

## June 30, 2006: Felice D. Gaer Elected New Chair of USCIRF; Michael Cromartie, Elizabeth H. Prodromou and Nina Shea Elected Vice Chairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Anne Johnson, Communications Director, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27 WASHINGTON- Felice D. Gaer has been elected chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent, bipartisan federal agency advising the Administration and Congress. Michael Cromartie, Elizabeth H. Prodromou and Nina Shea were elected Vice Chairs. Ms. Gaer is Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee. Gaer also serves as a member of the Committee Against Torture, an official United Nations expert body that reviews compliance by 139 countries with a core human rights treaty, the Convention Against Torture. "Felice Gaer is a recognized expert in the human rights field, with many years of experience behind her," said Commissioner Michael Cromartie, the outgoing Chair of the Commission. "The work of the Commission will surely benefit from her leadership." Ms. Gaer, who has served on the Commission since 2001, previously served as Chair from 2002 to 2003, and as Vice Chair from 2004 to 2006. She was appointed to the Commission by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.). Ms. Gaer thanked Mr. Cromartie for his chairmanship of the Commission over the past year. "The past year was a particularly active one for the Commission, under Commissioner Cromartie's leadership," Ms. Gaer said. "During the past year, the Commission issued a landmark report on violations of religious freedom in North Korea and visited China, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Russia to examine conditions in those countries." Commissioner Michael Cromartie directs the Evangelicals in Civic Life program and the Media and Religion program at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, which was established in 1976 to clarify and reinforce the bond between the Judeo-Christian moral tradition and domestic and foreign policy issues. He is also a Senior Advisor to The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in Washington. Commissioner Elizabeth Prodromou is Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations at Boston University, where she is also the Associate Director of the Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs. Dr. Prodromou holds a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A regional expert on Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, Dr. Prodromou has been an invited policy consultant in the U.S. and Europe, and has received academic awards and grants from Harvard University, New York University, and Princeton University. Commissioner Nina Shea, director of the Center for Religious Freedom, a division of Freedom House, has served as Vice Chair since 2003. She has been an international human rights lawyer for 25 years, and for 20 years has focused specifically on the issue of religious freedom in American foreign policy. She is a co-author of a book on governance by extreme sharia, *Radical Islam's Rules*, and the author of a widely acclaimed book on anti-Christian persecution around the world entitled *In the Lion's Den*. The other members of the Commission are Preeta D. Bansal, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, Khaled Abou El Fadl, Dr. Richard D. Land, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, all of whom are voting members of the Commission, and Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom John V. Hanford III, who serves in an ex-officio, non-voting capacity, and is appointed by the US Department of State. The Commission was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) to monitor violations of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in IRFA and set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. It is the first government commission in the world with the sole mission of reviewing and making policy recommendations on the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom globally.

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