

Washington, DC— Congressman Steve Israel (D-NY), a Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, joined the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom to discuss the findings of a report the Commission released today on religious freedom and human rights in Saudi Arabia. Congressman Israel announced new legislation to codify a recommendation in the report that would require the Secretary of State to invoke the Foreign Missions Act to prevent Saudi extremism and hatred from being taught in Saudi-funded schools operating in the United States.

“I don’t believe that enduring peace and stability are possible when we seek to achieve peace only at high diplomatic altitudes instead of going into second grade classrooms,” said Congressman Israel. “All the peace treaties and diplomatic agreements in the world will not succeed as long as children are taught how to hate.”

“If the Saudi government really wants peace and stability, it will use its classrooms as laboratories of education and not incubators of hatred,” continued Congressman Israel. “It will nourish its children with modernity, rather than feeding them a steady diet of blame against the West. It will teach its children how to put things together, not incite them to blow things up.”

At least two Saudi schools operating in the United States reportedly teach curriculum from textbooks promoting religious intolerance and abuses of human rights including violent acts against non-Muslims and disfavored Muslims. One such school, the Islamic Saudi Academy (ISA) purports to be privately operated, but conducts education on Northern Virginia properties that are formally leased to the “Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia.” Furthermore, the Saudi Ambassador to the United States is the chairman of the school’s board of directors and the school appears to be substantially funded by the Saudi government and uses government-condoned “curriculum, syllabus and materials.”

In 2003, Congressman Israel passed language in the State Department Authorization bill directing the Department to include an evaluation of textbooks in its annual report on human rights conditions. Two years later, Israel led a bipartisan group of members in sending a letter to Saudi Ambassador Prince Bandar bin Sultan demanding the immediate end to inflammatory incitement of Saudi Hate Propaganda distributed in the United States.

Rep. Israel’s legislation announced today requires the Secretary of State to immediately begin diplomatic discussions with the Saudi Government to close the Islamic Saudi Academy until the official Saudi textbooks used there are made available for comprehensive public examination. The Secretary would be required to conclude these discussions within 90 days and report back to Congress.