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NEWS RELEASE

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2012 First Freedom Awards

Gala to Honor Four Advocates of Religious Freedom

Thursday, January 12, 2012

Downtown Richmond Marriott, 500 E. Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219

On Thursday, January 12, 2012, four renowned advocates of religious freedom will be honored with the **First Freedom Awards** at an annual gala held at the Downtown Richmond Marriott.

“The First Freedom Center is proud to recognize profound contributors to the advancement of religious liberty,” stated First Freedom Center President, Ambassador (ret.) Randolph Bell. “In honoring these champions of religious freedom, we shine light on one of the most pressing issues facing humankind today. The ongoing quest to ensure that all societies of the world respect religious freedom as a fundamental human right is at the core of our shared aspirations for stability, peace, and the protection of human dignity.”

In commemoration of National Religious Freedom Day (January 16th), the First Freedom Center annually recognizes an international, national and Virginia award recipient with First Freedom Awards. On occasion, the Distinguished Service Award is also presented to an individual or organization for an exceptional contribution to promoting awareness of the civic rights and responsibilities religious liberty brings. This year:

- **Canon Andrew White** will be honored with the **International First Freedom Award**. Dubbed the “Vicar of Baghdad,” The Reverend Canon Andrew White is the Vicar of St. George's Church, the only Anglican Church in Iraq. White is also President of the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East and has built an extraordinary ministry of reconciliation and conflict mediation in that region.

In 1998, Canon White was installed as the Director of International Ministry for the Diocese and Cathedral of Coventry. Soon after, he became the Archbishop of Canterbury's Special Envoy to the Middle East, a dangerous position in which White's predecessor, Terry Waite, was kidnapped by Hezbollah and held hostage for over four years. White was actively involved in the Middle East, helping to lead the negotiations during the Siege of the Church of the Nativity in 2002. He also helped draft the First Alexandria Declaration of the Religious Leaders of the Holy Land and the Baghdad Religious Accord, both of which were instrumental in bringing together key religious leaders of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths. Since 2005, White has worked almost exclusively as the pastor of St. George's

Church in Bagdad and continued his pioneering reconciliation efforts through The Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East.

In Iraq's insecure environment, Canon White has led an aggressive interfaith mission to reduce conflict. Also, the clinic that White's church sponsors has medical staff from all sects in Iraq and delivers humanitarian relief without regard for the religious or ethnic backgrounds of patients. White's efforts have not only reduced violence against Iraq's increasingly small Christian community, but he has brought together the leaders of the opposing Sunni and Shi'ite factions, and his foundation has sponsored a number of high-level peace talks between them. Meetings chaired by White produced the first-ever joint Sunni and Shi'ite religious opinion against violence in Iraq, which was read in at least 80% of the mosques in Iraq.

- **Marc D. Stern** will be honored with the **National First Freedom Award**. Associate General Legal Counsel for Legal Advocacy at the American Jewish Committee, Marc Stern is one of the country's foremost experts on the law of church and state. Throughout his distinguished career, Mr. Stern has demonstrated a strong commitment to the democratic and multicultural values foundational to the country's vision and essential to the protection of minority rights.

Stern played a leading role in drafting the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, 2000. These highly influential pieces of legislation have significantly impacted the legal landscape for the past two decades.

For many years during his tenure at the American Jewish Congress, Stern compiled an annual survey of the laws governing religion and the public schools. Under his leadership, the AJCongress produced guidelines used by the Clinton Administration to clarify church-state issues. These guidelines included briefs on religion in the public schools, religion in the federal workplace, and a First Amendment guide to public schools and religious communities.

Stern has published many articles on civil rights and civil liberties, especially on legal remedies to anti-Semitism. A graduate of Yeshiva University and the Columbia University School of Law, he was an attorney with the American Jewish Congress for 33 years, where he conducted litigation, prepared amicus curiae briefs, drafted legislation, and gave public testimony on the full range of church-state issues. Marc Stern is a strong supporter of the separation of church and state in public schools, the religious rights of students, and of the Workplace Religious Freedom Act.

- **Robert M. O'Neil** will be honored with the **Virginia First Freedom Award**. Throughout his career, O'Neil has demonstrated a distinguished legal and scholarly interest in upholding religious freedom in Virginia and the United States. A prominent scholar of the First Amendment, O'Neil has argued cases before a number of Federal Courts of Appeals and has testified before congressional committees and state legislatures on First Amendment issues, including on issues of religious freedom or belief.

After serving for five years as the President of the University of Virginia, O'Neil founded The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, a nonpartisan institution created to resist threats to free expression from all sides of the political spectrum. An authority on the First Amendment, O'Neil has taught courses on the *First Amendment and the Arts, Speech and Press, Church and State, and Free Speech in Cyberspace* at the

University of Virginia Law School, and is a sought-after visiting professor and speaker on First Amendment law. O'Neil served in 1989-90 as Chair of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, and currently serves as General Counsel of the American Association of University Professors and as a Senior Fellow at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

During his tenure as director at The Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression, O'Neil oversaw a variety of projects and programs, including the Ford Foundation's Difficult Dialogues Initiative—a training and resource project to help college faculty, staff and students more effectively promote civic engagement, academic freedom and pluralism in higher education.

O'Neil is the author of numerous books and articles, including *Classrooms in the Crossfire* (Indiana University Press, 1981), *Free Speech in the College Community* (Indiana University Press, 1997), *The Rights of Public Employees* (second edition, Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), *The First Amendment and Civil Liability* (Indiana University Press, 2001), and *Academic Freedom in the Wired World* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

- **The Right Reverend Peter James Lee** will be recognized with the **Distinguished Service Award**. Bishop Lee is the retired Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia. In December (2011), he completed his tenure as Interim Dean of The General Theological Seminary in New York City, and later this month, he will assume the position of Interim Dean of the American Cathedral in Paris, France.

Ordained deacon in 1967 and priest in 1968, Lee served at St. John's Cathedral, Jacksonville, Florida, St. John's Church Lafayette Square, across from the White House in Washington, DC, and at The Chapel of the Cross in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In 1984, he was elected and consecrated a bishop for the Diocese of Virginia, the largest diocese in the continental United States and one of the oldest. He served as diocesan bishop from 1985-2009, and was prominent in church and ecumenical relations locally, nationally, and internationally.

In the service of peace, reconciliation, and justice, Bishop Lee has undertaken many significant responsibilities. In 1987, he was appointed by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church as part of a team to visit the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem during the first Intifada. While there, Lee made fact-finding trips to Jerusalem, Gaza, and Nablus on the West Bank. Subsequent to that trip, Bishop Lee was the founding President of the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and a board member of the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief (now Episcopal Relief and Development) and Chair of its grants committee. On sabbatical leave in 1993, Lee studied how Anglican churches ministered in contexts of protracted conflict and visited Johannesburg, Jerusalem, and Belfast. While in Johannesburg, he and his wife were received by Nelson Mandela shortly after Mandela's release from prison.

Bishop Lee served on the advisory committee to the Anglican Observer at the United Nations, and promoted peace in Southern Sudan. He was instrumental in establishing the "Triangle of Hope", a cooperative ministry among the Diocese of Liverpool in the Church of England, The Diocese of Kumasi in Ghana and the Diocese of Virginia to create healing and reconciliation in the centuries-old aftermath of the slave trade. Upon his retirement as Bishop of Virginia, Lee served for one year as Interim Dean of Grace Cathedral, San

Francisco, and took an active role in that city's dynamic interfaith and ecumenical relations effort.

William L. Sachs, PhD, First Freedom Center Vice President for Education, stated: "We welcome award nominations and, in particular, solicit nominations from legal, public-policy and academic experts across the country. We ask them to submit the names of individuals and organizations whose work has advanced understanding of and appreciation for religious freedom through innovative approaches, acts of personal sacrifice, or leadership. Then the nominees are judged by a panel of distinguished religious-freedom experts."

This year marks the 18th year that the First Freedom Center has hosted the First Freedom Awards in conjunction with National Religious Freedom Day. Please find attached headshots of the award recipients and additional background information on the event and the First Freedom Center. The gala is open to the news media by request to Chris Payton at (804) 239-1668 or cpayton@firstfreedom.org.

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About the First Freedom Center

The mission of the First Freedom Center is to advance the fundamental human rights of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. The Center is a religiously and politically neutral 501(c)(3) organization the sponsors multiple education programs and events.