

## June 30, 2004: USCIRF elects Preeta D. Bansal as Chair, Felice D. Gaer and Nina Shea as Vice Chairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent and bipartisan federal agency advising the Administration and Congress, has elected Preeta D. Bansal to serve as Chair. Commissioner Bansal succeeds Michael K. Young, outgoing Dean of The George Washington University Law School and incoming President of the University of Utah. 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. Commissioner Preeta D. Bansal is Of Counsel at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom in New York City. She is a constitutional lawyer whose career has spanned government service, private law practice, and academia. She served as the Solicitor General of the State of New York from 1999 through 2001. Prior to her appointment as New York Solicitor General, Ms. Bansal practiced appellate, constitutional, and media law with private law firms in Washington, D.C. and New York City. She also served in the Clinton Administration as Counselor in the U.S. Justice Department and as Special Counsel in the Office of the White House Counsel, has taught constitutional law and First Amendment law, and served as a public policy fellow at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. She served as a law clerk to Justice John Paul Stevens of the United States Supreme Court and to Chief Judge James L. Oakes of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. Ms. Bansal is a magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Harvard-Radcliffe College, and a magna cum laude graduate of Harvard Law School, where she was Supervising Editor of The Harvard Law Review. Commissioner Felice D. Gaer is the Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee. She is Vice Chair of the Committee Against Torture, an official United Nations treaty monitoring body that reviews governmental compliance with the Convention Against Torture. She is the first American to serve on the Committee. Ms. Gaer 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, and the World Conference on Human Rights. She is also a member of the steering committee of Human Rights Watch/Europe and Central Asia and the International Human Rights Council of the Carter Center. Ms. Gaer is the author of more than 30 articles on international human rights topics. In 1995, she was awarded the Alumnae Achievement Award from Wellesley College. Commissioner Nina Shea is the Director of the Center for Religious Freedom of Freedom House in Washington, D.C. She has been an international human rights lawyer for 25 years and has for 18 years focused specifically on the issue of religious persecution. Before her appointment to this Commission, on which she has served from the beginning, Ms. Shea served on the Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom to the U.S. Secretary of State. She has organized and sponsored numerous fact-finding missions to Sudan, China, Egypt, and elsewhere and has testified regularly before Congress about the governments of these countries. She is the author of *In the Lion's Den*, a book on anti-Christian persecution around the world, and writes frequently on the status of religious freedom in the world. She was appointed as a public delegate on the U.S. delegation to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1993 and 2001.

Preeta D. Bansal, Chair

- Felice D. Gaer, Vice Chair Nina Shea, Vice Chair Patti Chang Archbishop Charles J. Chaput Khaled Abou El Fadl Richard Land Bishop Ricardo Ramirez Michael K. Young Ambassador John V. Hanford III, Ex-Officio Joseph R. Crapa, Executive Director