



ROBERT WEXLER
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

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COMMITTEE ON
FINANCIAL SERVICES

July 8, 2008

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

I am writing to you regarding the recently released report by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, which expresses growing concerns regarding Arabic-language textbooks used at a Saudi Arabia operated school in Northern Virginia, the Islamic Saudi Academy (ISA).

As you may be aware, ISA is primarily funded by the government of Saudi Arabia and uses their official textbooks. As such, the ISA falls under the Commission's mandate to monitor the actions of foreign governments in relation to religious freedom. To this end, the Commission has asked the Department of State repeatedly since June 2007 to secure the release of all Arabic-language textbooks used at ISA in order to ensure that the books do not contain language that promotes violence, discrimination, or intolerance based on religion or belief. As of June 11, 2008, however, the Department of State has not yet made these textbooks available to the public or to the Commission to be translated.

Despite the failure to make these textbooks available and promises by ISA personnel promising that they had already revised the Saudi Ministry of Education materials, the Commission was able to acquire and review from an alternative source 17 ISA textbooks in use during this past school year.

What the Commission found after translating these books was deeply troubling. For example a twelfth-grade Tafsir (Koranic interpretation) textbook, states that it is permissible for a Muslim to kill an apostate (a convert from Islam), an adulterer, or someone who has murdered a believer intentionally. Other passages make statements that promote intolerance, including the vilification of adherents of the Ahmadi, Baha'i, and Jewish religions, as well as Shi'a Islam.

Since the Commission has not yet been able to analyze all textbooks used by the ISA, these findings may be just the tip of the iceberg. What is most disturbing about these initial findings is that the Saudi government is obligated as a member of the United Nations and a party to the International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and other relevant treaties to guarantee the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. It is clear following the translation and review of these textbooks that the Saudi materials used at ISA violate international obligations.

Secretary Rice, I am sure you agree that the use of discriminatory textbooks at ISA or any privately funded schools that contain anti-Semitic language and encourage hatred towards other religions is

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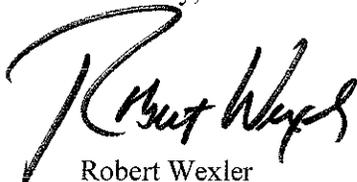
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unacceptable. To that end, it is critical that the State Department undertake a full review of the textbooks being used at ISA and follow through on the recommendations of the Commission. I strongly support the Commission's proposal to "create a formal mechanism to monitor and encourage implementation of the Saudi government's 2006 policies as part of every meeting of the U.S.-Saudi Arabia Strategic Dialogue, and ensure that U.S. representatives to each relevant Working Group of the Strategic Dialogue report the group's findings to Congress."

As we work around the globe to fight extremism and religious intolerance, it is essential that the Bush Administration take immediate steps to remove these hate-filled textbooks from Saudi-owned private schools. It is unacceptable that the Saudi government, despite requests from the Administration, is utilizing texts on American soil that stokes the flames of violence and discrimination.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Wexler". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "R" and a cursive "Wexler".

Robert Wexler