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WASHINGTON-The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the Congressional China Caucus co-hosted a roundtable discussion on Capitol Hill on Oct. 19 focusing on current problems facing refugees and asylum seekers in China - particularly North Koreans, Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists. Religion is a salient factor affecting the decision to seek asylum for all these groups. The Commission and the Caucus held the forum to encourage candid discussion between U.S. government officials and other policymakers, international organizations, Congressional staff and non-governmental representatives on how to engage the Chinese government to encourage treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in accordance with international standards.

"Through discussions such as these, the Commission hopes to encourage greater cooperation within the international community to offer more effective protection for North Korean refugees in China and for Uighur and Tibetan refugees who flee China to seek political asylum abroad," said Commissioner Leonard Leo, who presided at the roundtable. "Forum participants offered their assessment of the challenges facing refugees and asylum seekers as well as their evaluations of U.S. policy and suggestions for promoting protection of these refugee populations."

Congresswoman Madeline Bordallo of Guam, co-Chair of the China Caucus, offered an opening statement at the roundtable. "The plight of religious refugees throughout Asia today-and, indeed, throughout the world-should be an important part of U.S.-Sino relations and U.S. foreign policy," Bordallo said. The Commission also thanks the Chairman of the China Caucus, Congressman Randy Forbes of Virginia. "The refugee issue is an important piece of the puzzle with respect to how China wants to elevate itself to world leader status," Forbes said. "China doesn't look at international relations or human rights issues the same way the United States does. This is an important thing to keep in mind as we negotiate with China-we need to understand their philosophy is different than ours."

In the past, the Commission has hosted other off-the-record roundtables on China to discuss

human rights in Xinjiang, religion and the rule of law, and bilateral dialogues on human rights in China. Through these discussions, the Commission seeks to ensure that religious freedom goals are will integrated into the programs of government agencies and regional and international institutions to which both United States and China belong.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1999 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and related international Instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

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Michael Cromartie