

## July 2, 2008: Felice D. Gaer Elected Chair of U.S. Commission; Michael Cromartie, Dr. Elizabeth H. Prodromou Elected Vice Chairs

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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 Felice D. Gaer to succeed Michael Cromartie as Chair. Dr. Elizabeth H. Prodromou and Mr. Cromartie were elected as Vice Chairs. The officers will serve for one year effective July 1.

“I am very pleased to see Felice Gaer returning to lead the Commission,” Mr. Cromartie said. “Her expertise and stature as an internationally renowned advocate for respect for human rights and religious freedom will continue to enhance the Commission’s impact.”

Ms. Gaer is Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee. She is a veteran analyst, advocate, and negotiator on human rights protections in global institutions. She is the first American to have served as an Independent Expert on the UN Committee against Torture. In addition, Ms. Gaer, who was appointed to the Commission in 2001, has served twice as Chair and twice as Vice Chair of USCIRF. She writes and lectures on U.S. and UN human rights policy, including on advancing the human rights of women and resolving complex conflicts. She was appointed to the Commission by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.).

Mr. 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. Mr. Cromartie, who has served twice as 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.

Under Mr. Cromartie’s chairmanship, the Commission traveled to Turkmenistan, Vietnam, South Korea, and Iraq

and neighboring countries affected strongly by the Iraqi refugee crisis. It held two hearings on religious minorities, sectarian violence, and the refugee crisis in Iraq, a hearing on the aftermath of the "Saffron Revolution" in Burma, and a hearing on religious freedom in and U.S. policy toward Iran. In addition to its "Policy Focus" studies on Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan, the Commission published "Prison Without Bars," a follow-up report to its 2005 study of religious repression in North Korea.

Dr. Prodromou is Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations at Boston University, where she is also a Research Associate at the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs. She has published widely on issues of religion and human rights, democracy, and security in Europe and the United States. A regional expert on Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr. Prodromou has been an invited policy consultant in the United States and Europe, and has received academic awards and grants from Harvard, New York, and Princeton Universities, as well as the Commission of the European Union.

"I commend Michael Cromartie on guiding the Commission through a difficult year of transition, following the death of Executive Director Joseph Crapa. Visits to Vietnam, Turkmenistan, Iraq, and Syria, as well as hearings on Iran, Burma, and Iraqi refugees helped the Commission make a mark on U.S. human rights policy concerning severe violations of religious freedom," Ms. Gaer said. "I am delighted that Dr. Elizabeth Prodromou will bring her academic rigor and perspective to help guide the Commission's ongoing program of activities."

Other members of the Commission are Donald H. Argue, Preeta D. Bansal, Imam Talal Y. Eid, Leonard A. Leo, Richard D. Land, and Nina Shea. As the State Department's Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Ambassador John V. Hanford III by statute serves in an ex-officio, non-voting capacity.

The Commission, established by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), monitors 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. It provides independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress, and 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.