

July 14: China: USCIRF Calls on President Bush to Make China Trip a Strong Public Statement in Defense of Religious Freedom and Human Rights

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 14, 2008

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WASHINGTON—The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom urges President Bush to use his upcoming visit to China to seek visits with prominent human rights defenders and religious leaders and to make a strong public statement about the importance of religious freedom and human rights in U.S.-China relations.

Commissioners attending a White House event marking the tenth anniversary of the International Religious Freedom Act heard the President speak of his commitment to religious freedom and human rights, including in China, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Sudan, Burma, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Eritrea. Commissioners commend the President on his commitment to religious freedom and human rights and note that he has said that he will again raise religious freedom concerns with President Hu during his upcoming visit to China.

“The international community awarded China the 2008 Summer Games with the trust that Beijing would improve its protections of fundamental human rights, including the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief,” said Commission Chair Felice D. Gaer. “The Commission concludes that China has not lived up to its promises and continues to engage in serious violations of religious freedom.”

The Commission has suggested specific actions for President Bush during his trip to China.

These include:

1) giving a speech emphasizing religious freedom as a universal human right that would be broadcast live to the Chinese people;

2) urging the Chinese government to take several immediate, confidence-building measures to signal its commitment to guaranteeing the religious freedom of Tibetans by:

a) announcing an end to all "patriotic education" programs for Tibetan monks and

nuns;

b) permitting a visit by independent, impartial experts to Geoden Choekyi Nyima,

the Dalai Lama's chosen Panchen Lama, and repealing new laws requiring

government approval of all lamas;

c) affirming that minors should be able to engage in religious education at any age;

d) announcing that devotion to the Dalai Lama, including the display and veneration

of his picture, is not a criminal act;

e) unconditionally releasing all detained monks and nuns and providing an

accounting for all persons taken into custody, killed or otherwise harmed during

the protests this past spring; and

f) continuing direct negotiations between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese

government.

3) seeking

the immediate release of members of Rebiya Kadeer's family and an end to harassment of peaceful Uighur Muslim adherents;

4) seeking

the release of the estimated 33 "underground" Catholic Bishops and priests, including Bishop Su Zhimin;

5) meeting

with leaders of an unregistered group or congregation and calling for an announcement that independent Protestants can legally register separately from government-approved Protestant organizations;

6) urging

the Chinese government, as the Sudanese government's major oil partner and arms supplier, to use its considerable leverage to end genocide and protect religious freedom in Sudan; and

7) urging

the protection of North Korean refugees and calling for an end to forced repatriation.

"We

know President Bush has a strong, personal commitment to the issue of religious freedom in China. We hope he will convey his convictions in tangible ways, not only to China's leaders, but to its people," Gaer said.