



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **2008 First Freedom Award Recipients Announced** *Governor Kaine to Present the Virginia First Freedom Award*

**RICHMOND, Va. (December 12, 2007)** - To commemorate the January 16 anniversary of the nation's first law guaranteeing religious liberty, the Council for America's First Freedom will present the 2008 First Freedom Awards to three distinguished advocates of religious freedom, individuals who have made profound contributions toward advancing religious liberty around the world, across the United States and within Virginia.

Guests at the 14<sup>th</sup> annual awards dinner will hear Governor Timothy M. Kaine speak about the significant role religious freedom plays in Richmond, the Commonwealth, and the nation when he presents the Virginia First Freedom Award. The dinner, to be held on January 16, 2008 at the Jefferson Hotel, in Richmond, Virginia, is chaired by William C. Hall, Jr., Vice President of External Affairs and Corporate Communications for Dominion and President of The Dominion Foundation.

"The Governor's presence as well as the exceptional support from Dominion guarantees a most successful annual banquet," said Ambassador Robert A. Seiple, President of the Council for America's First Freedom. "Governor Kaine and Bill Hall both understand the necessity of the Council's educational programs, which is where the proceeds of this event are directed."

“The Council has developed an excellent strategy of offering information about other religions and providing curricula for schools to teach about our right of religious liberty,” Hall said. “This approach will create a more knowledgeable society that will be more understanding and respectful of people whose faiths are different than their own. I believe this will be the foundation for a more peaceful society. All of us at Dominion are privileged to be a part of this inspiring evening.”

“Our right to religious freedom in America is sometimes taken for granted. Yet, sadly, others around the world continue to suffer religious persecution,” said Governor Kaine. “As citizens of this nation, we should never take too lightly the value of this basic human right. I am proud to be included in the ceremony that honors the outstanding contributions of these remarkable people who have dedicated their life’s work to protecting religious freedom for us and expanding the concept abroad.”

The Council is honored to announce that the awards, presented in three categories, will be conferred to:

- **Jakob Finci**, President of the Jewish Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the President of La Benevolencija, the Jewish cultural, educational and humanitarian society of Bosnia and Herzegovina which provides aid to all citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina regardless of religion, will receive the **International First Freedom Award**.
- **John Witte, Jr.**, the Jonas Robitscher Professor of Law, and Director of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University, a specialist in legal history, marriage law, and religious liberty, will receive the **National First Freedom Award**.
- **Charles C. Haynes**, Senior Scholar at the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center and Director of the First Amendment Center’s educational program in schools, addressing issues concerning religious liberty in American public life, will receive the **Virginia First Freedom Award**.

National Religious Freedom Day is observed each year on January 16, the anniversary of the date on which the Virginia General Assembly enacted the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom in 1786. The landmark law was the first that guaranteed religious liberty and became the precursor for the First Amendment pledge of freedom of religion.

This year marks the 14<sup>th</sup> year in which the Council for America's First Freedom has hosted the First Freedom Awards in conjunction with National Religious Freedom Day. Past recipients include Madeleine K. Albright, former Secretary of State, who received the First Freedom Distinguished Service Award in 2007, Abdelfattah Amor, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, President Václav Havel of the Czech Republic, Prime Minister Tony Blair of Great Britain; Lawrence Eagleburger, former Secretary of State; Richard C. Holbrooke, chief negotiator of the Dayton Peace Accords and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Dr. Garry Wills, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, and Ambassador Robert A. Seiple, the first U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom.

Additional biographical information on each of the 2008 recipients is attached. For more information about the awards dinner ceremony, which is open to the news media, please contact Maureen Rosenbaum at (804) 643-1786 or [mrosenbaum@firstfreedom.org](mailto:mrosenbaum@firstfreedom.org).

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#### **About the Award Ceremony**

The 14<sup>th</sup> annual First Freedom Awards will be presented at an evening ceremony on January 16, 2008 at The Jefferson Hotel, 101 West Franklin Street, Richmond, Va. The event is by invitation only but is open to members of the news media.

#### **About the Council for America's First Freedom**

The mission of the Council for America's First Freedom is to increase understanding and respect for religious freedom in diverse communities worldwide through education about this core human value: *the freedom of thought, conscience and belief*.

The Council also sponsors the Presidential Proclamation of National Religious Freedom Day (January 16), First Freedom Awards, National First Freedom Student Competition, and The Constitution and Religion in the Classroom. For more information, please visit [www.firstfreedom.org](http://www.firstfreedom.org).