

September 5, 2000: Commission Praises Seiple Report, Urges Administration and Congress to Act

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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom today issued the following statement by Chairman Elliott Abrams in reaction to the release of the State Department's second annual Report on International Religious Freedom: "The State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom and outgoing Ambassador-at-Large Robert Seiple are to be commended for another masterful job in compiling in unvarnished form the tragic story of religious persecution around the globe. I am pleased to note that the report incorporates several of the suggestions for improvement made by the Commission in its May 1 Annual Report and by non-governmental organizations." "Once again the facts are in. The real question is what will the Administration and Congress do with them. The record during the almost two years since passage of the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998 leaves much to be desired. While many fine words have been spoken, little action has followed." "The evidence contained in the report would justify the State Department's listing for a second year of Burma, China, Iran, Iraq, and Sudan as 'countries of particular concern,' as well as the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the government of Serbia - which, while not countries, also remain 'particularly severe violators of religious freedom.' The report also gives additional weight to the Commission's July 28 recommendation that the Department add Laos, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Turkmenistan to the list, and we again urge the Department to do so." "The Commission is also disappointed in the Administration's policy towards several countries of particular concern following their designation in 1999. In the cases of Sudan and China, the sanctions it identified are grossly inadequate and ineffective. In Sudan, access to U.S. capital markets for companies involved in the Sudanese oil industry has not been closed, and the government of Sudan remains able to control most food aid supplied by the international community, thereby using food as a weapon in its civil war. The Administration has continued to push for Permanent Normal Trade Relations status for China without requiring any improvements in that government's egregious and deteriorating record on religious freedom." "The Commission also notes that with the upcoming departure of Ambassador Seiple his crucial position threatens to be vacant for many months. We will strongly urge the next president to move quickly to fill the vacancy with a person as knowledgeable and distinguished as Ambassador Seiple."

Hon. Elliott Abrams, Chair

- Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, Vice Chair Rabbi David Saperstein Laila Al-Marayati, M.D. Hon. John R. Bolton Dean Michael K. Young Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick Nina Shea Justice Charles Z. Smith Ambassador Robert Seiple, Ex-Officio Steven T. McFarland, Executive Director