

## March 27, 2006: Sudan: USCIRF to Release Policy Focus on Sudan at Capitol Hill Press Conference with Congressional Members

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 27, 2006

Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27 WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) will be joined by Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA), Congressman Donald M. Payne (D-NJ), and other Congressional Members for the release of USCIRF's Policy Focus on Sudan at an on-the-record press conference on Wednesday, March 29, 2006, from 11:00-12:00 a.m. in the Capitol, Room HC-203. The press conference is open to members of the media and the public. The Commission visited Sudan in January 2006 to assess the state of religious freedom and the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended a two-decades long civil war between the North and South. Policy Focus on Sudan includes recommendations for U.S. policy as a result of the findings from that visit. Although the Comprehensive North-South Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed a year ago, the Commission found that there have been significant delays and shortcomings in the CPA's implementation, raising questions regarding the sincerity of the commitment of the National Congress Party in the Government of National Unity. Moreover, the religious freedom and other human rights protections agreed to in the CPA and enshrined in Sudan's Interim National Constitution have yet to result in significant changes in practice in government-controlled areas of the North. The institutions intended to protect human rights still are not functioning, while an authoritarian security system remains in place, and the attitude of impunity for human rights abuses shows little sign of change. In addition, no country comes close to Sudan in terms of the number of civilians displaced by conflict. There are more than 600,000 refugees and four million internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the North-South civil war, and more than 200,000 refugees and two million IDPs from Darfur, for a total of seven million displaced Sudanese from a population of 40 million. Engagement on both Darfur and the implementation of the CPA is critical to help the Sudanese secure the peace they overwhelmingly desire. The United States has an opportunity to influence this process for the better. Sudan is a strategic nation where U.S. influence has already made a difference and should continue to do so. Toward that end, the Commission will call attention to its recommendations for U.S. policy in Policy Focus on Sudan, which include: U.S. diplomacy and the implementation of the CPA; U.S. sanctions on Sudan; and U.S. assistance to promote reconciliation, human rights, and the return of refugees and IDPs. Since its inception in 1998, including after the signing of the Peace Agreement, USCIRF has determined that Sudan should be designated as a "country of particular concern," or CPC. The State Department has repeatedly adopted this recommendation. In the past, the Commission has identified Sudan as the world's most violent abuser of the right to freedom of religion and belief and has drawn attention to the Sudanese government's genocidal atrocities against civilian populations, including in Darfur. As a result of the government's policies of Islamization and Arabization, 2 million people, mostly Christians and followers of traditional African religions in southern and central Sudan, died in the now-concluded North-South civil war. The Commission also has made a series of recommendations regarding U.S. policy toward Sudan, including that the U.S. government appoint a nationally prominent individual to bring about a peaceful and just settlement of the war in Sudan. In September 2001, President Bush appointed former Senator John Danforth as Special Envoy for Peace in Sudan, energizing the Sudan peace process. The Commission's consistent advocacy of strong U.S. pressure on the Khartoum regime also was reflected in the Comprehensive Peace in Sudan Act of 2004, signed by President Bush on December 23, 2004.

Michael Cromartie, Chair

- Felice D. Gaer, Vice Chair  
Nina Shea, Vice Chair  
Preeta D. Bansal  
Archbishop Charles J. Chaput  
Khaled Abou El Fadl  
Richard D. Land  
Elizabeth H. Prodromou  
Bishop Ricardo Ramirez  
Ambassador John V. Hanford III, Ex-Officio  
Joseph R. Crapa, Executive Director