

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Judith Ingram, Communications Director

(202) 523-3240

begin_of_the_skype_highlighting

(202) 523-3240

end_of_the_skype_highlighting

, ext. 127

communications@uscirf.gov

WASHINGTON-The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom strongly condemns the Chinese government's recent crackdown on Tibetan Buddhist monks in the Tibetan regional capital Lhasa. In the past week, the Chinese government has brutally repressed Buddhist monks who were exercising their right to freedom of expression and religion by arresting dozens, sealing off monasteries, and once again demonstrating disregard for its international commitments to protect fundamental human rights, including religious freedom. The Commission calls on the U.S. government to seek immediate diplomatic access to the monasteries that have been closed. In addition, the United States, with other members of the international community, should urge the Chinese leadership to allow the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, to visit his homeland. The Commission visited Lhasa and the Drepung and Sera monasteries during its August 2005 visit to China.

'China continues to use the heavy hand of repression in Tibet, viewing Buddhism practiced outside government control as a security threat requiring arrest, detentions, and 'patriotic education.' The Chinese government should cease its policy of brutally violating the rights of so many Buddhists in Tibet,' said Michael Cromartie, Chair of the Commission. 'The Commission urges the U.S. government to protest strongly the arrests and detention of Buddhist monks in Lhasa. With the Olympics coming, now is the time for the United States to insist that China strengthen human rights protections and adhere to international standards-not downgrade human rights in bilateral relations, a message that could be perceived in the State

Department's decision this year to remove China from its list of the 10 worst human rights abusers."

On March 10, hundreds of monks demonstrated against religious restrictions at Drepung monastery, seeking to end the government-imposed requirement of "patriotic education," which often requires monks to denounce the Dalai Lama. Such peaceful protests are protected actions under international human rights covenants, and they should not be met by force. The following day, hundreds of monks from the Sera monastery protested the latest crackdown and demanded the release of monks detained earlier for celebrating the awarding of the U.S. Congressional Medal of Freedom to the Dalai Lama. Dozens of monks from Sera monastery were arrested and their whereabouts remain unknown. Protests erupted at other monasteries and two monks at Drepung reportedly tried to commit suicide. Police and security forces sealed off monasteries in Lhasa to prevent additional demonstrations. In response to these measures, Tibetans have staged street protests in Lhasa, the largest demonstrations in Tibet since 1989. There have been reports of violence, looting, and at least two deaths. The Commission urges restraint and an immediate end to any violence that could further inflame tensions and become a pretext for a further crackdown.

Religious freedom restrictions and abuses in Tibet have long been some of the worst in China. The quick show of force used over the last week is part of the Chinese government's wider policy to discredit the Dalai Lama by accusing him of trying to disrupt the 2008 Olympic Games. China continues to pursue policies it believes will ensure a secure and stable environment for the Olympics. However, the government's attempts to ensure "order" have served only to spur new activism by those seeking to expose the Chinese government's failure to protect the rights and freedoms enshrined in China's own constitution and guaranteed by international instruments.

The government has also moved aggressively against China's growing number of human rights defenders. Earlier this month, lawyer Teng Biao was abducted from his home and taken to a police station. During his interrogation, Teng was ordered to stop criticizing China's human rights record or face further detention. Teng is co-author of an essay published last fall that criticized China's human rights violations ahead of the Olympics. The other author of the piece, Hu Jia, is currently on trial on charges of "subversion of state power."

"China cannot hide its repression of religious and ethnic minorities and human rights defenders. With the Olympics approaching, the whole world is watching," said Cromartie. "The Commission has urged President Bush to raise these issues and seek to meet prisoners when he visits China this summer. Other world leaders should seek to do the

same."

In order to ensure that the Chinese government does not ramp up its repression of religious freedom and related human rights in the run-up to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, the Commission has urged the U.S. Congress to

- within funds appropriated for the security of U.S. citizens in Beijing during the 2008 Olympic Games, allocate sufficient resources to ensure that training and related information materials include content that:

- instructs security officials, Olympic spectators, and athletes regarding China's commitments to uphold for all visitors certain internationally recognized human rights standards during the Olympic Games; and
 - informs U.S. citizens, participants, and spectators at the Olympic games of their rights protected under international law and identifies problem areas they may encounter with Chinese authorities, relating to the freedoms of expression, religion or belief, assembly, and association, including information on Chinese law and recent human rights practices of the Chinese government on these issues; and

- in order to promote a free and open environment, in concert with the principles of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the standards of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, designate appropriate funding to independent human rights organizations to monitor and report on human rights conditions during the summer games to ensure that the Chinese government is in compliance with relevant commitments made to the IOC to uphold human rights and international standards during the Summer Olympics.

The Commission on International Religious Freedom, a bipartisan, independent federal body, is mandated by Congress to monitor abuse of freedom of religion or belief and related human rights around the world and to make recommendations to the President, State Department and Congress on ways to address religious freedom concerns.

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