

May 12, 2003: USCIRF to announce its annual policy recommendations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 12, 2003 Contact:

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WASHINGTON - The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent and bipartisan federal agency, will announce tomorrow its Congressionally-mandated policy recommendations on the international effort to protect religious freedom. The Commission reviews violations of religious freedom abroad throughout the year. In May of each year, the USCIRF is required to submit to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress an annual report containing its recommendations. This year's report includes recommendations on addressing the global export of Wahhabi Islam by Saudi Arabia, protecting freedom of belief in the political reconstruction of Afghanistan, and using economic leverage to halt religious persecution in Vietnam, as well as others on China, Sudan, Russia, North Korea, Laos, and Belarus. Religious freedom and religious violence remain critical concerns of U.S. foreign policy. The issue is as relevant to the reconstruction of Iraq as it is to reducing conflict in Sudan. "Few issues have captured the imagination of Americans as has the concept of individual freedom and respect for the equal rights and dignity of every person. The reports being released show that the members of this Commission take seriously our responsibility to monitor and advise on how U.S. foreign policy tools can prevent such abuses," said USCIRF Chair Felice Gaer. The USCIRF is the only government commission in the world with a mandate to review and report on violations of the internationally-guaranteed right to freedom of religion and belief worldwide. The Commission gives the U.S. government and the American public the ability to promote religious freedom throughout the world by providing reliable information, analysis, and careful and creative policy recommendations. USCIRF's impact and its success in accomplishing its mission are dependent on bringing advice and accountability to U.S. foreign policy in its promotion of international religious freedom. While the work of the Commission is conducted year round, the Commission compiles an annual report in May, as required by law, for the President, Secretary of State, and Congress that provides country and issue-specific policy recommendations to promote religious freedom. The press conference will be held at the National Press Club in the Holeman Lounge on the 13th floor from 9:30-11:00 a.m. on May 13. Copies of the Annual Report and individual country reports will be available at the press conference and will also be posted on the Commission's Web site at www.uscirtf.gov. They can also be obtained by contacting the Communications department at (202) 523-3240. Interviews with Commissioners may be arranged by contacting Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, at (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

Felice D. Gaer, Chair

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