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Contact:

*Angela Stephens, Assistant Communications Director,
(202) 523-3240, ext. 14*

WASHINGTON-U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Chair Felice D. Gaer will deliver the U.S. delegation's intervention on violations of freedom of religion or belief to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Human Dimension Implementation Meeting on October 10. Ms. Gaer has been appointed an official member of the U.S. delegation to the meeting.

Ms. Gaer is also Director of the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee. She has been a member of USCIRF since 2001, and previously served as Chair (2002-2003) and Vice Chair (2003-2006).

The conference, which will take place Oct. 2-13, will host around 1,000 participants, including representatives from more than 300 nongovernmental organizations.

The conference will review progress made by the OSCE's 56 participating states in implementing their many human rights commitments and devote one of three special days to the promotion of tolerance, non-discrimination, and mutual respect and understanding. In 2004, the OSCE chair appointed personal representatives on anti-Semitism, on discrimination against Muslims, and on Christianophobia, racism and xenophobia. The Commission advocated the creation of these posts.

Among the other human rights challenges in the OSCE region-which includes Europe, Canada, the United States and Eurasia-are harassment of human rights defenders, limitations on the rule of law, election fraud, and other issues such as torture and cruel treatment, and trafficking in persons.

In the OSCE region, USCIRF has expressed strong and continued concern regarding particularly severe violations of freedom of religion in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, recommending that the U.S. government designate each of them as a "country of particular concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The Commission has also placed Belarus on its Watch List of countries where religious freedom merits ongoing scrutiny. In June, the Commission traveled to Russia to examine conditions in that country, including the upsurge of violent attacks widely attributed to racism and xenophobia. It will issue a report on its findings in the coming month. USCIRF's assessments of religious freedom conditions in these countries are available in its 2006 annual report.

USCIRF, a bipartisan, independent federal body, has been an active participant in previous HDim meetings as well as OSCE conferences, including as members of the U.S. delegation to the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and on Other Forms of Intolerance held in June 2005 in Cordoba, Spain.

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
- Michael Cromartie