

## Promoting Religious Freedom During the Campaign Against Terrorism": The Hon. Paula Dobriansky Prepared Testimony

November 27, 2001 at 9:00 am Thank you for that introduction, Michael. And thank you for having me here today. It is a pleasure to testify for the first time before the Commission on International Religious Freedom. It's also a good opportunity to continue our dialogue, particularly at a time when religious freedom and other human rights issues are so central to our foreign policy efforts. This panel is entitled, "The World After September 11: A Strategic Shift in US Foreign Policy." There have indeed been significant changes; they have a daily impact on our work. While our priorities and partners have changed, our principles have not. That is what I would like to focus on this morning - the continued importance of democracy and human rights in our foreign policy and how we can in advancing human rights, in particular religious freedom, further our overall foreign policy goals, in the post-9/11 era. Let me use the four questions you posed to me in your letter as a framework for my remarks and our discussion. The questions were: How has U.S. foreign policy to promote human rights, including religious freedom, changed as a result of the events of September 11? How has the process of making foreign policy for specific issues or regions changed since September 11, including the relative influence of the various offices and agencies in the US Government? How have changes in U.S. foreign policy since September 11 affected the ability and willingness of the United States to promote human rights, including religious freedom especially in countries cooperating in the campaign against terrorism? Can promoting religious freedom be a tool in the Campaign Against Terrorism? First, the changes in our foreign policy since September 11th. Our security concerns have taken on a new dimension and we are seized with the task of eradicating the Al-Qa'ida network and other terrorist threats. That said, our commitment to promote democracy and human rights has not changed. In fact, the role that these issues play in our overall policy priorities, and particularly, in the fight against terrorism, has been enhanced in many ways. Our efforts to bolster our security and promote stability throughout the world go far beyond the war which you see daily on CNN. In addition to these very public actions, we are committed to a less public and longer-term effort of rooting out the underlying causes of terrorism. This is a law enforcement and intelligence issue. But it is also undoubtedly a democracy and human rights issues. And this Administration is fully cognizant and supportive of this nexus. In fact, giving up on our human rights and democracy promotion efforts - policy initiatives that have made great strides over the past decades - would be to capitulate to the very desires of the terrorists. International terrorism threatens the institutions that protect the dignity of human beings, including the rule of law and the international commitment to fundamental freedoms and human rights. The terrorists sought to undermine the values and ideologies that they saw as a threat to them. Yet, we will continue to promote these values, to protect the freedom of religion which they claim motivated their actions. While at the same time, we will defeat them and their actions. We will continue to show that an open, accountable government which respects the rights of its citizens, even their right of peaceful opposition, is a strong government, able to form coalitions, to share power, to practice pluralism. And that these governments are best positioned to combat extremist elements within their own societies. We have and will continue to carry this message to our coalition partners. Let me move on to the second question posed: how the process of making foreign policy has changed since September 11, including the relative influence of the various offices and agencies in the US Government. While we have strengthened the ranks in several areas, namely in counterterrorism and homeland security, we continue to pursue our agenda with the assets we had before. There is stronger coordination between agencies and with the White House. Just these past two weeks we worked in lockstep with the White House on the recent women in Afghanistan campaign. And we will continue this cooperation. We will also continue to work very closely with our interagency partners. We consult regularly with the Hill and testify on a range of human rights and democracy issues. Our NGO partners are indispensable resources and sounding boards. Both our American and indigenous partners have invaluable perspectives about the situation on the ground and provide us with an important record of what is going on. And they work closely with our embassies. I will tell you that this is an issue that is growing in understanding at our embassies throughout the world. And it is one that they are tackling head on. I am really pleased to see our ambassadors and embassy officers throughout the world making this a high priority in their engagement with our foreign counterparts. In fact, as Under Secretary, I have met with many of our outgoing Ambassadors to address human right issues. In addition, I have been a speaker at every Ambassadorial seminar organized by the Department and have always discussed the fact that human rights is integral to US foreign policy. Let me move on to the third question: how the changes in U.S. foreign policy since September 11 affect the ability and willingness of the United States to promote human rights, including religious freedom especially in countries cooperating in the campaign against terrorism. Many have raised concern that we are partnering for the sake of our counterterrorism objectives with some countries with less than stellar human rights records. It is true that our coalition for fighting terrorism is diverse, and that is because a diverse group of countries can agree on the objectionable nature of the acts of September 11th and the destructive and unacceptable nature of terrorism, writ large. We have not, however, suppressed our objections to their human rights violations because of this increased cooperation. We have and will continue to raise our concerns with our partners, regardless of their level of counterterrorism cooperation. They are not mutually exclusive goals. As you saw during the President's trip to China, he stated publicly that the war on terrorism was not a green light to crack down on innocent minorities in the name of security. There could have been no clearer message to a more vital state on this important and very sensitive issue. And I can personally attest to the President's very serious commitment to religious freedom issues. Another example was the OSCE Conference in Warsaw this September. There we made religious freedom a priority, laying down a marker, clearly asserting that the U.S. would continue to support our core principles during the campaign waged against terrorism. We backed our public statements up with strong bilateral meetings with individual delegations to discuss specific human rights cases, such as the case of

the legal status of minority religious groups in Russia and Central Asia. The partnerships we are building now can serve as a foundation for long-term systemic change in the region. And this message has been strongly stated by Secretary Powell and National Security Advisor Rice on numerous occasions. I see this coalition as a tremendous opportunity to engage these countries on their human rights records. We have increased dialogue with countries like Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and other Central Asia neighbors. We have closer ties to Russia and China. And we will not miss an opportunity to raise our concerns with these countries. Do not confuse progress on terrorism with a desire to turn a blind eye to other issues. We have not and will not do so. It would undermine our longer-term objectives to fight terrorism and would be a divergence from the ideals for which we stand. Let me address the final question: Can promoting religious freedom be a tool in the Campaign Against Terrorism? The very short answer is yes. Religious freedom is a cornerstone of our democracy promotion and human rights efforts. We promote religious freedom as the life-affirming endeavor that is at the core of every world religion. We seek religious freedom that elevates and nourishes human dignity, a freedom that teaches reconciliation and tolerance. In short, to protect freedom of religion and conscience, as well as the rule of law, is to create conditions which mitigate against terrorism. Terrorism is a form of fanaticism born of hatred. It includes a willingness to view other human beings as objects to be destroyed. It is at its core a pure form of anti-religion. At its best, religion is, therefore, an antidote to fanaticism, not its cause. In the current circumstances there is a great deal of focus on Islam, on the Taliban's and the terrorists' distorted interpretations of Islam, and on those who would like to portray this as a war between the Islamic and Christian world. These trends highlight why the promotion of religious freedom is of even greater importance, particularly to our security efforts. This is our opportunity to highlight how significant religious freedom and tolerance are in this country and throughout the world. Religious freedom gives a voice to all citizens of a country and protects their rights to practice and express their faith. Ironically, religious freedom undermines the very religious extremism that some governments seek to squelch by forbidding religious freedom. By giving an outlet, governments are not the enemy of a faith but rather the protector of it. These are the principles upon which this Commission was founded. Let's take that a step further. Let me make several points about the importance of religious freedom and how we do it. We need to continue to highlight the United States' support for freedom of religion. An assertive U.S. religious freedom policy will help win the war on terrorism by building bridges to the Muslim world. We must highlight that this is a war to protect human rights and religious freedom, so it is also a war to protect the practice of Islam. Nevertheless, there is lingering skepticism, and even hostility, towards the U.S. among many Muslims abroad. While many are speaking out against terrorism, it is not enough. Their views are the result of many things, including gross misunderstandings of U.S. policy. We must work harder to correct the record. We must continue to challenge more Muslims abroad to speak out about the life-affirming values of their religion. We must think outside the box and employ creative means to promote religious freedom, such as making opportunities for academic and cultural exchanges available to Islamic scholars or imams or other Muslim voices. This shows both Muslims and Muslim countries the importance of hearing religious voices. And it shows a strong American commitment to promoting open dialogue and religious freedom. You will hear from colleagues on the public diplomacy front this afternoon and they will undoubtedly share how we can do this. We need to make a clear case to those who are persecuted and those who persecute. We must show that promoting religious freedom is a win-win for both governments fearful of extremists and religious minorities who feel they have no voice. It will show governments that persecute religious minorities that religious freedom is a better weapon against extremism than tanks and police raids. And it will deter extremists from reaching for violent means to express their message. We recognize that many of the victims of religious persecution abroad are Muslims. We also protest the treatment given Shi'a Muslims in Saudi Arabia and express concern about the religious dimension to human rights violations in India. In fact, we advocate religious freedom for Muslims around the world, such as in China, Chechnya and Burma. All these cases are cited in our 2001 IRF Report. We must engage countries. Most of the hijackers and the other extremists come from states that do not give an adequate voice to a broad spectrum of religions. We must work with these countries to keep their feet on the road of democratization. This is not going to be an easy, smooth, linear - or always forward-moving - journey. These are not easy issues when a government is fearful for its own security but we must engage and help keep governments on the right path. We must not, however, be afraid to criticize and use punitive measures when the behavior of a country defies internationally accepted norms. We must call a spade a spade when we see it. Our IRF report does that well. And so does our Human Rights Report. While 9/11 was one of the most horrific days in American history, we - and this is characteristic of the American spirit - can turn this tragedy into a springboard for positive developments. We will use this opportunity borne out of religious intolerance and hatred to promote the basic fundamentals that will strengthen our security and world peace. The promotion of democracy, religious freedom, and other human rights will be our long-term weapon in our arsenal of weapons against terrorism.