

June 3, 2005: Uzbekistan: USCIRF releases Policy Focus with recommendations for U.S. policy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27 WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today released Policy Focus on Uzbekistan at a roundtable "Human Rights and Instability in Uzbekistan" at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. USCIRF Commissioner Michael Cromartie represented the Commission and was joined by Robert Templer, Director of the Asia Program at the International Crisis Group, who presented Crisis Group's report, "Uzbekistan: the Andijon Uprising," on recent events in Uzbekistan. The roundtable was chaired by Dr. Martha Brill Olcott, Senior Associate at Carnegie. Policy Focus on Uzbekistan includes a number of recommendations for U.S. policy. Many of those recommendations were formulated on the basis of a Commission trip to Uzbekistan in October 2004, when the Commission met with Uzbek government officials, human rights activists, religious leaders, and former prisoners in the Ferghana Valley, including in Andijon, as well as in Tashkent and Samarkand. In April 2005, the Commission recommended to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that the State Department designate Uzbekistan as a "country of particular concern," or CPC, in accordance with the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, due to its egregious, systematic, and ongoing violations of religious freedom. CPC designation carries with it the requirement that the U.S. government take specific policy actions, up to and including the cessation of economic and security assistance. In addition to recommending that Uzbekistan be designated as a CPC, the Commission recommends that: U.S. statements and actions should be coordinated across agencies to ensure that U.S. concerns about human rights conditions in Uzbekistan are reflected in all dealings with the Uzbek government; U.S. assistance to the Uzbek government, with the exception of assistance to improve humanitarian conditions and advance human rights, should be made contingent upon establishing and implementing a specific timetable for the government to take concrete steps to improve conditions of freedom of religion or belief and observe international human rights standards; U.S. security and other forms of assistance should continue to be scrutinized to ensure that this assistance does not go to Uzbek government agencies, such as certain branches of the Interior Ministry and the Justice Ministry, which have been found to be responsible for religious freedom violations; and The U.S. government should reinstate Uzbek-language radio broadcasts at the Voice of America (VOA), and should use VOA and other appropriate avenues of public diplomacy to explain to the people of Uzbekistan why religious freedom is an important element of U.S. foreign policy as well as specific concerns about religious freedom in their country. Policy Focus on Uzbekistan is available on the Commission's web site at www.uscirf.gov and may also be obtained by contacting the Commission's Communications Department at communications@uscirf.gov or (202) 523-3240, ext. 38.

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