

## October 11, 2001: Commission Meets With Chinese Delegation to Express Religious-Freedom Concerns

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Left to right: Lorne Craner, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State; Nina Shea, Commissioner; He Kemin, Director General of the Chinese Religious Affairs Ministry; Shirin Tahir-Kheli, Commissioner; Felice Gaer, Commissioner; and Li Baodong, Director General, Bureau of International Organizations and Conferences, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. WASHINGTON - A delegation from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom met October 10 with officials from the Chinese Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Religious Affairs to discuss the Commission's concerns about religious-freedom violations in China. The Commission members noted the Chinese government's resumption of the Chinese-American Human Rights Dialogue as the Commission recommended in its May 2000 and May 2001 reports. They expressed the hope that this would lead to specific and measurable improvements. More remains to be done: The dialogue must continue at high levels and open up avenues to address human rights and religious-freedom questions at all levels. The Chinese government should accede to the Commission's long-standing request to visit China. Most important, the Commissioners stressed, the Chinese government must also respond with improvements in religious freedom and human rights for its citizens. The Commissioners raised a number of concerns and recommendations from the Commission's May 2001 report. They highlighted the cases of a number of adherents of various faiths who are currently in detention for their religious activities and noted that they are illustrative of widespread religious freedom problems in China. As the Secretary of State concluded in September 1999 and again in 2000, the Chinese government severely and systematically violates the religious freedom of its citizens and respect for religious freedom has "deteriorated markedly" in recent years. In the last year, the government of China has expanded its crackdown on unregistered religious communities and tightened its control on official religious organizations. The government has intensified its campaign against the Falun Gong movement and its followers. It has arrested many leaders of the unofficial Roman Catholic and Protestant "house church" movements. Provincial officials confiscated or destroyed up to 3,000 unregistered church buildings and Buddhist shrines in one district alone in southeastern China last November. Government control over the official Protestant and Catholic churches has increased, through which officials interfere in the training, ordination, and assignment of clergy. At the same time, the government continues to close Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and to maintain tight control over Uighur Muslims in the northwest. Commissioners Felice Gaer, Nina Shea, and Shirin Tahir-Kheli participated in the meeting, which was arranged with the help of the State Department.

Michael K. Young, Chair

- Felice D. Gaer Firuz Kazemzadeh Richard D. Land Bishop William Francis Murphy Leila Nadya Sadat Nina Shea The Hon. Charles R. Stith The Hon. Shirin Tahir-Kheli Steven T. McFarland, Executive Director