

## May 25, 2000: Commission Chairman Voices Disappointment with House Vote on China Trade

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 25, 2000 Contact:

Lawrence J. Goodrich, Communications Director, (202) 523-3240

The Chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom today expressed regret over the House vote to grant China Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status without requiring China to show "substantial improvement" on religious freedom. Such a standard was a major recommendation of the Commission's first Annual Report, issued May 1. "I am disappointed that the House decided to forgo the opportunity that the PNTR vote afforded to require that China show improvement in religious freedom," Rabbi David Saperstein said. "That's especially needed given the serious deterioration in religious freedom in China over the past year." The House vote was the crucial one, he noted, since most political observers believe the measure will easily pass the Senate. "There is a risk that the PNTR vote will be misinterpreted in China as a sign of American indifference to violations of religious freedom there," Chairman Saperstein said. "House approval of PNTR therefore makes it even more critical that Congress act to express its support for religious freedom in that country. We hope that Congress will now address some of the recommendations made in our report." He noted that the passage of the Levin-Bereuter amendment creating a commission to study China's human rights performance and report annually is a step in the right direction. Among other actions the U.S. should now take:-- Undertake a multilateral campaign to seek the release of arrested or detained Chinese religious leaders;-- Increase its efforts, from the President on down, to pass a censure resolution against China in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights;-- Increase exchange opportunities and radio broadcasts for the Muslim Uighur minority in Xinjiang;-- Use its influence to ensure that China is not selected as a site for the Olympic Games until it makes significant improvements in human rights, including religious freedom. In addition, Congress should invite the Dalai Lama, a symbol of the struggle for religious freedom in the face of China's repression, to address a joint session of Congress; The U.S. should also continue to press China on the five standards that the Commission set forth for granting PNTR, Saperstein noted: opening of a high-level dialogue on religious freedom; ratification of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights; access to Chinese religious leaders, including those imprisoned or detained; response to inquiries regarding persons imprisoned and detained for their religious beliefs, including those now missing; release of all religious prisoners. The Chinese Foreign Ministry in recent weeks has used the old saw that no one has the right to interfere in China's "internal affairs," Saperstein said. "We and others are not interfering in internal affairs; we are demanding that China live up to the international commitments it has undertaken, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of religion and belief." Saperstein said the Commission hopes Congress and the administration will study and implement its recommendations regarding China. "In the meantime, we will continue to monitor the condition of religious freedom in China and will make additional recommendations as the situation warrants."

Rabbi David Saperstein, Chair

- Dean Michael K. Young, Vice Chair Hon. Elliott Abrams Laila Al-Marayati, M.D. Hon. John R. Bolton Firuz Kazemzadeh Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick Nina Shea Justice Charles Z. Smith Ambassador Robert Seiple, Ex-Officio Steven T. McFarland, Executive Director