

June 26, 2002: Felice Gaer Elected Commission Chair; Michael Young Chosen Vice Chair

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent federal agency advising the Administration and Congress, has elected Felice Gaer to serve as Chair beginning July 1, 2002. Commissioner Gaer succeeds Dean Michael K. Young, who was elected Vice Chair. The election follows the Commission's practice of alternating the post of Chair yearly between Democratic and Republican appointees. The Chair is chosen by the Commissioners themselves. Ms. Gaer is director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee. In her 20 years in the human rights field, she has conceptualized, planned, and conducted research and advocacy on many aspects of human rights, including freedom of religion, the human rights of women, the rights of national and religious minorities, and the prohibition against torture. In 1999 she was elected a member of the Committee Against Torture, a 10-person United Nations supervisory body that reviews reports by governments on their compliance with the Convention Against Torture, a treaty ratified by over 120 countries. She is the first American to serve on the Committee. She was appointed as a public member of nine U.S. delegations to UN human rights negotiations between 1993 and 1999, including the UN Commission on Human Rights, the World Conference on Women (1995), and the World Conference on Human Rights (1993). She was appointed to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom in 2001 by Rep. Richard Gephardt (D), House Minority Leader. "Felice Gaer's extraordinary contributions to the field of human rights are well known by everyone who works in this area," Dean Young said. "It's the Commission's great good fortune that she has agreed to accept the chairmanship. We all look forward to continuing to expand the Commission's work under her leadership." Commissioner Young is dean of the George Washington University Law School. Prior to that, he was the Fuyo Professor of Japanese Law and Legal Institutions at the School of Law of Columbia University. At Columbia, he also served as Director of the Center for Japanese Legal Studies, the Center for Korean Legal Studies, and the Project on Religion, Rights and Religious Freedom. During the Administration of President George Bush, he served as Ambassador for Trade and Environmental Affairs, Deputy Under Secretary for Economic and Agricultural Affairs, and Deputy Legal Advisor to the U.S. Department of State. In 1996, Dean Young also served as Counsel to the Select Subcommittee on Transfers of Iranian Arms to Bosnian Muslims of the U.S. House of Representatives. First appointed in 1999 to the Commission by Sen. Trent Lott, then-Senate Majority Leader, he served as Vice Chair from June 1999 to June 2000. Senator Lott reappointed him in 2001, after which he was elected Chair for a one-year term. "Mike Young has been an inspiring and effective chair," Commissioner Gaer said. "His sophisticated leadership style has led the Commission into a new type of reporting, with innovative proposals and country analysis, increasing our outreach to Congress and elsewhere. I'm honored to follow in his footsteps, and that he has agreed to continue as Vice Chair."

Felice D. Gaer, Chair

- Michael K. Young, Vice Chair Firuz Kazemzadeh Richard D. Land Bishop William Francis Murphy Leila Nadya Sadat Nina Shea The Hon. Charles R. Stith The Hon. Shirin Tahir-Kheli Tad Stahnke, Acting Executive Director