

## December 20, 2000: Commission Issues Recommendations on Religious Freedom in North Korea

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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom wrote the President, Secretary of State, and congressional leaders December 18 with recommendations for promoting religious freedom in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea). The Commission wrote that "U.S. policy ... should reflect America's concern for religious freedom in a country ruled by one of the world's worst violators of religious freedom." "In the DPRK ... it is apparent that religious freedom is non-existent," the Commission said. "The government has imprisoned religious believers and apparently suppresses all organized religious activity except that which serves the interest of the state." The Commission noted reports of torture and execution of religious believers, including between 12 and 23 Christians on account of their religion. The past year has seen significant developments in U.S.-North Korean relations, including Secretary of State Albright's historic visit and the possibility that President Clinton may yet travel there. But U.S. policy has thus far focused primarily on the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technology, and on peace on the Korean Peninsula. The Commission urged that the U.S. also place "significant emphasis" on religious freedom in North Korea and recommended that the U.S.: Insist that the DPRK publicly reaffirm its commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Press the DPRK to immediately establish conditions whereby the status of religious freedom can be assessed and progress monitored; Ensure that any peace treaty between the parties to the Korean war include provisions on religious freedom and non-discrimination; Make it clear that substantial improvement in religious freedom and other human rights in North Korea is a prerequisite for normalization of relations and the relaxation of U.S. sanctions; Insist that any U.S. diplomats stationed in North Korea in the future have reasonable access within the country to assess the state of religious freedom and monitor developments, and that a religious-freedom dialogue begin at the highest policymaking levels; Raise the issue of religious freedom in all high-level diplomatic exchanges with North Korea; Urge the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Japan to press human rights and religious freedom in their talks with North Korea as well. The full text of the Commission's letter is available on the Commission's Web site, [www.uscirf.gov](http://www.uscirf.gov). It can also be obtained by calling (202) 523-3240, ext. 34.

Hon. Elliott Abrams, Chair

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