



ICRF expresses its grave concern over China's apparent snub of Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, the U.S. Religious Freedom Ambassador at Large, who was planning a trip to China.

Dr. Cook was scheduled to visit China on February 8, but Beijing refused to grant her meetings with government officials and religious-freedom advocates, according to the [Washington Post](#).

Chinese officials told her staff that "it's not a convenient time to come," according to the religious rights advocates

"Diplomats in Cook's position have encountered problems before," said the *Post*, "but denying a visa to a sitting U.S. ambassador represents one of China's strongest rebuffs to date, experts say."

In its [Country Report](#), ICRF gives China its lowest rating of one star—indicating "serious violations" of religious freedom. According to the report:

*The Falun Gong is an outlawed spiritual organization, and its members have been severely persecuted in attempts to lessen the numbers of Falun Gong practitioners. Several other groups are also listed as "heretical (or evil) cults." Religious groups such as Catholics loyal to the Vatican are not allowed to openly hold religious services. Authorities in parts of the country have charged religious followers unaffiliated with a patriotic religious organization with "illegal religious activities" or "disrupting social stability." Penalties for these charges vary from fines to imprisonment.*

Cook's post was created as part of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which seeks to promote religious freedom as a U.S. foreign policy and to advocate on behalf of individuals viewed as persecuted in foreign countries due to their religion.

Cook is the first woman and the first African-American to hold the post.