

Commission Asks Sec. Albright to Stress Religious-Freedom Issues in North Korea

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom wrote to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on October 10 urging that she raise religious-freedom issues with Cho Myong Nok, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea National Defense Commission First Vice Chairman, during his visit to Washington October 9-12. The Commission calls the North Korean government's record on religious freedom "abysmal," stating that the "government has imprisoned religious believers and apparently suppresses all organized religious activity except that which serves the interests of the state." The text of the letter follows:October 10, 2000Dear Madam Secretary:On behalf of the Commission on International Religious Freedom, I am writing to urge that you raise the issue of religious freedom with Cho Myong Nok, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea National Defense Commission First Vice Chairman, during his visit to Washington October 9-12 as the Special Envoy of Chairman Kim Jong Il.The North Korean government's record on religious freedom is, by all accounts, abysmal. The State Department's Annual International Religious Freedom Report - 2000 states that "[g]enuine religious freedom does not exist" in North Korea. The government has imprisoned religious believers and apparently suppresses all organized religious activity except that which serves the interests of the state.U.S. policy with respect to North Korea has undergone significant change in the last year, including the announcement of the lifting of certain sanctions against the country. The State Department's announcement of the Special Envoy's visit characterizes it as "an important step forward in improving bilateral relations." The Commission urges you to raise the issue of religious freedom high on the agenda of your meeting to impress upon the Special Envoy that this issue is an essential part of U.S. relations with the Government of North Korea.Sincerely,Elliott AbramsChairman

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