

July 19, 2006: USCIRF and Rep. Gary Ackerman to Convene a Town Hall Meeting on Religious Freedom in North Korea

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Anne Johnson, Communications Director, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27 WASHINGTON-Felice D. Gaer, chair of the independent, federal U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), will report on eyewitness accounts from North Koreans at a July 24 town hall meeting convened in New York by USCIRF and Rep. Gary Ackerman of New York focusing on human rights in North Korea. At the event, Gaer will release the Korean-language version of USCIRF's report "Thank You, Father Kim Il Sung": Eyewitness Accounts of Severe Violations of Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion in North Korea. The report is available in Korean and English on the USCIRF Web site, www.uscirf.gov. Congressman Ackerman's district-the Queens community of Flushing-contains one of the highest concentrations of Korean Americans in the United States. Commissioner Gaer will present findings from the USCIRF report, which documents the extreme repression of religious freedom in North Korea. David Hawk, the lead researcher of the USCIRF study, and Jaehoon Ahn, director of the Korea Service at Radio Free Asia, will speak at the event. New York City Councilman John Liu will also participate. Congressman Ackerman, a senior member of the House International Relations Committee and former chair of the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, which has jurisdiction over U.S. policy toward countries in Asia, made history in 1993 by traveling to North Korea to discuss with the late Kim Il Sung-the country's president at the time-the framework under which the communist nation would cease building nuclear weapons. Kim Il Sung was the father of current President Kim Jong Il. Upon his return to South Korea, Ackerman became the first person since the Korean War to cross the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone). WHAT: Town hall meeting on North Korea's violations of religious freedom WHEN: Monday, July 24, 2006, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. WHERE: Hyo Shin Bible Presbyterian Church, 42-15 166th Street, Flushing, New York 11358

Felice D. Gaer, Chair

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