

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of human rights and democracy has many dimensions. There is certainly a long history of identifying those rights – as we have recognized them in our own political system and in actions the international community has taken through such instruments as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Creating international consensus on what constitutes fundamental rights was a major step forward, taken in the aftermath of the atrocities of World War II, although we discovered that in practice many governments failed to live up to their commitments, and in some cases, openly flouted international human rights standards.

In this kind of environment, monitoring human rights abuses and holding governments accountable for violations is another indispensable part of protecting human rights. For decades, non-governmental organizations have taken up the challenge of collecting comprehensive data and giving a voice to those whose testimony oppressive governments would silence. Since 1977, the State Department has published the annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, which enjoys a hard-won status as an accurate and objective portrayal of the human rights situation around the globe. It is an indispensable tool in our efforts to advocate for the victims of human rights abuses and to press upon foreign governments the need to take positive steps to build free, democratic and stable societies.

Over a quarter-century of reporting on human rights has helped shine a light on the worst abuses and kept pressure on oppressive governments. In the past 10-15 years, particularly with the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States has taken opportunities to extend human rights promotion beyond what is called the “name and shame” strategy. This has required us to look at the human rights reports as not merely a record of past performance, but a guide to areas and methods for future improvement. More recently, President Bush’s U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) proposals have increased our reliance on human rights reporting for achieving objectives of democratic governance. And so more and more, we are using the annual *Country Reports* with these goals in mind, to help us and others involved in policymaking tailor assistance programs to achieve real and measurable impact.

Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2002-2003 identifies in a more systematic way, for Congress, the American public and audiences overseas, how the U.S. Government is integrating policy with reporting on human rights. Around the world, in every region, the United States is implementing programs, taking advantage of the information and understanding of global human rights that we have built up over the years by compiling the annual *Country Reports*. In this volume, we detail our efforts in 92 countries, taking care to include among them places of concern for “extrajudicial killings, torture, or other serious violations of human rights,” as Congress called for in the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Year 2003.

These reports have been produced by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, but would not have been possible without the contributions of regional and other functional bureaus of the Department of State and U.S. missions abroad, and those provided by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Labor and the U.S. Agency for International Development. In fact, the joint production of the report mirrors the collaborative nature of our efforts to defend and promote democracy worldwide.

The *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* have served as a catalog of the problems of human rights in countries worldwide, and we have striven to present that information with accuracy and integrity. In this inaugural edition of *Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2002-2003*, we describe solutions, implemented by individuals and organizations whose vision looks toward a better world and whose courage inspires groundswells for change. The U.S. Government is proud to support their efforts.

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