

July 2, 2007: USCIRF Elects Michael Cromartie Chair

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WASHINGTON—The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent, bipartisan federal agency advising the Administration and Congress, has elected Michael Cromartie as chair to succeed Felice D. Gaer, who has served in this capacity since 2006. Preeta D. Bansal and Richard D. Land were elected Vice Chairs. The officers will serve for one year effective July 1. Cromartie is Vice President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, where he directs the Evangelicals in Civic Life program and the Media and Religion program. Cromartie, who has served previously as Chair and Vice Chair of the Commission, is also a Senior Advisor to The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and a Senior Fellow with The Trinity Forum. President George W. Bush appointed him to the Commission. "In his three years on the Commission, as well as throughout his professional life, Michael Cromartie has manifested a strong and continuing commitment to advancing the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. I am grateful he is willing to serve again and provide leadership to the Commission in the coming year," Gaer said. "The challenges to these and related freedoms of expression and association are more virulent than ever," said Gaer, "and the Commission will greatly benefit from the intensity, sincerity, and universality of focus that Michael Cromartie brings to the subject." Cromartie thanked Gaer for chairing the Commission over the past year, which included official Commission visits to Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and publication of reports and policy briefs on Russia, Bangladesh, and the implementation of Commission recommendations on treatment of asylum seekers in the U.S. Expedited Removal program. Through testimony to the Iraq Study Group, op-eds, and high-level meetings, the Commission directed public attention to the plight of Iraqi religious minorities. Gaer represented the Commission at official commemorations of the 25th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Religious Intolerance. Through the participation of Gaer and other Commissioners in meetings of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the publication of timely op-eds, the Commission emphasized the need to create mechanisms to counter growing anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, and other religious intolerance worldwide. Gaer will continue to serve as a Commissioner. "We all appreciated Felice Gaer's leadership of the Commission, bringing her human rights expertise into the Commission's analyses and actions. Her unique insights and leadership helped keep the Commission's work front and center in the vital effort to end repression worldwide—and particularly to end severe violations of human rights targeted at religious minorities or in the name of religion," Cromartie said. Bansal is a lawyer whose career has spanned government service and private practice. A former Solicitor General of the State of New York, Bansal heads the appellate litigation group of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, a major Wall Street law firm. She also serves on the advisory boards of several leading human rights and civil rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and the National Women's Law Center. Land is president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. He hosts three nationally syndicated radio programs: For Faith & Family, For Faith & Family's Insight, and Richard Land Live! He is also Executive Editor of FFV, a magazine covering traditional religious values, Christian ethics, and cultural trends, and is the author of several books, most recently *The Divided States of America?* (2007). Other members of the Commission are Donald H. Argue, Imam Talal Y. Eid, Leonard A. Leo, Elizabeth H. Prodromou, Nina Shea, and John V. Hanford III. As the State Department's Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Hanford serves in an ex-officio, non-voting capacity. The Commission was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) to monitor violations of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in IRFA and set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. It is the first government commission in the world with the sole mission of reviewing and making policy recommendations on the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom globally. Its Executive Director is Joseph R. Crapa; the Deputy Directors are Tad Stahnke and David Dettoni. Michael Cromartie, Chair • Preeta D. Bansal, Vice Chair • Richard D. Land, Vice Chair • Don Argue • Imam Talal Y. Eid • Felice D. Gaer • Leonard A. Leo • Elizabeth H. Prodromou • Nina Shea • Ambassador John V. Hanford III, Ex-Officio