



UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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Message from the Chair: *Often called the “first freedom,” freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief is universal in its importance and applicability. It is the freedom to assert an individual conscience or identity without fear, and is a foundational right of the post-World War II system of international human rights. When observed, freedom of religion or belief is one of the linchpins of stable, democratic, productive societies. When denied, generations of hatred may be sown. Throughout the world today, the religious and sectarian dimensions to human conflict cannot be ignored. Yet where governments protect religious freedom, and citizens value it, religious persecution and religion-based violence often find little appeal, and other fundamental human rights, the rule of law and democracy are accorded greater value. Promoting the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief is in the vital national interest and central to maintaining universal principles of human dignity.*

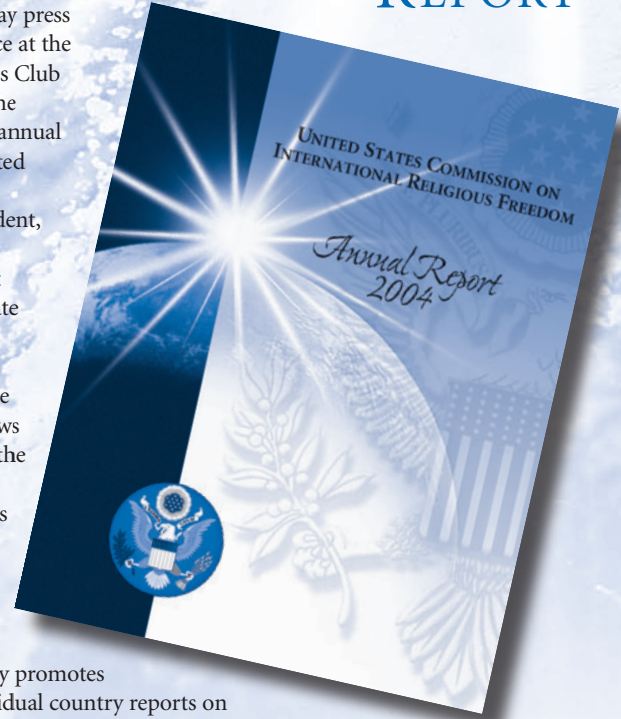
—**Preeta D. Bansal**

At a May press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, the USCIRF released its annual Congressionally-mandated report that includes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress. The USCIRF is the only government commission in the world with a mandate to review and report on violations of the internationally-guaranteed right to freedom of religion and belief worldwide, and to provide policy recommendations. The Commission reviews violations of religious freedom abroad throughout the year. In May of each year, the USCIRF is required to submit to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress an annual report containing its recommendations.

This year’s report included recommendations on the process of constitutional development in Afghanistan and Iraq, the designation of “countries of particular concern,” the global export by Saudi Arabia of a religious ideology that explicitly promotes hate and violence toward members of other religious groups, individual country reports on more than 20 countries, a review of U.S. Refugee and Asylum Programs, and a review of the State Department’s Annual Report on International Religious Freedom.

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USCIRF ANNUAL REPORT



USCIRF CPC RECOMMENDATIONS TO POWELL

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) provides that each year the Commission review evidence on countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations and provide recommendations to the President or his designee, the Secretary of State, as to which countries should be designated “countries of particular concern,” or CPCs.

In February, the Commission recommended that Secretary of State Colin L. Powell designate the following 11 countries as CPCs: Burma, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), Eritrea, India*, Iran, Pakistan, People’s Republic of China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam.

The designation of countries of particular concern is one of the most important human rights acts taken by the U.S. government, and the Commission strongly urges the State Department to name those countries that have not yet been designated. However, the simple designation of a severe violator of religious freedom as a CPC is not a sufficient action. CPC designation carries an obligation that one or more of certain actions specified in Section 405 of the IRFA be taken, unless the President determines that pre-existing sanctions are adequate or otherwise waives the requirement. For

every country named a CPC to date, the only official actions taken have been to invoke already existing sanctions rather than to take additional action to advance religious freedom pursuant to IRFA. The USCIRF believes this is contrary to the purpose and intent of IRFA. Moreover, IRFA explicitly requires that the Secretary of State submit to Congress an evaluation of the effectiveness of prior actions against CPCs. The State Department has never done this, in violation of IRFA.

The USCIRF called on Secretary Powell to engage the governments of CPC countries in as many ways as possible in order to better promote religious freedom in these countries, and particularly to use the policy tools outlined in IRFA. Moreover, the Commission has made specific policy recommendations on China, India, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, and Vietnam, and we encourage the Secretary to give special attention to those recommendations. The letter to Secretary Powell is available on the Commission’s Web site at www.uscirf.gov.

* Commissioners Bansal, Gaer, and Young dissented from the Commission’s recommendation that India be designated a country of particular concern (CPC). Commissioner Chaput also joins this separate opinion, and would place India on the Watch List rather than recommend that it be designated a CPC. Their separate opinion with respect to India was attached to the Commission’s letter to Secretary Powell concerning the Commission’s CPC recommendations.

Commissioners

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USCIRF HEARING ON NORTH KOREA

At the end of January, the Commission held a public hearing on North Korea entitled "North Korea: Human Rights Ground Zero," to draw attention to the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crises in that country. Held at UCLA's School of Law, the hearing also served to raise awareness among the Korean-American community in the Los Angeles area about the situation on the Korean peninsula. Witness testimony highlighted abuses of human rights in the vast North Korean prison system, the ongoing food security crisis in North Korea, religious freedom inside North Korea, and the ongoing North Korean refugee crisis in China.

Commissioners heard testimony from David Hawk, author of "The Hidden Gulag," a ground-breaking report on North Korea's prison camps; Roger Winter, Assistant Administrator for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development; Reverend Isaac, President, Cornerstone Ministries, which has ties to North Korean Christian groups; Colonel Kim Yong, North Korean refugee and former officer in North Korea's Intelligence Service; and Suzanne Scholte, President of the Defense Forum Foundation, a policy organization in Washington, DC.

The North Korean refugee crisis reflects the profound human rights disaster inside that

country, as well as the intense disregard by the regime for the dignity and needs of the North Korean people. The Commission called on the Chinese government to begin offering asylum to North Korean refugees and defectors. It is time for the Chinese authorities to give serious attention to this human rights disaster and take affirmative steps to work with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other NGO groups in developing a process for helping the refugees.

The Commission is thankful to all the witnesses who testified at the hearing and to the Korean-American community in Los Angeles and the Korea Studies Center at UCLA for their support with the hearing. The full proceedings of the hearing are available on the Commission's Web site at www.uscirf.gov.



CAPITOL HILL HEARING ON SAUDI ARABIA

In November 2003, the Commission held a public hearing on Capitol Hill titled, "Is Saudi Arabia a Strategic Threat?: The Global Propagation of Intolerance." At the hearing, the Commission heard from four panelists: Dr. Mai Yamani, Research Fellow, Middle East Program, Royal Institute for International Affairs; Ambassador Martin Indyk, Director, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution; Mr. Robert Baer, former CIA operative and author of *Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold our Soul for Saudi Crude*; and Mr. David Aufhauser, former General Counsel, Treasury Department and former Chair, National Security Council Policy Coordinating Committee on Terrorist Financing.

The panelists agreed that Saudi exportation of intolerance, reform of the Saudi education system, and addressing the virulently inciteful government-controlled media were among the most pressing issues that need to be dealt with both by the Saudis themselves and as a matter of U.S. policy. Each confirmed and highlighted Commission concerns and U.S. policy recommendations outlined in USCIRF's

May 2003 report on Saudi Arabia. Witnesses specifically endorsed the Commission's recommendation that Congress should authorize a study to determine whether, how, and the extent to which the Saudi government, members of the royal family, or Saudi-funded individuals or institutions are propagating globally a religious ideology that explicitly promotes hate and violence toward members of other religious groups, including disfavored Muslims.

In April 2004, the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee and the House Government Reform Committee announced that the General

Accounting Office (GAO) would undertake a comprehensive review of U.S. oversight of Saudi support for an ideology promoting violence and intolerance globally. The need to undertake such a comprehensive review of Saudi exportation of intolerance has been one of the Commission's key recommendations in recent years. In August 2004, Senators Collins (R-ME) and Schumer (D-NY) introduced a resolution urging Secretary Powell to designate Saudi Arabia a CPC and calling on the government of Saudi Arabia to cease its support globally for a religious ideology that explicitly promotes hatred and intolerance.



LETTERS FROM CONGRESSIONAL MEMBERS

Terrorism Financing and Religious Extremism: Partners in crime

By Senator Susan M. Collins (R-ME)

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, I have launched an investigation into terrorism financing. An integral part of the fight against terrorism is to combat the funding of religious extremism that promotes hatred, violence, and intolerance of Christians, Jews, and Muslims who adhere to a different sect of Islam.

At the Committee's most recent hearing on June 15, 2004, we reviewed the counterterrorism efforts of Saudi Arabia. In recent years, Saudi Arabia seems to be exporting not only oil but also hatred and prejudice. Since the 1970s, Saudi Arabia has spent an estimated \$70 billion propagating an extreme form of Islam around the world through madrassas, mosques, and certain charities. While some of this money went to legitimate uses, other contributions did not. As David Aufhauser, the former General Counsel of the Treasury Department, recently testified before my Committee, Saudi funds promote "an unforgiving, intolerant, uncompromising and austere view of the faith that became kindling for Osama bin Laden's match."

The Saudis have taken some promising first steps in reforming their oversight of financial institutions and charities. Nevertheless, the Committee heard testimony indicating that the Saudis continue to export extremism around the world. Indeed, a review of recent Saudi television programs finds continued promotion of violence against America, Israel, and other perceived "enemies" of Islam. During the most recent Ramadan, radical clerics across Saudi Arabia stepped up their invective against Christians, Jews, secularists, and advocates of women's rights. And less than two months ago, the Saudi Crown Prince and other senior Saudi government officials blamed terrorist attacks in the Kingdom on Zionists. This offensive and blatantly false allegation was repeated by the Saudi Ambassador to Great Britain.

Religious extremism sows the seeds of hatred and intolerance that grow into violence and terrorism. Therefore, the U.S. must develop a strategy to counter the dissemination of this extremism. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom understands the importance of addressing this issue, and I have worked closely with them to develop ways to tackle the spread of religious extremism by Saudi-funded mosques and clerics. As part of these efforts, I have asked the General Accounting Office to examine the U.S. government's efforts to track and counter Saudi promotion of Wahhabism around the world. Only by conducting a comprehensive review will we determine if our efforts are adequate, and, if not, what further steps are necessary.

Until the funds promoting hatred and violence around the world are cut off, we will continue to see more Osama bin Ladens. To win the war on terrorism, we must address the root causes.

Saudi Arabia's Exportation of Religious Extremism

By Senator Charles E. Schumer (D-NY)

Despite professing to be an ally in the war on terror, Saudi Arabia continues to support religious extremism throughout the world. Saudi funding finances religious schools, known as madrassas, that promote religious intolerance and violence. Saudi Arabia brutally prohibits the public practice and expression of religion that is not the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, and its efforts to export this militant ideology also inflame anti-Western sentiments throughout the world leading to the potential of terrorist attacks that are now the greatest threat to our national security.

It is essential that Saudi Arabia be held accountable for its support of extremist religious ideology. Even though our own government has concluded that religious freedom does not exist in Saudi Arabia and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has recommended the designation of Saudi Arabia as a "country of particular concern," the State Department has thus far refused to designate it as such. That is why I have joined with Senator Susan Collins to introduce a resolution urging the Administration to name Saudi Arabia a "country of particular concern" for its "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom."

This resolution also calls on Saudi Arabia to stop providing undeserved diplomatic status to Islamic clerics and educators teaching outside of Saudi Arabia, and demands that it close any Islamic affairs section of an embassy of Saudi Arabia that has been responsible for propagating intolerance. Saudi Arabia must provide an accounting of what kinds of support they provide to religious schools, mosques, centers of learning, and other religious organizations globally, including in the U.S., and the names of such institutions.

It is my sincere hope that this resolution will strengthen our foreign policy toward Saudi Arabia, and that Saudi Arabia will respond by demonstrating that it is genuinely willing to be a partner in the war against terrorism by ending its policies of extremist religious incitement, recruitment, and education. As we continue to confront the harsh realities of post-9/11 world, our efforts will continue to be destabilized if our supposed ally in this war continues to propagate and export religious extremism.

Visit USCIRF's
Web site at
www.uscirf.gov
to read its
Policy Focus on
Saudi Arabia.



BANGLADESH HEARING IN NEW YORK

The Commission held a public hearing at the end of April titled, "Bangladesh: Protecting Human Rights of Thought, Conscience, and Religion." The hearing was held in Flushing, NY, at the City University of New York, Queens College School of Law, in New York's 7th Congressional district, represented by Congressman Joseph Crowley. Congressman Crowley, a member of the House Committee on International Relations and Chair and founder of the Congressional Caucus on Bangladesh, participated in

the event. The second largest South Asian community in the United States is based in Jackson Heights, Queens.

The hearing examined recent trends regarding religious freedom for both Muslims and non-Muslims in Bangladesh and the implications of those trends for U.S. policy. Bangladesh has constitutional and other legal protections for human rights. Nevertheless, there were numerous reports of severe abuses targeting members of religious minorities. In addition, according to the State Department, violence against women is widespread and sometimes led by religious

leaders, particularly in rural areas. The Commission has been concerned about the growth of religious extremism and its negative impact on the rights of all Bangladeshis.

Commissioners heard testimony from Latifur Rahman, former Chief Justice of Bangladesh; U.A.B. Razia Akter Banu, Professor of Political Science, University of Dhaka; Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International; Rosaline Costa, human rights monitor and Coordinator, Hotline Bangladesh; and Aroma Dutta, civil society activist and Executive Director, PRIP Trust. To read the transcript of this hearing, visit our Web site at www.uscirf.gov.



COMMISSION VISITS HONG KONG



The Commission traveled to Hong Kong in January 2004 to continue gathering information in advance of a planned trip to Mainland China. Commissioners Preeti D. Bansal and Felice D. Gaer met with religious leaders, academics, and experts in law and human rights in China. The Commissioners also met with Hong Kong human rights advocates to discuss the aftermath of an anti-subversion law introduced by the

government last year. The Commission had been concerned that implementation of such legislation could threaten human rights, including religious freedom, of the people of Hong Kong. Prior to the Commission's visit, the government withdrew the anti-subversion legislation after mass demonstrations by Hong Kong's citizens.

The Commission undertook the trip to Hong Kong following a series of failed attempts to hold meetings in Hong Kong as a part of a broader trip to the People's Republic of China. On two occasions in 2003, the Commission was forced to cancel planned visits to China after the Chinese government placed unacceptable conditions regarding meetings in Hong Kong. Given Hong Kong's promised autonomy under the "One Country, Two System" model, the Commission decided to visit Hong Kong before scheduling a trip to Mainland China.

The Commission continues to seek agreement on a trip to Mainland China. A successful USCIRF mission to China is in the interest of both the United States and China. We hope the Commission can conduct meetings in China in the future on acceptable terms.



Specific recommendations for U.S. policy include:

AFGHANISTAN

The U.S. government should:

- strongly support the reconstruction in Afghanistan of a judicial sector operating under the rule of law and upholding international standards of human rights and work to ensure that: all judges and prosecutors are trained in civil law and international human rights standards; women are recruited into the judiciary at all levels; and all Afghans have equal access to the courts;
- improve security outside Kabul in order for Afghanistan's political reconstruction to succeed, because without adequate security, the warlords will continue to hold sway over much of the country, undermining the rule of law and Afghanistan's nascent democratic institutions; and encourage its NATO partners to increase their commitments to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and to expand ISAF's presence in major urban centers outside Kabul.

CHINA

In addition to recommending that China be designated as a CPC, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. government should:

- establish an official U.S. government presence, such as a consulate, in Lhasa, Tibet and Urumqi, Xinjiang, in order to monitor religious freedom, human rights, and other problems in those regions;
- create and fund regular exchange programs between Chinese academics and government officials and U.S. scholars, experts, representatives of religious communities and non-governmental organizations regarding the relationship between religion and the state, the role of religion in society, international standards relating to the right to freedom of religion and belief, and the importance and benefits of upholding human rights, including religion.

IRAQ

The U.S. government should:

- work to ensure that human rights are fully guaranteed in the permanent constitution, consistent with international human rights standards, and that a permanent constitution should include an explicit guarantee that "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion" as affirmed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and specified in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iraq is a party;
- appoint a team of advisors in Iraq to advise on religious affairs and monitor human rights violations, including freedom of religion; ensure that the monitoring and reporting of issues relating to religious freedom and other universal human rights and the promotion of these rights is adequately staffed in the new U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and its constituent posts and that U.S. personnel receive training in human rights and religious freedom issues, and on how to deal effectively with these issues in the Iraqi context.

NORTH KOREA

In addition to recommending that North Korea be designated a CPC, the Commission believes the U.S. government should:

- work to expand the agenda of the current Six Party Talks on nuclear security on the Korean Peninsula to include issues of human rights and refugees, ensuring that these issues receive a high level of priority in any discussion of security issues regarding North Korea;
- develop and support ways to provide information to the people of North Korea, particularly on religious freedom and other human rights issues, including by expanding or developing broadcasts that target a North Korean audience by the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia;
- fund an objective and comprehensive study of human rights conditions in North Korea by a non-governmental source, establish a congressional caucus to focus on human rights in North Korea, and expand funding for (a) organizations advocating the protection of human rights in North Korea and (b) activities that raise the awareness of human rights conditions in that country.

PAKISTAN

In addition to recommending that Pakistan be designated a CPC, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. government should:

- urge the government of Pakistan to take effective steps to prevent sectarian violence and punish its perpetrators, including disarming militant groups and any religious schools that provide weapons training;
- urge the government of Pakistan to implement procedural changes to the blasphemy laws that will reduce and ultimately eliminate their abuse;

- repeal or suspend enforcement of laws targeting Ahmadis that effectively criminalize the public practice of their faith, in violation of the right to freedom of religion guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

SAUDI ARABIA

In addition to naming Saudi Arabia a CPC, the Commission urges the U.S. government to:

- press the Saudi government for immediate improvements in respect for religious freedom, including: (1) establishing genuine safeguards for the freedom to worship privately, (2) entrusting law enforcement to professionals in law enforcement agencies subject to judicial review and dissolving the mutawaa (religious police), (3) permitting non-Wahhabi places of worship in certain areas and letting clergy enter the country, (4) reviewing cases and releasing those who have been detained or imprisoned on account of their religious belief or practices, (5) permitting independent non-governmental organizations to advance human rights, (6) ending state prosecution of apostasy, blasphemy, criticism of the government, and sorcery, (7) ceasing messages of hatred, intolerance, or incitement to violence against non-Wahhabi Muslims and members of non-Muslim religious groups in the educational curricula and textbooks, as well as in government-controlled mosques and media, and (8) ratifying international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and cooperating with UN human rights mechanisms.

With regard to the exportation of religious intolerance from Saudi Arabia, the Commission has recommended that the U.S. government should:

- continue efforts, along with those of the Congress, to determine whether and how—and the extent to which—the Saudi government, individual members of the royal family, or Saudi-funded individuals or institutions are directly or indirectly propagating globally, including in the United States, a religious ideology that explicitly promotes hate, intolerance, and human rights violations, in some cases violence, toward members of other religious groups, both Muslim and non-Muslim;
- request the Saudi government to provide an accounting of what kinds of Saudi support go to which religious schools, mosques, centers of learning, and other religious organizations globally, including in the United States.

For the full text of the Commission's Annual Report and its letter to Secretary Powell concerning CPCs, please visit our Web site's home page at www.uscirtf.gov.

STATE DEPARTMENT: REVIEW OF ITS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT



On February 10, Commissioner Michael K. Young testified before the House International Relations Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Non-Proliferation and Human Rights at a hearing titled "The Status of International Religious Freedom: an Analysis of the State Department's 2003 Annual Report." Commissioner Young testified that the overall quality of the Annual Report shows that the U.S. government is taking seriously the issue of religious freedom, and that the information presented demonstrates that several countries merit CPC status in addition to those that have been named by the Secretary of State in previous years.

However, Commissioner Young testified that while many individual country reports in the 2003 Annual Report are comprehensive and up to date, in some cases, questionable

conclusions have been reached. He further commented that other individual reports, while adequate on the whole, nevertheless contain significant errors or omissions. In addition,

Commissioner Young said it is not apparent from the information presented in the Annual Report that the State Department has conducted its activities in a coordinated way to implement particular policies and to achieve specific goals. He noted that their efforts should be fully reported so that the Congress and the public can better determine if all of the tools Congress made available under IREFA to advance the protection of religious freedom abroad are being used. From the information present in the 2003 Annual Report, the Commission is concerned that this is not the case.



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SFRC testimony on Vietnam

On February 12, Commissioner Michael K. Young testified before the East Asian and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at a hearing titled "Protecting Religious Freedom in Vietnam: Balancing Interests and Principles." He discussed the Commission's concerns about Vietnam's deteriorating record on religious freedom and the Commission's recommendations for U.S. policy to address the situation. While the Commission recommended passage of the Vietnam Human Rights Act, which incorporated many of the Commission's past recommendations, the Commission continues to recommend that Vietnam be designated a "country of particular concern" (CPC). CPC designation does not automatically entail sanctions, but requires that the Secretary of State enter into direct consultations with a country to find ways to improve the religious freedom situation. The Commission has unsuccessfully recommended CPC status for Vietnam for the past two years. The Commission also recommends that steps be taken to overcome jamming of Radio Free Asia broadcasts, to ensure that RFA's Internet site is accessible and free, and to allow RFA personnel into Vietnam.

California, Colorado, and Texas Outreach

As part of its work, the Commission reaches out to Americans across the United States to engage them and give them a voice in the policy process. At the end of January, the USCIRF traveled to Los Angeles, California, where it held a hearing at the UCLA School of Law on North Korea (see article page 2), a roundtable with members of the Iranian-American community, and an inter-faith dialogue at the Fuller Theological Seminary. The Commission also met with analysts at the RAND Corporation, the editorial board of the *Los Angeles Times*, and the President and senior staff of World Vision about the importance of promoting freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief throughout the world.

In April, the Commission visited Colorado to discuss USCIRF's work with leaders of several influential faith-based organizations headquartered in Colorado Springs. The Commissioners met with Reverend Ted Haggard, President of the National Association of Evangelicals; Dr. James Dobson, Founder and Chairman of the Board, Focus on the Family; Don Hodel, President, Focus on the Family; and several other key leaders.

In early June, Commissioner Richard Land traveled to Houston, Texas, where he gave a keynote address entitled, "Global Security and U.S. National Interests: Why Religious Freedom Matters," at The James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy at Rice University. The Commission has been invited back to The Baker Institute to give a second presentation this fall. Also in Houston, Commissioner Land held an interfaith roundtable hosted by the Houston chapters of the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League. In addition to Houston, Commissioner Land traveled to College Station to meet with Dean Richard Chilcoat and faculty at The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University to discuss areas of possible future collaboration.

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