

October 19, 1999: Meeting with President Clinton to Urge Action on Sudan and China

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 19, 1999 Contact:

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

WASHINGTON, October 19, 1999 -- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom met today at the White House with President Clinton, National Security Adviser Samuel Berger, and White House Chief of Staff John Podesta to urge action against religious persecution in Sudan and China. On Sudan, the Commission called upon the President to apply his 1997 Executive Order imposing economic sanctions on that country to bar the Chinese government's China National Petroleum Corporation and other companies from using U.S. stock exchanges to finance Sudan's new oil pipeline. Revenues from the pipeline would, the Commission said, insulate Sudan's repressive regime from the impact of economic sanctions, and would perpetuate the 16 year old civil war which has already claimed the lives of 2 million Sudanese. The Commission also urged the President to meet with experts on Sudan to design future actions aimed at ending egregious religious persecution by that country's government, and to send Secretary of State Albright to a congressionally-sponsored "summit meeting" on the Sudan on November 9th. Finally, it asked the President to speak out more forcefully and frequently - in public, in multilateral organizations, and in diplomatic exchanges - against the violations of religious freedom in Sudan and to strengthen the hand of the U.S. special peace envoy. On China, the Commission welcomed the State Department's designation of that country as a "country of particular concern" due to its severe violations of religious freedom. The Commission emphasized, however, that this designation must carry consequences if the International Religious Freedom Act is to be taken seriously. It urged the Administration to raise religious freedom issues as often and as prominently as possible in meetings with Chinese officials. The Commission emphasized the importance of cooperating with the Administration to devise strategies that would affect Chinese conduct. There was discussion as well of approaches to the U.S. business community on this issue. On Russia, the regressive trend toward violations of religious freedom was discussed. It was agreed that the Commission and the Administration would seek to develop new policies to address this growing problem. The link between extreme nationalism and religious persecution was noted as a significant factor in designing an effective U.S. policy. The President commended the Commission for its work to date and strongly encouraged its continuing efforts.

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