

September 26, 2005: OSCE: Vice Chair Felice Gaer appointed as official member of U.S. delegation to Warsaw conference

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Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27 WASHINGTON - U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer will be an official member of the U.S. delegation to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meeting held in Warsaw, Poland from September 26-30, 2005. Commissioner Gaer is also Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee. The U.S. delegation will be headed by Lorne R. Craner, former Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Gaer will be one of six members of the official delegation. (For more information on the US delegation, see <http://osce.usmission.gov/HDIM/hdim2005.html>.) The annual Warsaw meeting is Europe's largest human rights conference, and the OSCE's most important human rights event of the year. Its purpose is to examine implementation of the human rights commitments in OSCE's founding document, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, and other commitments made since then. Participants from government and civil society will devote special attention to future planning to combat intolerance and discrimination, including antisemitism, discrimination against Muslims, xenophobia and related intolerance, including Christianophobia. These topics have been a special focus of USCIRF concern in the OSCE. The USCIRF, an independent federal body, has been an active participant in past OSCE conferences. Most recently, USCIRF Commissioners were members of the U.S. delegation to the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and on Other Forms of Intolerance held in June in Cordoba, Spain. The OSCE consists of 55 nations, including the nations of Europe and Eurasia, the U.S. and Canada. The USCIRF has made a series of recommendations to the U.S. government, among them asking that the U.S. delegation to the OSCE to urge the participating States to: take specific steps to ensure that they are complying with their commitments to combat discrimination, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism, as detailed in the 1990 Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension, including adopting laws against incitement to violence and ensuring effective remedies for acts of discrimination; take concrete action to engage in a regular public review of compliance with OSCE commitments on freedom of religion or belief, on racial and religious discrimination, and on anti-Semitism, including by facilitating a more active role by non-governmental organizations as part of that process; condemn in a public fashion, while vigorously protecting freedom of expression, attacks targeting Muslims and pursue and prosecute the perpetrators of such attacks; monitor the actions of regional and local officials who violate the right to freedom of religion or belief and provide effective remedies for any such violations; and establish mechanisms to review the cases of persons detained under suspicion of, or charged with, religious, political, or security offenses and to release those who have been imprisoned solely because of their religious beliefs or practices, as well as any others who have been unjustly detained or sentenced. In the OSCE region, the Commission has expressed strong and continued concern regarding particularly severe violations of freedom of religion in both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, recommending that the U.S. government designate each of them as a "country of particular concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The Commission has also placed Belarus and Georgia on its Watch List of countries where religious freedom merits on-going scrutiny.

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