constitutions and, two, that the freedom be guaranteed for the individual. Those most likely to benefit from these individual guarantees are women, dissidents and minority religious members; that is, members of minority religions.

Effective guarantees of the right of every person to freedom of religion are essential to advancing reform in both Afghanistan and Iraq. These guarantees inhibit those who would use religion as a weapon to obtain and hold on to power through undemocratic means, abuses of basic rights, such as by bringing blasphemy and apostasy charges to stifle debate and punish the efforts of political moderates, reformers and political opponents, and to sow fear generally. This is not a theoretical matter but a very real issue in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

In August 2003, during the crucial period when Afghan experts were drafting the new constitution, a Commission delegation visited Afghanistan. We found that elements in Afghan society who would promote respect for international human rights are currently on the defensive and even under threat. These moderate elements continue to need U.S. support to counter the influence of those who promote an extremist agenda and those who would use prevailing religious orthodoxy as an instrument of terror to crush political dissent and democratic debate.

In January 2004, Afghanistan adopted a new constitution. Though the constitution provides for the freedom of non-Muslim groups to exercise their various faith, it does not contain explicit protections for the right to freedom of religion that would extend to the individual. This flaw is compounded by a repugnancy clause that states that, quote, "No law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of Islam," as well as by provisions where a judicial system, empowered to enforce the repugnancy clause and apply Hanafi jurisprudence to cases where there is no other law on point. With no guarantee of the individual right to religious freedom and a judicial system instructed to enforce Islamic principles and law, there are fewer protections for Afghans to debate the

role of religion in the laws of society, to advocate the rights of women and religious minorities, and to question interpretations of Islamic precepts without fear of retribution.

Arrests and reprisals for alleged blasphemers -- that is, those critical of Karzai government policies -- have already occurred in the new Afghanistan. The Commission continues to urge U.S. officials to work vigorously to ensure that what happened in Afghanistan -- namely, the failure of its constitution to protect the rights of every person -- is not repeated in Iraq. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime, some segments of the Shi'a community in Iraq have demanded the implementation of Islamic law -- that is, Sharia -- in a manner that threatens to preclude freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, in contravention of Iraq's international commitments to protect human rights and individual freedoms.

The Commission is concerned that moderate Iraqi religious groups, including those that advocate multi-religious cooperation and respect for human rights, may be put on the defensive as in Afghanistan. There was initial concern in the drafting of the Transitional Administrative Law that individual rights would not be sufficiently protected. In response, the Commission developed, for senior U.S. policymakers, a series of specific recommendations that would ensure any interim constitution guarantees for the right to freedom of religion and belief for every Iraqi. In the end, the CPA and the Iraqi Governing Council saw that the interim constitution embraced the individual right to freedom of thought, conscience and religious belief and practice. This codified recognition is a historic step for Iraq.

The Commission remains concerned, however, by language in the interim constitution requiring that legislation not be contrary to the universally agreed upon tenets of Islam. This provision could potentially be used by judges in Iraq to abridge internationally recognized human rights. With regard to Iraq, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. government should work to ensure that human rights are fully guaranteed in the permanent constitution, consistent with international human rights standards.

Finally, the Commission wishes to address the shameful abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers. Since last June, the Commission has urged the CPA administrator to appoint a team of advisors in Iraq to advise on religious affairs and to monitor human rights violations, including freedom of religion, ensure that the monitoring and reporting of issues relating to religious freedom and other universal human rights, and the promotion of these rights be adequately staffed in the new U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and its constituent posts, and that U.S. personnel receive training in human rights and religious freedom issues and on how to deal effectively with these issues in the Iraqi context, and assign to Embassy Baghdad and each of its constituent posts U.S. personnel specifically tasked with these responsibilities and having sufficient experience and rank to perform them.

I'd like to now turn to Sudan, and I think we're going to go through all the countries before we get into the questions, but we will have time for that.

For a number of years the government of Sudan has engaged in genocidal violations of freedom of religion and belief, particularly against Christians, disfavored Muslims, and followers of traditional African religions. The Commission has long recommended that Sudan be designated a country of particular concern, a recommendation the State Department has adopted. Religious conflict has been a major factor in Sudan's ongoing civil war, which began in 1983. In the context of this war, the government and its militias have committed egregious human rights abuses, including forced starvation, abduction and enslavement of women and children, the forcible displacement of civilian populations, and aerial bombardment of civilian targets.

Current and previous governments in Khartoum have attempted forcibly to convert non-Muslims to Islam and to impose Sharia on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Some children from non-Muslim families captured and sold into slavery by pro-government militias reportedly have been forced to convert to Islam. The government of Sudan and the major rebel group, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, appear close to a comprehensive peace agreement. In the past, however, commitments have been violated by the government in Khartoum. Close U.S. monitoring of compliance and sanctions for non-compliance will be necessary to ensure a just and lasting peace, as will resolution of other regional conflicts not addressed in the peace talks, such as that in Darfur.

While peace efforts have brought improvements in the situation in south and central Sudan, government-backed militias are committing similar acts against African Muslim civilian populations in Darfur. This is a population that does not practice the strict Wahhabi brand of Islam favored by Khartoum.

In addition to recommending that Sudan be designated a CPC, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. government should, one, oppose the application of Sharia to non-Muslims and insist that national institutions such as the military, law enforcement, and the highest level of the judiciary be secular; two, prevail upon the government of Sudan to provide needed humanitarian assistance to international relief organizations and increase U.S. humanitarian assistance delivered outside the UN, including in Darfur.

Thank you. And Richard Land will now take the podium.

RICHARD LAND: I'm going to begin by referring you to page 99 in following of the report concerning the refugee and asylum issue. The flow of refugees and religious persecution has been closely linked throughout world history and particularly American history. And this link is acknowledged throughout the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which brought this Commission into being.

Among the general recommendations in this report that are made on refugees and asylees is that, number one, the State Department improve access to resettlement for those who have fled countries where there are serious violations of religious freedom. Today, only Iranian religious minorities may access the U.S. refugee program without a

referral from the United Nations, and they have access problems as well, which we discuss in the report.

Commission staff now participates in regional working group meetings with the State Department on the refugee program, and we hope that this may result in important improved access for those who are fleeing religious persecution. That refugee and consular officers receive better training is essential -- better training in religious freedom and refugee procedures as required by the International Religious Freedom Act. While consular officers have the authority to refer refugees who need protection to the refugee program, such referrals are extremely rare. This may be attributable in part to lack of training.

Concerning Iran, while Iranian religious minorities -- Jews, Christians, Mandeans and Baha'i -- may come to Austria to apply to the U.S. refugee program. In 2003, Austria stopped issuing visas to Iranian Christians, citing the high denial rate of this group by U.S. refugee adjudicators. In September of 2003, the Commission endorsed the Specter Amendment, which would provide relief to the situation by clarifying the adjudication standard for refugee applications from members of Iranian religious minorities. In January of 2004, the Specter Amendment was enacted into law. The Commission remains, however, very concerned that four months after enactment, the Department of Homeland Security shows no signs of implementing the amendment. It is the law. Thus, Iranian Christians who would otherwise be eligible for refugee status from the U.S. are now stranded without legal status in Austria, or worse, in Iran. The Commission urges the Department of Homeland Security to implement the law.

And we also have an Expedited Removal Study that we report on in the report. Section 605 of the International Religious Freedom Act authorizes the Commission to appoint experts on refugee and asylum law to study the impact of expedited removal procedures on asylum seekers. With the dissolution of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the absorption of asylum responsibilities in the Department of Homeland Security, the Commission determined that it would be important to perform such a study at the current time. Consequently, in 2003, the Commission designated its experts and has been working with the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice to collect the data for the study. The Commission is now monitoring airports and DHS detention centers and expects to complete and release the study by the end of 2004.

I would next turn your attention to page 88 of the report where we talk about India. The Indian government's response to violence against religious minorities in Gujarat and elsewhere continues to be inadequate. Several national government leaders have publicly aligned themselves with extremist Hindu organizations that have been implicated in that violence. In 2003, the Commission again recommended that India be designated as a country of particular concern or CPC. As you will note, several of our Commissioners have dissented from the Commission's majority recommendation and their dissenting report is included. See dissent:

<http://www.uscirf.gov/countries/countriesconcerns/Countries/India.html>

Unlike other countries recommended for CPC designation, India has a democratically elected government. It's governed essentially by the rule of law and has a tradition of secular governors that dates back to the country's independence. Despite these democratic traditions, religious minorities in India continue to be subject to violent attacks, including killings in what is called communal violence. Those responsible for that violence are rarely held accountable for their actions. This violence against religious minorities has coincided with the rise in political influence of Hindu extremist nationalist organizations that view non-Hindus as foreign to India.

More than two years after the violence in Gujarat, few persons have been arrested and held accountable for the deaths. Most of those initially arrested were released without charge. In addition, state officials have been accused of failing to protect witnesses in cases against Hindu extremists believed to have taken part in the attacks. Last year the state government in Gujarat passed a bill limiting religious conversions. In addition to recommending that India be named a CPC, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. government should, one, urge the BJP leadership to denounce Hindu national militancy that supports violence and discrimination; two, make clear its concern to the BJP-led government that virulent nationalist rhetoric is fueling an atmosphere in which perpetrators believe they can attack religious minorities with impunity; three, press the Indian government to pursue perpetrators of violent acts against members of minority religious groups.

And then I would turn your attention to the report that follows on Pakistan. The response of the government of Pakistan to persistent sectarian and religiously motivated violence continues to be inadequate. Official government policy, such as the anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws, frequently result in – (audio break) – by Sunni militants against Shi'a Muslims, Ahmadis and Christians. In March 2004, armed men opened fire in Shi'a worshippers during a religious procession, leaving 45 dead and 160 wounded. There has also been an upsurge in anti-Christian violence, including fatal attacks on churches and other Christian institutions. Police protection appears ineffective, and no one has yet been successfully prosecuted for these crimes.

Belated efforts to curb extremism through reform of Pakistan's thousands of Islamic religious schools appears to have had little effect thus far. Many of these schools continue to provide ideological training and motivation to those who take part in violence, targeting of religious minorities in Pakistan and abroad. Ahmadis, who number 3 to 4 million in Pakistan, are prevented by law from engaging in the full practice of their faith. The constitution of Pakistan declared members of the Ahmadi religious community to be non-Muslims despite their insistence to the contrary. It is illegal for Ahmadis to preach in public, to seek converts, or to produce, publish and disseminate their religious materials. Ahmadis have been arrested and imprisoned for all of these acts and they are reportedly subject to ill treatment from prison authorities and their fellow prisoners.

Blasphemy allegations, which are often false, result in lengthy detention of and sometimes violence against Christians, Ahmadis, and members of other religious minorities as well as Muslims on account of their religious beliefs. Several accused under the blasphemy laws have been attacked, even killed by vigilantes, including while in police custody. Following an abortive attempt in 2000 at introducing procedural reforms, the Musharraf government has made no further effort to reform, much less repeal, the blasphemy laws.

In addition to recommending that Pakistan be designated a CPC, the Commission has recommended the U.S. government should, one, make clear to the Pakistan government that laws targeting Ahmadis that effectively criminalize the public practice of their faith violate their internationally guaranteed right to freedom of religion; two, urge the government of Pakistan to implement procedural changes to the blasphemy laws that will reduce and ultimately eliminate their abuse; and three, urge the government of Pakistan to take effective steps to prevent sectarian violence and punishment and punish its perpetrators, including disarming militant groups and any religious schools that provide weapons training.

And now I'll turn the podium over to my fellow Commissioner, Archbishop Chaput.

ARCHBISHOP CHAPUT: Thank you, Dr. Land. I'd like to talk about Turkmenistan first.

Turkmenistan is among the most repressive states in the world today, with a government that engages in very severe, ongoing violations of freedom of religion. The Commission continues to recommend that the Secretary of State designate Turkmenistan as a country of particular concern, or a CPC. Today, Turkmenistan has not been named a CPC.

President Niyazov's monopoly on power and absolute control over Turkmen society renders any independent religious activity impossible and religion is treated as a potential threat to that control. The 1997 version of the religion law effectively banned all religious groups except the state-controlled Sunni Muslim Board and the Russian Orthodox Church, though religious instruction, even for these two communities, is severely limited.

The status of religious freedom declined further after the passage of a law on religion in November 2003. Niyazov's surprise decree of March of this year that religious communities no longer had to meet the requirement of 500 members in order to register was a surprise to all of us. However, the decree relates only to narrow elements of the registration law and to date, no religious community has been registered as a result of that decree. The Commission very much hopes that this clearly well-timed move of the president will not encourage the State Department to forgo a much-warranted CPC designation for Turkmenistan.

In addition to recommending that the Turkmenistan government be designated a CPC, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. government should, one, suspend all non-humanitarian assistance to the government of Turkmenistan, and, two, identify specific steps that the government of Turkmenistan should take in order to have its currently suspended assistance reinstated, including the lifting of oppressive legal requirements on religious groups, the end of harassment and deportation of religious leaders, the halting of unjust arrest, detention, imprisonment, torture, and residential and workplace intimidation of religious leaders and their adherents.

The Commission is co-hosting a briefing on religious freedom in Turkmenistan this afternoon at 3:30.

Egypt. In Egypt, serious problems of discrimination and other human rights violations against members of religious minorities remains widespread. The Egyptian government has failed to take effective steps to halt repression and violence against religious believers. Egypt remains on the Commission's Watch List.

The Commission has found that serious problems of discrimination against a number of minority religious groups, particularly Christians, Jews and Baha'is, as well as various Muslim groups, are widespread in Egypt. Islamists face extra legal harassment, torture and prolonged detention. Coptic Christians face ongoing violence from vigilante Muslim extremists, including members of the Muslim brotherhood, many of whom act with impunity. The Egyptian authorities also have been accused of being lax in protecting the lives and property of Christians. All Baha'i institutions and community activities continue to be banned by the government. Material vilifying Jews and Baha'is appear frequently in state-controlled and semi-official media.

The Commission continues to monitor the actions of the government in Egypt to see if the situation rises to a level that warrants designation as a CPC.

Belarus. Belarus is on the Watch List of the Commission. Violations of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, or belief, by the government of Belarus became more pronounced in 2003. Implementation of a new law on religion has resulted in severe regulatory obstacles and bureaucratic and legal restrictions enforced by the Belarus government on several religious communities to inhibit their activities. Official intolerance and harassment of various denominations continues to grow, including the Greek Catholic communities and the Belarus Orthodox Autocephalous Church, as well as religions relatively new to the country including Pentecostals, Hindus, and Hare Krishnas.

The Commission has placed Belarus on its Watch List and will continue to consider closely whether the government record rises to a level warranting designation as a country of particular concern, or CPC.

Georgia. Georgia's previous government, under President Shevardnadze, responded slowly to serious ongoing vigilante violence against some of the country's religious minorities.

In the past three years there have been over a hundred vigilante attacks on minority religious groups in Georgia, including Baptists, Catholics, Hare Krishnas, Jehovah's Witnesses, and independent orthodox churches. Only the Georgia Orthodox Church has the right to register and gain legal status.

The 2002 Accord grants that the Georgian Orthodox Church has approval authority over construction of religious buildings and publications of religious literature. In September 2003, the Roman Catholic Church failed to gain the legal status in Georgia when the Georgian government suddenly canceled plans to sign an agreement with the Vatican. At present, Georgia is the only country of the former Soviet Union that does not have a religion law. Official drafts circulated in the parliament last year contained some problematic areas, for example, that what is termed "improper proselytism" could give rise to criminal charges. More recent developments have been positive but we'll continue to watch Georgia – continue to keep it on our Watch List.

Finally, Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has highly restrictive laws on religion that severely limit the ability of religious groups to function. The Uzbek government has also been harshly cracking down on Muslim individuals, groups, and mosques that do not conform to government policies on the practice and expression of Islamic faith. The Commission continues to place Uzbekistan on the Watch List. The law on religion imposes burdensome criteria for the registration of religious groups. The Uzbek government's harsh campaign on Muslim individuals, groups, and mosques that do not conform to governmental policies on the practice and expression of the Islamic faith has resulted in the imprisonment of thousands of individuals, many of whom have been tortured. In the majority of cases, Uzbek authorities have presented no evidence that these persons have participated in any violent acts.

In some cases, piety alone is reported to result in state suspicion and arrest. The government of Uzbekistan does face security threats from certain groups that claim religious links but they sometimes seem to use this excuse to persecute generally religious people.

The Commission has recommended that the United States government should make all U.S. assistance to the Uzbek government, with the exception of assistance to improve humanitarian conditions and advance human rights, contingent on the government undertaking concrete steps to improve conditions for religious freedom, including releasing persons in prison solely because of their religious beliefs, practice, or choice of religious association, ending torture, halting the arrest and detention of persons because of their religious beliefs, practice, or choice of religious associations.

Dean Young.

MR. YOUNG: Thank you. Thank you very much. Let me say a word or two about Saudi Arabia and then we'll open it for questions.

We have expressed over the past few years a substantial concern about Saudi Arabia. It engages, without any doubt, in systematic, egregious, ongoing abuse of freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief. Indeed, the State Department's own report starts out by highlighting that freedom of religion simply does not exist in Saudi Arabia. The country, however, has yet to be designated a country of particular concern. It continues to engage in these violations as part of its official policy. Reliable reports of torture, cruel and degrading punishment imposed by judicial and administrative authorities, prolonged detention without charges, blatant denials of the right to liberty and security of the person, including coercive measures aimed at women and the broad jurisdiction of the religious police; all of these are serious, sustained problems.

The Saudi government bans all forms of public religious expression other than the government's interpretation and presentation of the Hanbali school of Sunni Islam. This policy violates the rights of large communities of non-Muslims and Muslims alike from a variety of doctrinal Islamic schools who reside in Saudi Arabia, including the Shi'as, who make up 8 to 10 percent of the population. The *mutawaa*, the religious police, have broad, vaguely defined powers and exercise those in ways that clearly violate freedom of religion under cover of state authority. They frequently conduct raids on worship services, including in private homes.

Many non-Muslims are particularly harassed and persecuted in their attempts to worship even privately within their homes. A promise the Saudi government has continued to make to U.S. authorities would not be done is nevertheless being done. Its monopoly on the interpretation of Islam also has adversely affected the fundamental rights of women in their attempts to define their religious practices, including their freedom of speech, movement, association and religion.

The Commission has recommended to the United States government that Saudi Arabia be named a country of particular concern and that steps be taken for immediate improvement of the state of religious affairs, in particular that the promises with respect to private worship be honored, that public prosecution and government prosecution of apostasy, blasphemy and criticizing the government all be ceased immediately, and that incitement to violence against non-Wahhabi Muslims and members of non-Muslim religious groups, as are found in the textbooks and other educational materials, be eliminated immediately.

Related to that, there have been a number of reports coming in of the Saudi support around the world and the propagation of a particularly intolerant set of ideologies. Everyone understands and no group champions more the right to religious promulgation than this Commission does, and certainly that is legitimate and acceptable. At the same time, the sponsorship by a close ally of the United States around the world of extremist intolerant religious views, or views that incite to violence, seems to us something that the American people must know more about.

In that context, we have urged the U.S. government to conduct a study to determine the reliability and accuracy and depth and degree of those reports and that that be a determinant. We have held hearings on this matter. They have been unsettling, to put it mildly. As one of the witnesses who had served extensively in the U.S. government told us, that a number of ministers from other countries around the world, particularly in the Middle East, including a prime minister, had, quote, “told him that they would not even let a Saudi cleric into the land anymore for fear that the preaching would be preaching of hate and revolt and violence rather than religion.”

We have suggested this study. In April of 2004 the Commission’s recommendation was advanced when several members of Congress wrote to the comptroller of the United States General Accounting Office requesting that that agency conduct such a study to determine what the U.S. government is doing to identify and monitor sources of Saudi funding for institutions that advocate violence and intolerance and what the United States government was doing to counter its influence. A press conference on this request will be held tomorrow on Capitol Hill with Senator Susan Collins and Representative Dan Burton and myself.

So with that elaborate introduction, we’re delighted to take questions.

Q: Yes, my name is – (unintelligible). A three-part question on India. Do you agree that the Commission has all of these problems because at least three of the Commissioners are not here – (unintelligible) – they didn’t agree with you that India should be recommended – (unintelligible)?

And second, I thought India was the world’s largest democracy, rule of law judiciary, and any religion – anybody throughout India can practice any religion on their choice and wish.

And finally, you have more than four pages on – or against India, compared with only two-and-a-half pages on Pakistan, which has all the terrorists in the name of religion killing and murdering – (unintelligible). What do we get out of this report – (unintelligible)? If you have recommended India, then where other countries will go and what you expect from other countries if you expect this from India?

MR. YOUNG: That sounds like a speech more than a question but we’ll nevertheless take it as a question.

Q: Well, my question is –

MR. YOUNG: I heard your question. Thank you.

(Cross talk.)

MR. YOUNG: Let me answer. I heard your questions. Perhaps you could let me answer it, and I'll certainly turn to my other Commissioners.

There has been dissent on the part of three Commissioners regarding whether India should be designated a CPC. There is no dissent, however, within the Commission that the Indian government has not done enough to resolve and address these issues. You mentioned that India – or assert that India is the largest democracy and all groups can worship freely. There are thousands of dead people in India who would contest that assertion who are not here and able to contest it in person because they are dead, and the murderers have not been held responsible for that.

Those are serious concerns and we have tried to put those concerns in context. I think the length of a particular part of our report that does not reflect necessarily the depth of concern nor the things that need to be done. India is a complicated country with a vibrant, dynamic human rights community, which itself has spoken out. The government has not responded, in the judgment of all nine Commissioners, adequately to those concerns, even on the part of the Indian people.

What do we expect of India? We expect of India the same thing we expect of all countries around the world: to live up to their international agreements to provide that kind of religious freedom to people.

My other fellow Commissioners may have comments as well.

MR. LAND: I would draw your attention to page 82 of the report. Since 1998 there have been hundreds of attacks on Christian leaders, worshipers and churches throughout India. These attacks have included killings, torture, rape and harassment of church staff, destruction of church property, and disruption of church events. In January 2003, armed members of a Hindu extremist group attacked an American missionary and seven others with swords. Two activists, part of the Sangh Parivar, were later arrested in the state where the attack took place. Though there have been some convictions of a few perpetrators of the Gujarat violence and attacks on Christians, and though the BJP-led central government may not be directly responsible for instigating the violence against religious minorities, it is clear the government does not do all in its power to pursue the perpetrators of the attacks and to counteract the prevailing climate of hostility against these minority groups.

Now, the reason for the length of the report is that you have division within the Commission, so you have a minority report, so to speak, over whether or not the abuses that we all nine Commissioners agree are there, rise to the level of CPC status. So there's no disagreement on the Commission about the fact that there's an unacceptable level of religious persecution in India. The only question was whether it should be on the Watch List or whether it should be a country of particular concern. And there was no disagreement about whether Pakistan should be on there. There was unanimity about Pakistan.

Q: Keith Peters. A question: With all of this, why should you consider religious freedom important, then?

MR. YOUNG: Why should we consider religious freedom important?

Q: Yes.

MR. YOUNG: Well, in part, it's our statutory mandate to consider it important. The United States Congress, reflecting, we believe, the will of the United States people, considers it important. I mean, that's a simple answer to it. A more complicated answer I think really involves the fact that it is a principle central right contained in every major human rights treaty and document that currently exists. I think Congress, if you were to ask them why this particular piece of legislation and this particular focus, I would predict at least some would say that it is a right that perhaps had been underemphasized in the broad range of human rights; that Congress was not necessarily interested in putting this right before others, but in fact it was insistent that it not be put after others as well, and there was certainly some sentiment on the Hill that that had been happening.

I also think I would add that that question almost answers itself in this day and age, if one looks at geopolitical developments of all sorts over the past decade and a half, the centrality of religion is just very hard to deny, and where religion is not permitted, where freedom of religion is not tolerated and is repressed, the very worst kinds of violence happen. It is very often the first right that governments attack. It's very often religious movements that, if not given adequate public space, that turn out to be the victims of the greatest violence in a society. There is a great deal of history and geopolitical developments that I think support this assertion as well.

If others want to –

MS. SHEA: Well, I would just add that in addition to being an international right it is a cornerstone American freedom; it is the clause of the First Amendment. It is a key right, and I think our founders understood that, because with the sanctity of the individual conscience, you have protection against tyrannical state power.

MR. YOUNG: And let me be clear: we are talking about the internationally defined standards, not the U.S. First Amendment, and it defines freedom of religion, and from religion, as freedom of thought, conscience and belief.

MR. LAND: I want to underscore that so people understand it and no one can be mistaken. We are not trying to impose the U.S. First Amendment standard on the world. As much as we would personally recommend it, we're not trying to impose it. If a country wants to give preference to a particular religion, to give government sponsorship to that religion, that is their right if they chose to do so by majority vote. What they don't have the right to do is to violate the internationally agreed upon documents, the most famous of which is the UN Declaration on Human Rights, which makes freedom of

conscience and the freedom to practice one's faith and to change one's faith a fundamental human right – a universal human right.

And that's the standard, and it was neglected. That's why the Congress overwhelmingly passed the International Religious Freedom Act and why it was signed into law, which created this Commission, because it wasn't getting sufficient attention and the abuses were rising, not falling. The 20th century has one of the worst records of any century -- and that's a pretty scary thought when you look at some of the other centuries – when it comes to the violation of religious freedom. Perhaps more people have been martyred for their faith – different faiths – in the 20th century than any century in the history of humankind. And the situation – my impression as a Commissioner – I've been serving for three years now – is the situation is getting worse, not better.

ARCHBISHOP CHAPUT: Some people would think that religion in some ways is the source of all these problems because people clearly and strongly hold religious principles that lead to these conflicts, but what we emphasize is the importance of respecting the right of people to personally hold firm and clear beliefs, and that they grant that same freedom of religion to other people. So we see religion as a positive value of course. We also see the oppression or the restriction of religious practice leading to an undermining of human dignity.

Q: I'm Al Milliken. Do you have a feel of how much U.S. efforts to improve religious and other freedoms may have been hurt by reports of abuse of Iraqi prisoners? And do you have any suggestions to the U.S. government on maybe how to repair that?

MR. YOUNG: Well, each of my fellow Commissioners may have personal views on this. It's not something that we as a Commission have taken any position on. I will say, individually I think as we have been clear, the concerns about human rights and human dignity are central to this conflict, and in fact we had urged some time ago that a specifically designated senior U.S. government official be put in both Afghanistan and in Iraq, be privy to everything that was going on to ensure that those rights were adequately protected and reflected in the way in which those governments were subsequently restructured and in the way in which people were encouraged to behave across the board to each other. So it has been a concern.

On the other hand, I think one needs to put it in a little bit of perspective. Number one, this is something that I think individually each of us has stood up here and deplored. Number two, it's not something with respect to which we as a Commission would in any way discourage foreign criticism of the United States. It has long since passed the day when what a country does is a matter, even within its own borders, is a matter purely of domestic concern. From the foundation of the UN and beyond, that has been clear. So there's nothing inappropriate about foreign criticism of U.S. behavior in this regard.

However, one does need to keep a little bit of perspective. If every country responded as vigorously as our Congress has to human rights abuses in their countries,

our report would probably be enormously shorter than it is and there would have been far fewer countries and we probably would have been out of here 45 minutes ago.

Number two, these are, in my judgment at least, violations of human dignity of a sort that are entirely inappropriate. That should not blind us from the fact, however, that there are tens of thousands of people around the world who are having fingernails pulled out, who are having electric shocks attached to them, who are being beheaded, who are being tortured and killed and imprisoned simply for their expression of their religious beliefs and their faith. And what is going on in these prisons is deeply problematic but should not blind any of us in the United States or outside of the United States of these other issues as well.

MR. LAND: I would second what Michael has said and I would just point out, the reason that the abuses at the prison in Baghdad have been such worldwide news is because these were American soldiers in an American prison facility. Would it have been news that this kind of abuse and much worse was going on in a Chinese prison or a North Korean prison? Hardly. Far worse goes on all the time and we all know it.

The United States has asked to be judged by a different standard and we're calling the rest of the world to that standard. What happened in the Baghdad prison was horrific and the perpetrators should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law as far up the chain of command as it needs to go to get to those who were responsible or whose dereliction of duty led to these abuses.

But let's understand: this is news because we do behave differently and we're calling the world to the standard that we espouse and the standard that we normally practice, of which this is an aberration.

MR. YOUNG: And we are calling other governments to respond to abuses in their countries in the way in which we hope our government will respond as well.

MS. SHEA: Yeah, your other part of your question was how do you prevent it from happening and what do you do about it, and our recommendation is that there should be human rights advocates and experts inside the Embassy in Baghdad, the CPA, and in Afghanistan. Because of the unique role the United States is playing in reconstructing these places, we need to have some expert advocate right in their midst.

MR. LAND: And we made that recommendation.

MS. SHEA: We made that recommendation a year ago and we continue to make it.

MR. YOUNG: And we reiterate it at this point.

Q: In your newsletter, everyone in the White House front-page photograph is smiling. Are George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice taking your findings seriously

enough? And since your last report, what further changes have you noticed in nations where Muslims are in political control? Are there areas where tolerance and coexistence have particularly improved with Christians, Jews and Pagans, or where have language and actions deteriorated, particularly when it comes to implementing Sharia, Islamic law, or waging jihad? What kind of a debate or difference of opinion are you picking up on with Islam itself, and is dialogue and freedom increasing or decreasing?

MR. YOUNG: Thank you. Let me just say a word about the first one and then turn to my fellow Commissioners for any thoughts on the first or the second part of your question.

No, the U.S. government is not listening to us as much as they should. They should do absolutely everything we say in this report. (Laughter.) This is clear. If Dr. Land is elected President we're confident that that will happen.

No, of course they should listen to us more, they always should, but we have appreciated the extent to which this issue has been in the forefront of some action to the U.S. government, both in this Administration and in the prior Administration, and I think Commissioner Shea has talked about some of the developments in Sudan. I think many of those are a product of a concerted effort on the part of the U.S. government both to redeploy its aid, a suggestion we made, as well as to appoint a special envoy. We believe the possibility of Congress imposing capital market sanctions in that situation also had a salutary effect in advancing the process. Every senior administration official from the Ambassador up to the President, who have gone to China, have made the issue of freedom of religion a major part of their public diplomacy in that country. There are other examples that we could go on and cite.

So, no, not enough is being done and, no, they're not listening to our recommendations enough, but we do appreciate and acknowledge those – the efforts that are being made.

MR. LAND: I do think that there is no question that this issue is far higher on our government's radar screen and the radar screen of other governments around the world because of the existence of this Commission. And I think the unforeseen benefit of this Commission has been – and of the law that brought it into being is that part of the International Religious Freedom Act states that the State Department has to issue an annual report, which means that every embassy has an embassy officer who is responsible for doing the interviews and gathering the material and preparing a report that's going to be part of a public record which they're going to have to defend.

And I have seen this – during my three years on the Commission, I have seen that what's been the result is there has been the development of a significant cadre of career diplomatic corps officers who have been sensitized and made aware of this issue and of the abuses that are taking place around the world in a way that was not prevalent prior to 1998. And so I think that they are listening to us and they are listening more as they become more sensitized to the problem as a result of preparing these reports and having

to interact with the people who have been victimized in the various countries where they serve.

MR. YOUNG: Thank you. Let me ask my fellow Commissioners if they have any thoughts on the second part of your question.

ARCHBISHOP CHAPUT: Well, just a brief one. I think it's very difficult – Islam has a difficult time dealing with the issue of religious freedom, but I think – I've only been a Commissioner for less than a year, but I think in the course of that time I think we have called various elements of the Islamic community to be reflective about this, and so I think there's a greater amount of reflection going on and I hope that's progress, but I think we'll see as time goes on.

MR. YOUNG: I think there also are a number of countries with majority Islamic populations that have obviously made efforts in this area, I mean, ranging from Morocco and Jordan as well as Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesia, I think its problem is not – we have criticized Indonesia not so much as a matter of formal government policy that would repress religion but much more concerned with its inability to do it, and have urged the U.S. government to work together with that government in ways to help the government foster tolerance, prevent this kind of inter-religious violence and so forth. But the government itself, despite being the largest Islamic country in the world, has not structured a country where there is government sponsor of problems in that regard.

MS. SHEA: I just want to say that a refrain throughout our studies of Islamic societies is that we call on the United States to really start supporting – give their support to the beleaguered moderate Muslims because they are on the front lines, and the question is constantly, where are the moderates? They have a hard time speaking out in some of these places, as we've seen recently in Afghanistan where some journalists last summer were debating this issue of whether Islam was compatible with democracy, and they were arrested – they have an arrest warrant over their heads now in Afghanistan. That happened last summer.

So we call on the United States in our report to support the moderate Muslims.

MR. YOUNG: Yes?

Q: I hope I don't have a hard time expressing my thoughts against the notion that Islam has trouble with debate of other religions.

MR. YOUNG: If you could keep it to a question, that would be helpful.

Q: Well, the question, do you have any on the Commission who is Islamic scholar or Jewish scholar -- other than Christians? And do you anticipate adding these to your recommendations?

And also, I want to ask another question. I just would –

MR. YOUNG: Let me take those questions.

Yes, in fact we have, since the inception of the Commission, had people of the Islamic faith on the Commission. We currently have actually a very distinguished scholar, Khaled Abou El Fadl, who is currently serving as a professor of law at Yale Law School in New Haven -- a school clearly inferior to George Washington University but a good one nevertheless -- (laughter) -- who is himself having studied -- speaks Arabic, studied these texts extensively, has written -- I think we're probably close to seven or eight books now on the subject.

So, yes, we do have Commissioners who are steeped in this. We also have, on our research staff, Arabic-speaking capacity and people who are knowledgeable about this, and the benefit of an enormous group of people who are willing to come and talk with us and educate us on these matters as well.

MR. LAND: Michael, why don't you just tell them a little about -- you've been on the Commission since the beginning. Tell them about some of the religious diversity of the Commission in terms of the Commissioners.

MR. YOUNG: I think despite the fact that the appointment process is such that they are appointed from different sources, nevertheless it has, rather happily, achieved a pretty broad balance. We have had, since the inception of the Commission, people who have been of the Catholic faith, Jewish, Protestant, Baha'i, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Southern Baptists, Buddhists, Hindu. So it's been about as broad a cross section -- we've yet to have a Zoroastrian but we are hopeful.

MS. SHEA: Mike, I'd also like to add something to that, and that is you should know that we are all -- we're appointed as volunteers and some of us have day jobs that prevent us from being here today. But the fact that they're not here, like Professor El Fadl, is not a reflection that they're unhappy with our work but they're simply doing other things.

MR. YOUNG: That's right.

MS. SHEA: There's a number -- we hoped to have some of our other members here today but they were called away at the last minute for other work-related -- some are out of the country.

MR. YOUNG: And when Commissioners disagree, they are quick to tell us publicly.

Q: Yeah, you've designated Burma as a CPC and Laos you've put on the Watch List. Can you tell us what's going on in those countries and explain the difference in the designations?

MR. YOUNG: The difference in designation I think largely results from the fact that at least – our judgment is that the activities of the Burmese government – and I think if you read the report – are very systematic, pervasive and deep throughout the country. It is a repressive regime in other ways to be sure, but there have been a particular target of the religious communities. The Catholic community has come under substantial repression, as has the Buddhist community in Burma.

Laos is a country with serious problems, to be sure. There is a somewhat broader scope for religious groups to meet. The groups that are repressed are somewhat more targeted in Laos. It is not quite as pervasive in Burma, and I think, in the judgment of most of the Commissioners, that did not in any way suggest that Laos should get a pass, but it did seem to us that if one was prioritizing, Burma was a place to pay particular attention.

Q: Do you have any recommendations to the U.S. government on the handling – (off mike)?

MR. YOUNG: Yes, we do. We actually – I refer you to our report. We have recommendations on both Burma and Laos, probably a little more fulsome on Laos. We have actually been able to get over into that part of the world and been in Vietnam and Cambodia and so forth. Burma has been more difficult to get into for our Commission.

Q: My question goes back to Iraq. Any recommendations on Iraq? There are lots of rational recommendations about protecting religious freedom for individuals in the constitution for a permanent Iraq, but constitutions can be amended by votes of legislators, legislatures and people. Are there any recommendations about the way the elections will be structured in Iraq, which is a huge debate right now, and some are saying that, you know, should they do it in a caucus system versus a regional system or different election that might have different effects for how many religious minorities can make it into a parliament and how many can't. Do you have any recommendations as you're thinking about it? Has there been a debate on the Commission about making recommendations for a form of elections in Iraq?

MR. YOUNG: There has been some discussion within the Commission on that, but our position has been that what is central and of primary importance is to enshrine in the document, that is unchangeable as you can make it, these fundamental rights. The electoral process may be structured in a whole variety of different ways to achieve different balances and different ways of interpreting and implementing these rights, but what we would hope is that the rights themselves are enshrined in a way that are the least susceptible to negative alteration in that context. Beyond that we have not, as a Commission applied – some of us have worked individually in other capacities on different parts of the Iraq situation but as a Commission that seemed to us the central issue and the wisest course.

I'm sorry, you had a question. Let's see if we can get some others who haven't.

Q: Barbara Bradley Hagerty from National Public Radio. Could you just elaborate a little bit on what you are going to recommend vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia tomorrow and tell us a little bit about that?

MR. YOUNG: Oh, no, we'd invite you to our press conference. The worst thing I could do is steal Senator Collins's thunder – (chuckles) – except to say that we have been urging the Congress to call for this kind of a study for some time. There are extensive reports – their degree of reliability I think needs to be tested and the depth and breadth of this problem needs to be examined as well as the extent to which there is funding from sources that have systematically defined themselves as sympathetic to and allies of the United States and the international community. That needs to be examined and the American public really needs to be aware and informed of that, and much of tomorrow I hope will be a clarion call to GAO to define and debate that study.

Q: May I just follow up on that? How cooperative has the Saudi Arabian government been in your work so far?

MR. YOUNG: The Saudi government has actually permitted us in the country. We have been there before. Commissioners have visited Saudi Arabia and they have been responsive. We have not yet ourselves, and don't really have the resources to launch that kind of a systematic study. The Saudi government claims to decry that kind of intolerance and violence so we anticipate that the Saudis would be very forthcoming and open. It would be enormously odd for an ally of the United States that defines itself as that close a friend of the United States to not cooperate in something like this. We would be deeply disappointed. So we fully anticipate the Saudis will welcome and cooperate with us.

MS. SHEA: Mike, can I add something to that?

MR. YOUNG: Yeah.

MS. SHEA: I do want to emphasize, though, it is still a problem. There is still hate speech, there is a proliferation of hatred by the Saudi government. The problem still remains. They have not fixed it.

Q: I wonder, if that is so, the panelists share the view of one that Islam in general has difficulty dealing with religious freedom. Is that your view, too – both of you?

MS. SHEA: I personally have seen that Islam is trying to work out a way of dealing in a pluralistic modern world. Yes, I have personally seen that. In giving, for example, non-Muslims – their testimony is given equal weight as Muslim men in Sharia courts. That is a problem in places like Saudi Arabia, in Sudan, in Iran, places in Northern Nigeria that have this Sharia law.

So I think that within an Islamic system, there is a problem of dealing with a pluralistic society.

MR. LAND: To borrow a phrase from someone who has studied the problem in much more depth than I have, it's been my impression from my three years on the Commission, and other observations, that Islam is a "many splintered thing." Some expressions of Islam clearly have a problem with practicing religious freedom for people who disagree with them and others don't. I think Michael's point is very well made, that you do have some overwhelmingly majority Islamic countries that do – are committed to religious freedom and in some cases have it. And some – the response, for instance, of Saudi Arabia and the response of Morocco are very different, and the response – you know, Indonesia is a country that is committed to religious freedom. They're having a hard time enforcing it because – but that's a lack of central government authority; not central government will. And clearly they have been committed to it.

Bangladesh. It's true that there are none presently in the Arab world that had that kind of a commitment, no countries that do, but I'm not sure that that's not a particular issue for Arabic culture, not Islamic culture per se, because we do have majority Islamic countries that do have a commitment to religious freedom.

So I would say it depends on what expression of Islam you're talking about. It's like – in many ways it's like historically Christianity. There have been many, many expressions of Christianity. Some have been more tolerant of differing views than others.

MR. YOUNG: Let me add just one more word about that. I think it's important not to be diverted from something very central, and the central point is it is not Islam about which this Commission is or should be concerned. It is not Hinduism. It is not the orthodox churches that we are concerned about. What we are concerned about is people within those traditions or without those traditions who may use those arguments that they derive, correctly or incorrectly, from a religious basis or any other ideology, and use those as a justification for intolerance and repression of others. It's just not in any way unique to the Islamic world.

As you read our report you'll see there's criticism to India, particularly the extent to which the government has aligned itself with the Hindu nationalists, and is Hindu a religion that has trouble being moderate and tolerant? I mean, that's a bizarre question and the answer is almost certainly no, as it is certainly no in the case of Islam. But there are people who will take those doctrines or any other ideology that they can find and use those as justifications for repression, and that is what we decry, and I think it's important not to lose sight of that. Our criticisms, as you read our report, I think will range across a very broad range of religious justifications.

Many of the problems in Eastern Europe and former Russian republics that we're defining are really problems of some religious leaders under the cloak of religion of the Orthodox Church, aligning with the revanchist right to create repression. And whether they are Orthodox, whether they are Hindu, whether they are Muslim, whether they are Mormon, whether they are Catholic is not the central concern. The central concern is the taking of those ideologies or any ideology and using it to justify repression and to garner

political support to do that. That is, in our judgment, something governments must guard against and must not permit and must not tolerate.

Now, let's see if there are any other questions. We have –

Q: This is really important.

MR. YOUNG: I appreciate that. We can talk after about it.

Please.

Q: Has the Commission looked into – (off mike)?

MR. YOUNG: We have not as a Commission yet studied and opined on Mauritania.

Q: Just to get back to that point – (off mike) – would you say that – (off mike) – was able to advise you that there are teachings in Islam that preach non-tolerance against non-Muslims?

MR. YOUNG: Does he advise us that there are teachings – I will let you address that question to him. I think advice and counsel deliberations that go on with the Commission are private matters. I urge you, if you're interested, to contact him directly. He can tell you what he believes. I certainly would not represent publicly either what he says in Commission meetings or what his stances are. He's extensively published and I'm sure is fully capable of telling you precisely what he believes.

Q: Did he advise the Commission – (off mike)?

MR. YOUNG: I would urge you to talk to him and ask him if he is comfortable sharing with you the advice he gives the Commission.

Q: (Off mike) – and my question is in regard to the – (off mike) – situation in Vietnam. The State Department has repeatedly refused to put it down in the CPC list. However, the reason – (off mike) – that Vietnam has in fact made a lot of improvements on human rights – (off mike) – evidence enough for the State Department to take action? Or if not, then what are the actual nature of –

MR. YOUNG: Well, it's true, there should be convincing enough evidence. In our judgment there has been convincing evidence in the past. You highlight what is unmistakably convincing additional evidence, and we hope that's enough to persuade the State Department. We have stated strongly and publicly, and do so again today, Vietnam should be named; it should be a country with which the United States is dealing much more intensely on this particular issue.

I think I am told we have to vacate the room at 11:00. We passed that just a little bit. I think Commissioners will certainly remain around for a few minutes in the hallway if you'd like to ask questions.

Let me introduce, before we go, others who have been helpful in their sources of information about the Commission's activity: our press secretary, Anne Johnson is in the back, and Joe Crapa, our executive director, is standing, frowning at me over there for having gone over time. And there are other staff of the Commission here. Please feel free to talk to them as well.

Thank you very much.

(END)