

# First Freedom News

*Advancing the fundamental human rights of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience*

## First Freedom Center Honors Champions of Liberty

At its January 13 First Freedom Awards dinner, the Center conveyed four honors. It conferred its International Religious Freedom Award on former United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir. The Center cited her for her tireless advocacy both in her native Pakistan and worldwide of human rights and religious freedom. Because of events in Pakistan, Ms. Jahangir was unable to complete her planned visit to Richmond, and her daughter, human rights attorney Sulema Jahangir, accepted the award in her stead. The National First Freedom Award went to Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association, John Graz, whose lifelong support for religious freedom, both as an advocate and as a scholar/writer, has achieved worldwide acclaim. Virginia First Freedom Award recipient, J. Brent Walker, achieved recognition for his unstinting legal and political advocacy for constitutionality in the relations between church and state. The Center presented its Distinguished Service Award to the Alexander Lebenstein Teacher Education Institute at the Virginia Holocaust Museum. The Museum's Director of Education, Rena Berlin, accepted the award, which recognized the Institute's widespread and broadly acclaimed work to enable



(Left to right): **Rev. Brent Walker**, Virginia First Freedom Award Winner (Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty); **Sulema Jahangir**, accepting the award for her mother, Asma Jahangir, the International First Freedom Award Winner (Sulema is a human rights attorney.); **Rena Berlin**, accepting the First Freedom Distinguished Service Award for the Alexander Lebenstein Teacher Education Institute of the Virginia Holocaust Museum (She is the Director of Education at the Museum.); **Dr. John Graz**, the National First Freedom Award Winner (Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association).

Virginia teachers to explain the Holocaust and its relationship to modern genocide. In their remarks, recipients stressed the urgency of the work in which they themselves and the Center engage during a time when the abuse of internationally-recognized rights of freedom and religion and conscience is so closely associated with conflict and violence.



(Left to right): **Barbara (Bobbie) Ukrop**; **Jim Ukrop**, Director, Union First Market Bankshares Corp.; **Rachel Flynn**, Director of Community Development, City of Richmond.



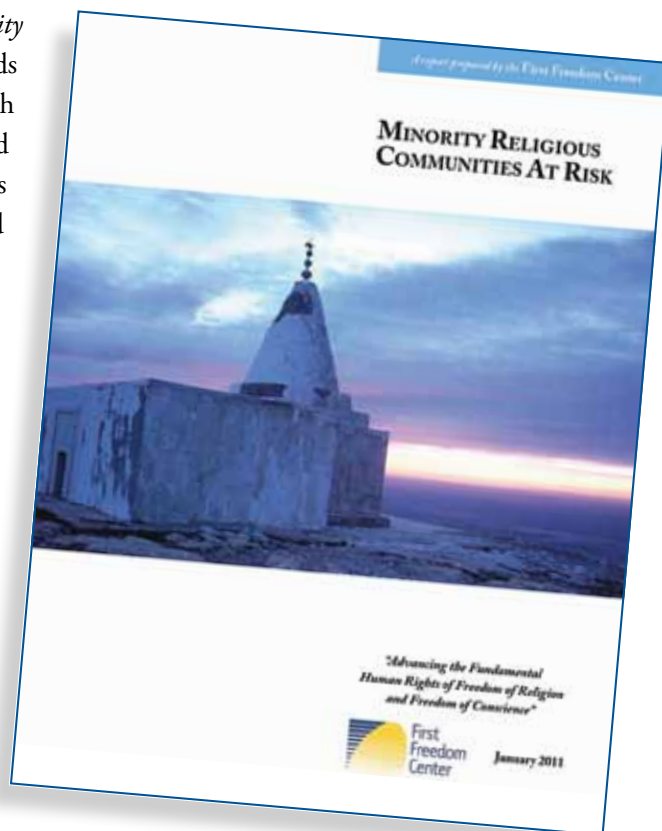
**Dr. Ben Howerton**, First Freedom Center Chair-Elect (Professor Emeritus, George Washington University); **Sulema Jahangir**, daughter of International First Freedom Award Winner Asma Jahangir (and human rights attorney).



(Left to right): **Dr. Brad Anderson**, President, Richmond VA Stake, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; **Glade Knight**, Chairman & CEO, Apple REIT Companies; **Robyn Anderson**.

## Center Presents Findings on Minority Religious Communities at Risk to Congress, International Organizations

The First Freedom Center published its report on *Minority Religious Communities at Risk* on January 13, the day of the Awards Dinner. Compiled following diligent and extensive research and with the participation of a national Editorial Board of fourteen recognized authorities on human rights and religious freedom, the report examines the international legal basis for freedom of religion as a recognized and guaranteed right. It profiles eight minority communities which the Editorial Board and the research staff considered most at risk of extinction within the coming decade. In extensive and detailed regional analyses, it examines barriers to the granting of guaranteed rights, and, in its conclusion, makes recommendations for governments and international bodies. In briefings to the House of Representatives Caucus on International Religious Freedom and to individual members, Center representatives have presented the findings. The report has been distributed widely within the United States Government, in academia, among non-profit and advocacy organizations, and to international organizations. It has won widespread praise. The report is available for download on the Center's website at [www.firstfreedom.org](http://www.firstfreedom.org).



## Children's Website Approaches Launch

*The Kids Holiday Space*, a specialized website which will go live later this year, will serve as a trustworthy, non-sectarian resource on religious diversity for children, assisting them to explore its contents either on their own or in cooperation with educators. Developed by education specialists and experts on religious freedom, the site will provide learning activities concerning five major religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. It will offer text, video clips, interactive storybooks, quizzes, and games. *The Kids Holiday Space* responds to the National Council for Social Studies' finding that: "Since the purpose of social studies is to provide students with a knowledge of the world that has been, the world that is, and the world of the future, studying about religion should be an essential part of the social studies curriculum." The Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation has provided a generous grant to enable the Center to market the site among schools and institutions.



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## National Essay Contest Concludes – Includes Videos

The Center announced winners in its high school competition on April 13. Participants in this year's round selected a religion or belief group from their local community, state, or region which is currently or has been in the past a minority. They researched its history and its encounters with issues of religious freedom and equality, and then reviewed their findings in the wider contexts of U.S. history and First Amendment law to answer the question: "Has this group fully realized its freedom of religion or belief?" Students were free to submit their work in either written or, for the first time, video



**Tessa Opalach**  
Video winner

format. They addressed a wide variety of faith groups. The \$2,500 Essay Award went to Heather L. Hills, a home schooler in Lambertville, NJ, and the \$2,500 Video Award honored Tessa Opalach of Arcata High School in Arcata, CA. Four essays and three videos received honorable mention. Entries came very broadly from all across the United States.



**Heather Hills**  
Essay winner

## Congressional Aide/ Becket Fund Official Joins Trustees

At their December 2010 meeting, the Center's Trustees elected Tina Ramirez to join their ranks. Ms. Ramirez has worked on the staffs of two Representatives and one Senator, and currently serves as Director for Government Relations at The Becket Fund in Washington, a non-profit advocacy organization which promotes freedom of religion and conscience. Ms. Ramirez formerly served as a Human Rights Policy Analyst at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. She holds Master's Degrees in Education and in International Human Rights from Vanguard University and the University of Essex, respectively, and a Certificate in International Human Rights from the International Institute of Human Rights in Strasbourg.



**Tina Ramirez**

[www.firstfreedom.org](http://www.firstfreedom.org)

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