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WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today expressed grave concern over the Kuwaiti Parliament’s approval last week of severe new penalties for blasphemy. The Emir of Kuwait has 30 days to approve these penalties before they would become law. The new provisions would impose the death penalty on Muslims who refuse to repent after being found to have insulted God, the Prophet Mohammad, his wives, or the Qur’an. For non-Muslims, the punishment would be up to 10 years in prison; for Muslims who repent, the punishment would be up to five years or a fine.

“These penalties are alarming and contrary to international human rights standards. It is particularly regrettable that a strong ally of the United States and a member of the UN Human Rights Council has taken these steps,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF Chair. “The Kuwaiti parliament’s approval is especially unfortunate in light of the new consensus resolutions at the Human Rights Council – adopted in both 2011 and 2012 -- that focus on fighting religious intolerance, discrimination, and violence without restricting speech.”

USCIRF urges the United States to work with Kuwait to address concerns about intolerant speech through counter-speech and positive measures, including education and outreach, as provided for in [Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18](#) . The U.S. government also should urge the Emir of Kuwait to reject the pending blasphemy law amendments and focus instead on criminalizing only incitement to imminent violence. Such a reform would make Kuwaiti law

consistent with international human rights standards and the intolerance resolutions that Kuwait supported at the UN.

“These draconian provisions should be rejected because they would place individuals’ lives in jeopardy for exercising their internationally-guaranteed freedoms of religion and expression,” said Leo. “As has been evident during the years USCIRF has monitored religious freedom violations around the world, blasphemy laws do not promote religious harmony as their proponents assert; rather, they exacerbate religious intolerance, extremism, and violence.”

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Samantha Schnitzer at SSchnitzer@uscirf.gov or (202) 786-0613.

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