

November 8, 2005: China: USCIRF releases Policy Focus on China at press conference with Congressional Members

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 8, 2005

Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27 WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) will be joined by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA), Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA), and Congressman Christopher Smith (R-NJ) for the release of USCIRF's Policy Focus on China at an on-the-record press conference on Wednesday, November 9, 2005, from 2:00-3:00 p.m., in The Capitol, Room H-203. The press conference is open to members of the media and the public. The findings and recommendations in Policy Focus on China are based on the Commission's August 2005 official two-week delegation to China, when it traveled to Beijing, Urumqi, Kashgar, Chengdu, Lhasa, and Shanghai. The release of Policy Focus on China and its recommendations for U.S. policy are especially timely in light of President George W. Bush's November 14 meeting in Beijing with Chinese President Hu Jintao. During its visit, which was the result of several years of diplomatic effort by the United States government, the Commission engaged senior Chinese officials at the national, provincial and local levels, including Vice Premier Hui Liangyu, responsible for the management of religious affairs and the protection of human rights in discussions on Chinese policies and practices relating to religious freedom. In addition, the Commission met with Chinese academics and lawyers, UN officials, and representatives of government-sanctioned Buddhist, Catholic, Taoist, Islamic, and Protestant religious organizations. "The Commission continues to find that the Chinese government systematically violates the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, contravening both the Chinese constitution and international human rights norms," said USCIRF Chair Michael Cromartie. "Indeed, the room for political openness, public activism, and greater civil and individual freedoms is narrowing in China. Economic freedom, as some had hoped, has not led to more political freedom or human right protections. Within the last week, the Chinese government has shut down the law firm of Gao Zhisheng, a prominent civil rights lawyer who refused to withdraw an open letter urging President Hu Jintao to respect freedom of religion and stop persecuting members of the Falun Gong, and has arrested two priests of the "underground" Catholic Church following an interview they gave to an Italian newspaper. Given the continuing critical human rights problems in China, the Commission believes that these concerns must be raised at the highest levels and that U.S. officials should provide a consistent, candid, and coordinated message about human rights, including religious freedom, in their interactions with Chinese officials. Toward that end, the Commission has recommended policy options to strengthen U.S. human rights diplomacy with China." What: Press Conference on China with Congressional Members

When: Wednesday, November 9, 2005, 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Where: The Capitol, Room H-203

Michael Cromartie, Chair

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Nina Shea, Vice Chair
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