

May 6, 2005: USCIRF announces new recommendations to Secretary of State Rice on Countries of Particular Concern; Releases 2005 Annual Report

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) will announce its 2005 recommendations to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for "countries of particular concern," or CPCs, at an on-the-record press conference at the National Press Club on May 11, 2005. The Commission's 2005 recommendations will include both additions to and removals from the list of recommended CPC countries, as well as the Commission's Watch List. The Commission will also release its 2005 Annual Report with policy recommendations for the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. The press conference will be held from 9:30-11:00 a.m. in the First Amendment Room on the 13th floor of the National Press Club (529 14 th Street, NW, Washington, DC). It is open to all members of the media and the public. The Commission is statutorily charged with making recommendations to the Secretary of State on countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief. Under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, those countries may be designated by the Secretary of State as "countries of particular concern," or CPCs. Last September, in addition to redesignating five countries (Burma, China, Iran, North Korea, and Sudan), the State Department acted on the Commission's recommendations and designated for the first time Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, and Eritrea. The Commission sent Secretary Rice a letter with recommendations for policy actions on those first-time designees. The State Department is required by law to take action on designated countries within 180 days. "In announcing its 2005 CPC recommendations to Secretary Rice, the Commission notes that the State Department has yet to announce Congressionally-mandated policy actions for its 2004 CPC designations of Saudi Arabia and Eritrea," said USCIRF Chair Preeta D. Bansal. "Yesterday, the State Department announced it had entered into an agreement with Vietnam. The agreement, however, makes clear there is 'outstanding work' to be done. The 2005 Annual Report we are releasing today includes the Commission's recommendations for Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Eritrea, as well as China, Egypt, India, Iraq, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan , among others." Copies of the Commission's 2005 CPC recommendations to Secretary of State Rice and its 2005 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 Commission's Communications department at (202) 523-3240. Interviews with Commissioners may be arranged by contacting Anne Johnson, Communications Director, at (202) 523-3240, ext. 27.

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