

September 20, 2004: "Imagining Freedom and Straining to Hear Voices For Tolerance in a Post-9/11 Age"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA ADVISORY

Keynote speaker Dr. Azar Nafisi, author of the #1 New York Times bestseller *Reading Lolita in Tehran*

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) invites members of the media to attend an invitation-only event the Commission is holding in conjunction with The Folger Shakespeare Library. Our featured speaker will be Dr. Azar Nafisi, author of the #1 New York Times bestseller *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Her presentation will be followed by a question and answer session and a reception. The event, in conjunction with an exhibit currently at the Folger titled *Voices for Tolerance in an Age of Persecution*, will focus on the need for greater respect for tolerance and human rights amid rising religious repression in the world today.

WHAT: "Imagining Freedom and Straining to Hear Voices for Tolerance in a Post-9/11 Age"

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Dr. Azar Nafisi, author of "*Reading Lolita in Tehran*"

WHEN: September 23, 2004, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

WHERE: Folger Shakespeare Library, Elizabethan Theatre

201 East Capitol Street, S.E., Washington, DC

The exhibition currently on display, which runs through October 30, uses the Folger's rich collections of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books, manuscripts, and works of art to tell the important story of those who argued for religious tolerance in early modern Europe - a Europe divided by religious and political conflict and struggling to understand newly discovered lands and peoples. These voices have particular resonance in today's world where the relevance of historical events to present conflicts is often little understood or even ignored.

Our speaker, Dr. Azar Nafisi, is a visiting fellow and professorial lecturer at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies and the director of The Dialogue Project, a global forum about the relationship between the Islamic world and the West. After being fired from her job as an English literature professor at the University of Tehran for refusing to conform to religious edicts and prescribed expression, Dr. Nafisi gathered seven of her best female students at her home to discuss the work of Jane Austen, Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Vladimir Nabokov. These meetings served as a springboard for debating the social, cultural, and political realities of living under strict Islamic rule, and inspired candid discussions which formed the basis of her award-winning book, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*.

Because space is limited, we request that you ensure seating by responding to David Park, at (202) 523-3240, ext.16, or by sending a confirmation email to communications@uscirf.gov.

This year's report includes recommendations on the process of constitutional development in Afghanistan and Iraq, the designation of "countries of particular concern," the global export of a religious ideology that explicitly promotes hate and violence toward members of other religious groups by Saudi Arabia, individual country reports on more than 20 countries, a review of U.S. Refugee and Asylum Programs, and a critique of the State Department's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom.

WHAT: Press Conference: U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom 2004 Annual Report

WHEN: Wednesday, May 12, 2004, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.

WHERE: National Press Club, 529 14th Street, NW, in the Murrow/White/Lisagor rooms, 13th floor

Copies of the Annual Report will be available at the press conference and will also be posted on the Commission's Web site at www.uscirf.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.

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