

July 14, 2003: China: Uighur roundtable on Capitol Hill

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 14, 2003 Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27

WASHINGTON -- On July 10, 2003, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) held its second off-the-record roundtable on religious freedom in China in the U.S. Capitol building. The USCIRF created this series to foster dialogue among senior Administration officials, members of Congress, human rights experts, NGOs, and representatives of religious groups to advise the Administration and Congress on U.S. policy options for promoting religious freedom and human rights in China. Commissioners Felice D. Gaer, Nina Shea, and Dean Michael K. Young were joined by State Department officials John Hanford, Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, and Lorne Craner, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, as well as Congressional staff and experts from academia, commissions, and advocacy, religious, and human rights organizations. The July 10 roundtable focused on the status of the Uighurs in Xinjiang. Participants discussed the extent to which the Chinese government has permitted or restricted religious freedom among the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, in the context of the government's Uighur and religious freedom policies. Participants suggested steps the U.S. government could take to advance the protection of human rights, including religious freedom, of the Uighurs. Participants also received updates on the Chinese government's ongoing activities to restrict the rights of Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetans, and unregistered house church members like Pastor Gong Shengliang, as well as on the status of the Hong Kong government's implementation of Article 23 (see USCIRF July 1 press release). The USCIRF has produced reports on the status of religious freedom in China and has recommended that China be listed by the State Department as a "country of particular concern" (CPC). Under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), a CPC is a country whose government has either engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom, defined as violations that are "systematic, ongoing, and egregious." IRFA sets forth that the policy of the United States is to oppose particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Commission's report on China may be viewed at www.uscirf.gov

Felice D. Gaer, Chair

- Dean Michael K. Young, Vice Chair Preeta Bansal Richard Land Bishop William F. Murphy Bishop Ricardo Ramirez Leila Nadya Sadat Nina Shea Ambassador John V. Hanford III, Ex-Officio Joseph R. Crapa, Executive Director