

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Anne Johnson, Director of Communications, (202) 523-3240

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WASHINGTON - U.S. Commission on International Religious freedom (USCIRF) Vice Chair Felice D. Gaer and Commissioner Michael Cromartie recently presented the preliminary findings from the Commission's North Korea study at a luncheon hosted in USCIRF's honor by the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Commissioners were joined by David Hawk, who is the Commission's Project Manager for its North Korea study. Attendees included U.S. Ambassador Kevin Moley, Senator Rudy Boschwitz, head of the U.S. delegation to the UN Commission on Human Rights, Ambassadors from 29 countries, and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour. The study is interviewing North Korean refugees and escapees about the conditions of freedom of religion or belief in North Korea and the actions of the North Korean government to suppress or replace religious belief or practice. The final report is expected in summer 2005.

While in Geneva, Commissioners also discussed with U.S. and foreign officials USCIRF's findings on severe violations of human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, in such countries as Belarus, Cuba, Turkmenistan, Sudan, Uzbekistan, and Iran.

Commissioners also met with Acting High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Wendy Chamberlin and her senior staff. They discussed ways to provide protection for North Korean refugees in China and Montagnard refugees in Cambodia. In addition, USCIRF met with the Special Rapporteur for North Korea Vitit Muntabhorn and cited the need to address freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief more amply in his next report.

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.

- Preeta D. Bansal
- Felice D. Gaer