

May 17, 2003: Religious Freedom Said at Risk in Afghanistan - Los Angeles Times

Los Angeles Times

May 17, 2003 Religious freedom in Afghanistan is perilously at risk unless the U.S. government presses for greater human rights protections, an independent government advisory panel has warned. In its annual report to Congress, the president and the State Department, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said Afghanistan could again become a repressive Islamic state unless Washington intervenes. "There are indications that Afghanistan is being reconstructed -- without serious U.S. opposition -- as a state in which an extreme interpretation of Sharia [Islamic law] would be enforced by a government which the United States supports and with which our nation is closely identified," the nine-member panel warned. The watchdog panel called for increased security to guarantee human rights, as well as secular courts to prevent "misguided judicial activism" and a commitment to make sure "punishments such as flogging, amputation of limbs and death by stoning are banned." The commission also rebuked Saudi Arabia for restricting non-Muslim faiths and faulted the State Department for not pressing for reforms. "The commission shares the State Department's view that freedom of religion does not exist in Saudi Arabia, and notes that advancing human rights, including religious freedom, has not been a public feature" of U.S. diplomacy, the panel said.