

# January 18, 2002: Commission to Hold Hearing on Religious Freedom in North Korea

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent government agency advising the Administration and Congress, will hold a hearing on Thursday, January 24 in Washington, D.C., on "Promoting Religious Freedom in North Korea." The hearing is scheduled from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. in the Longworth House Office Building, Room 1302. Background Despite the difficulty of obtaining reliable information on conditions in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea), it is apparent that religious freedom does not exist there. Among other countries, the Commission nominated North Korea for designation by the State Department as a "country of particular concern" (CPC) - the world's worst religious-freedom violators, subject to U.S. action under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The Commission was pleased when in October 2001, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell designated North Korea as a CPC. U.S. policy toward North Korea has focused on concerns with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technology, and peace on the Korean Peninsula. Nevertheless, in light of the grievous religious-freedom situation there, the Commission believes that the United States must place significant emphasis on the protection of religious freedom in North Korea. The hearing will examine religious persecution in North Korea and explore policy options for the U.S. government to improve the situation of religious people there. To date, the confirmed witnesses and schedule are as follows: 9:00-9:15 Welcome and Introductory Remarks by Michael K. Young, Chair Panel I: 9:15-10:15 Religious Freedom Conditions in North Korea Norbert Vollertsen, former volunteer medical doctor in the DPRK Sang-Chul Kim, Secretary General, Commission to Help North Korean Refugees 10:15-10:30 Break Panel II: 10:30-12:00 U.S. Policy Options for North Korea Stephen Linton, Chairman, Eugene Bell Foundation Donald Oberdorfer, Adjunct Professor, SAIS, Johns Hopkins University Chuck Downs, Private consultant and author of *Over the Lines* Jack Rendler, Vice Chairman, U.S. Committee on Human Rights in North Korea

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