

Commission Recommends President Bush Seek to Address Chinese People During Visit

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Contact:

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent federal agency advising the Administration and Congress, yesterday wrote President Bush recommending that he seek to address the Chinese people during his upcoming state visit to China. In the letter, Commission Chair Michael K. Young urged the President to "obtain assurances from the Chinese government that you will be given an opportunity to address the Chinese people directly by live, uncensored broadcast in a major speech on fundamental human rights and freedoms, particularly freedom of religion and belief."

Chairman Young noted President Ronald Reagan's address to students at Moscow State University in 1988. "The Commission urges you to follow this precedent and address the Chinese people directly in similar fashion to express why the U.S. government, on behalf of the American people, is concerned with violations of internationally recognized human rights, including religious freedom, and why it is U.S. policy to oppose such violations anywhere in the world - and not just in China," Young wrote. The text of the letter follows:

January 31, 2002

Dear Mr. President:

Pursuant to its advisory responsibilities under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA), the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom respectfully urges that before you undertake your upcoming state visit to the People's Republic of China you obtain assurances from the Chinese government that you will be given an opportunity to address the Chinese people directly by live, uncensored broadcast in a major speech on fundamental human rights and freedoms, particularly freedom of religion and belief. The Commission also recommends that you continue to raise religious-freedom concerns directly with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, as you began during your discussions in Shanghai last October.

In August 2001, the Commission wrote to you in connection with the visit to China that was then being planned for October to urge you to take specific steps - one of which was to address the Chinese people - during the visit that would clearly demonstrate our nation's commitment to genuine religious freedom. A copy of that letter is attached.

The widespread and serious abuses of the right to freedom of religion and belief in China are well documented by the State Department, this Commission, and religious and other nongovernmental organizations. In October 2002, for the third straight year, the Secretary of State has concluded that the Chinese government severely and systematically violates freedom of religion and belief, and named China as a "country of particular concern" under IRFA. The most recent State Department report on China concludes that the Chinese government's "respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience worsened" during the period of that report (July 2000 - June 2001). There are numerous serious violations against members of many of China's religious and spiritual communities.

An important aspect of promoting religious freedom in China, along with other human rights, is for representatives of the United States to inform the Chinese people why the U.S. government is concerned about human rights practices in their

country. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan gave an address to Russian students at Moscow State University during his state visit to the former Soviet Union in which he described in detail the commitment of Americans to democracy, economic freedom, freedom of assembly, speech, and the press, and freedom of religion. The address was well received among Russians. The Commission urges you to follow this precedent and address the Chinese people directly in similar fashion to express why the U.S. government, on behalf of the American people, is concerned with violations of internationally recognized human rights, including religious freedom, and why it is U.S. policy to oppose such violations anywhere in the world - and not just in China.*

Thank you, Mr. President, for considering the Commission's recommendations. The Commission plans to present you with the rest of its policy recommendations on China in the near future.

Respectfully,

Michael K. Young

Chair

Michael K. Young, Chair

- Felice D. Gaer Firuz Kazemzadeh Richard D. Land Bishop William Francis Murphy Leila Nadya Sadat Nina Shea The Hon. Charles R. Stith The Hon. Shirin Tahir-Kheli Steven T. McFarland, Executive Director