

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent federal agency advising the Administration and Congress, welcomes the news from U.S. officials that China will invite the Commission to visit the country.

"Since its inception, the Commission has made several formal requests for an official invitation to visit China. The Commission is pleased to hear that Chinese officials have agreed to invite us without conditions, and we look forward to visiting the country as soon as possible to examine religious freedom conditions and discuss the Commission's recommendations to improve those conditions," said Commission Chair, Felice D. Gaer.

U.S. officials are currently in China engaging in a bilateral dialogue with senior Chinese officials on human rights, including religious freedom. The Commission received confirmation of the news about the invitation to visit China from the State Department.

"The Commission's trip to China will be a crucial step in expanding from this dialogue to action addressing respect for religious freedom," said Gaer.

The Commission's requests to other countries for visits to examine religious freedom conditions have been met positively. With this invitation from China, India is now the only country that has refused a request for an invitation to the Commission to visit.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

Felice D. Gaer ,
- Dean Michael K. Young ,