

October 8, 2001: Commission Urges President to Continue to Defend Human Rights, Religious Freedom

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 8, 2001 Contact:

Lawrence J. Goodrich, Communications Director, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom October 5 wrote President Bush, urging him "to continue to declare that the United States will defend religious freedom and to demonstrate its commitment to doing so." Together with its support for the fight against terrorism, Commission Chair Michael K. Young wrote, the Commission "is concerned that, in forging alliances against terrorism, the United States not compromise its commitment to human rights - including religious freedom - and democracy. We oppose such policy trade-offs." The full text of the letter follows: Dear Mr. President: The members of the U. S. Commission on International Religious Freedom condemn utterly the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, and mourn the terrible loss of life sustained that day. We support the U.S. government's strong commitment to respond. The Commission stands with our country and the world in fighting terrorism. The Commission is concerned that, in forging alliances against terrorism, the United States not compromise its commitment to human rights - including religious freedom - and democracy. We oppose such policy trade-offs. The United States has sought cooperation from several governments that are among the world's most egregious violators of religious freedom and other human rights, and that have been designated as "countries of particular concern" for those religious-freedom violations by the U.S. government, or recommended for that status by this Commission. Some of the countries are also on the State Department's list of states that sponsor international terrorism. As the United States works with these governments, it should make clear that their current commitment to cooperate to eradicate terrorism does not mean that the United States will lose interest in the conditions of human rights in their countries. The U. S. government should not, in effect, signal to these governments that it is indifferent to the violent persecution they inflict on their own populations as long as they stop exporting terrorism to the United States. Cooperation in the fight against terrorism does not grant them license to continue to abuse the rights of their own people. The U. S. government should continue to press human rights both publicly and privately and to protect human rights worldwide. In doing so we demonstrate our commitment to our principles and values, including the very rights and freedoms the terrorists would destroy. We may also be more effective in our efforts to eradicate terrorism. The United States, which is doing so much to stand up to terrorism, should insist that our partners eradicate the types of violations of human dignity that are themselves a threat to peace, justice, democracy, and the rule of law - so necessary to global security and stability. Mr. President, the International Religious Freedom Act affirms the policy of the United States to condemn violations of religious freedom and to implement effective and principled responses. We urge you to continue to declare that the United States will defend religious freedom and to demonstrate its commitment to doing so. Thank you for considering the Commission's recommendations. Respectfully, Michael K. Young Chairman

Michael K. Young, Chair

- Felice D. Gaer Firuz Kazemzadeh Richard D. Land Bishop William Francis Murphy Leila Nadya Sadat Nina Shea The Hon. Charles R. Stith The Hon. Shirin Tahir-Kheli Steven T. McFarland, Executive Director