

## November 9, 2005: China: USCIRF releases Policy Focus on China at press conference with Congressional Members

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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 was joined by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA), Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA), Congressman Christopher Smith (R-NJ), and Congressman Mark Kennedy (R-MN) for the release of USCIRF's Policy Focus on China at an on-the-record press conference on Capitol Hill. The findings and recommendations in Policy Focus on China are based on the Commission's August 2005 official two-week delegation to China, when the Commission traveled to Beijing, Urumqi, Kashgar, Chengdu, Lhasa, and Shanghai. The release of Policy Focus on China and its recommendations for U.S. policy are especially timely in light of President George W. Bush's November 14 meeting in Beijing with Chinese President Hu Jintao. During its visit, which was the result of several years of diplomatic effort by the United States government, the Commission engaged senior Chinese officials at the national, provincial and local levels, including Vice Premier Hui Liangyu, who are responsible for the management of religious affairs and the protection of human rights. In addition, the Commission met with Chinese academics and lawyers, UN officials, and representatives of government-sanctioned Buddhist, Catholic, Taoist, Islamic, and Protestant religious organizations. The Commission raised questions on Chinese law and international human rights norms, the management of religious affairs in China, Chinese policies concerning religious education of minors and unregistered religious organizations, new regulations on cults and religious affairs, the unique situations in Tibet and Xinjiang, and the situation for North Korean asylum-seekers in China. The Commission also raised specific cases of concern with law enforcement officials and was allowed to meet with recently released Tibetan Buddhist nun Phuntsog Nyidron during its visit to Lhasa. The Commission pressed Chinese authorities to restore her freedom of movement so that she could get needed medical attention outside of China. "The Commission continues to find that the Chinese government systematically violates the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, contravening both the Chinese constitution and international human rights norms," said USCIRF Chair Michael Cromartie. "Indeed, the room for political openness, public activism, and greater civil and individual freedoms is narrowing in China. Economic freedom, as some had hoped, has not led to more political freedom or human rights protections. Particularly vulnerable are Catholics and Protestants engaged in unregistered activities, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, and members of religious and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. Within the last week, the Chinese government has sentenced an 'underground' Protestant church pastor to three years in prison for illegally printing and distributing Bibles and other religious books, shut down the law firm of Gao Zhisheng, a prominent civil rights lawyer who refused to withdraw an open letter urging President Hu Jintao to respect freedom of religion and stop persecuting members of the Falun Gong, and arrested two priests of the 'underground' Catholic Church following an interview they gave to an Italian newspaper." "Moreover," continued Cromartie, "there is a fundamental misapprehension on the part of Chinese officials about what freedom of religion or belief means under international instruments. They have mistaken - cynically or inadvertently - the proliferation of state-sanctioned and state-controlled religious expression with the guarantee of the individual right of freedom of religion or belief. The growth of religious sentiment within the spaces sanctioned by government does not constitute freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief." Given the ongoing critical human rights problems in China, the Commission believes that these concerns must be raised at the highest levels and that U.S. officials should provide a consistent, candid, and coordinated message about human rights, including religious freedom, in their interactions with Chinese officials. Toward that end, the Commission has recommended policy options to strengthen U.S. human rights diplomacy with China. The Commission has recommended that the U.S. government: Urge the Chinese government to end its current crackdown on religious and spiritual groups throughout China, including harassment, surveillance, arrest, and detention of persons on account of their manifestation of religion or belief; the detention, torture, and ill-treatment of persons in prisons, labor camps, psychiatric facilities, and other places of confinement, and the coercion of individuals to renounce or condemn any religion or belief; release all those imprisoned or detained on account of their manifestation of religious belief in contravention of international human rights standards; Fully implement the March 2005 bilateral agreement between the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Department of State, including by urging China to issue a national decree guaranteeing the right of minor children to manifest their religion or belief and the liberty of parents to ensure the religious and moral education in conformity with their own convictions; Promote rule of law in China by urging the Chinese government to investigate allegations of abuses of power by law enforcement officials and the use of torture to extract confessions in criminal cases, including the cases raised by the Commission with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, report publicly on the results of the investigations, and punish those found responsible for such abuses; Appoint a new counselor for Human Rights and the Rule of Law at the U.S. Embassy in Beijing; Support and encourage programs with U.S. human rights experts and Chinese government officials, academics, representatives of religious communities, and non-governmental organizations on international standards relating to the right of freedom of religion or belief; Support and encourage programs with international human rights experts and Chinese scholars, judges, attorneys, and government officials on reforms to the Chinese criminal justice system, including planned changes in the criminal procedure code, the role of defense lawyers, and international norms on criminal justice standards; Encourage international coordination of internationally funded technical assistance programs in China to ensure that programs advance Chinese compliance with its international

human rights commitments and the objectives of the bilateral and multilateral human rights initiatives with China; Increase the U.S. diplomatic presence in Tibet and Xinjiang; and Highlight conditions faced by Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists by increasing the educational opportunities in the United States that are available to religious and other leaders from these regions; creating legal clinics to assist Uighurs and Tibetans to enforce their human rights under the Chinese Constitution and international law; and expanding ongoing assistance to civil society programs that promote Tibetan culture, language, and social welfare and develop similar programs for Uighurs. China Policy Focus will be available on the Commission's web site at [www.uscirf.gov](http://www.uscirf.gov) at 2:00 p.m. on November 9 and may also be obtained by contacting the Commission's Communications Department at [communications@uscirf.gov](mailto:communications@uscirf.gov) or (202) 523-3240, ext. 26 or 27

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