

## June 17, 2005: Vietnam : Commissioner Shea to testify on Capitol Hill

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 17, 2005 Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240, ext. 27 WASHINGTON - U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Vice Chair Nina Shea will testify on Monday, June 20, before the House International Relations Committee (HIRC) Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations at a hearing on human rights and religious freedom in Vietnam. The hearing will be held in Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2172, at 2:00 p.m. The hearing is being held on the day that Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai arrives in Washington for meetings with President George W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and other U.S. officials. Prime Minister Khai's visit comes 30 years after the end of the Vietnam War and 10 years after the normalization of U.S.-Vietnamese relations. Vice Chair Shea will testify that while trade and military ties have increased, significant problems in U.S.-Vietnamese relations remain, particularly in the area of human rights, including religious freedom, which will hinder the further growth of the relationship. Vietnam's economic openness has not led directly to political openness, and freedoms of speech, assembly, association, and religion continue to be significantly restricted. The Commission recommended beginning in 2001 that Vietnam be designated a "country of particular concern," or CPC, for severe violations of religious freedom. In September 2004, the State Department designated Vietnam a CPC. Last month, the State Department announced it had reached an "agreement" with Vietnam to avoid more stringent actions, which can include economic sanctions, required for countries designated as CPCs. However, as the Commission noted when the agreement was announced, the actions taken by Vietnam signal only promises of improvement and not actual measurable progress in addressing the problems that resulted in Vietnam's CPC designation. In her testimony, Commissioner Shea will outline the religious freedom concerns that remain, troubling new developments, and recommendations for U.S. policy to address these issues. Commissioner Shea's testimony will be available on the Commission's web site at [www.uscirf.gov](http://www.uscirf.gov) at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, June 20.

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