

## April 24, 2002: Commission Deplores Unwarranted Rejection of UNCHR Resolution on Iran

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 24, 2002 Contact:

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a federal agency advising the Administration and Congress, deplores the unwarranted rejection by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) of a resolution expressing concern over human rights abuses in Iran. Iran is a "country of particular concern (CPC)," as recommended by the Commission and so designated by the current and previous Administrations. A CPC is a country whose government has engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom as defined in the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. Since 1984, annual resolutions at the UNCHR have been extremely important in identifying and monitoring violations of religious freedom and other human rights against religious minorities in Iran, particularly Baha'is. This deplorable decision - the resolution failed by one vote - marks the first time in 19 years that the UNCHR has failed to condemn Iran. The vote also terminates the mandate of the UNCHR's Special Representative on human rights in Iran, Mr. Maurice Danby Copithorne. Last year, the Commission recommended that the U.S. government should vigorously urge its European and other allies to support and advocate religious freedom in Iran. More specifically, "The U.S. government should continue to sponsor or support annual resolutions of the UN Commission on Human Rights ...condemning Iran's egregious and systematic violations of religious freedom and should recruit the support of other Commission member countries, until such violations cease." Iran's violations of religious freedom and other human rights remain severe. The UNCHR's recent vote ignores the findings of its own Special Representative on Iran, who concluded in a January 2002 report that members of religious minorities continue to face persecution and discrimination in Iran, as do women, dissidents, members of ethnic minorities, and in particular, journalists. Moreover, the government of Iran has not implemented the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance embodied in General Assembly Resolution 53/158. It is now vital that UNCHR's Special Rapporteurs on thematic issues seek and gain entry to Iran, and report on human rights abuses there. The vote reveals the urgent need for U.S. membership on the UNCHR, from which it is involuntarily absent for the first time since 1947. This deprives our nation of a voice and a vote on religious freedom and other human rights issues in the main UN human rights forum. In the past, the United States has played a key role in helping encourage other states to condemn religious freedom and other abuses in Iran. Meanwhile, the Commission urges President Bush to speak out against Iran's continuing religious freedom and other human rights violations and leave no doubt where the United States stands on the issue.

Michael K. Young, Chair

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