

## April 13, 2005: USCIRF Chair encourages Iraqi civil society leaders to protect religious freedom in Iraqi permanent constitution

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WASHINGTON - U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Chair Preeta D. Bansal participated recently in a working session of Iraqi civil society in Amman, Jordan that brought together a diverse group of leaders to discuss issues related to the drafting of Iraq's permanent constitution. Iraq's interim constitution, the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), requires the permanent constitution to be drafted and finalized after consultation with civil society. "The session provided an important opportunity for influential leaders from Iraq's NGO, academic, religious and business communities to explore central constitutional questions, including gender equality, federalism, and the role of religion in Iraq's new constitution," said USCIRF Chair Preeta D. Bansal.

Commissioner Bansal presented participants with the findings of a recent USCIRF study on the role of religion in the constitutions of predominantly Muslim countries. She underscored the variety of constitutional models in existence in the Muslim world, the wide range of possible constitutional roles ascribed to Islam, and the fundamental standards associated with freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief under international human rights law. Following her presentation, participants had a discussion about the potential role of Islam in the permanent constitution and the need to ensure that the constitution represents all segments of Iraqi society. The working session was convened under the auspices of the American Bar Association's (ABA) Iraq Legal Development Program.

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