

Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2002-2003

Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State
**Lorne W. Craner, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and
Labor**

Remarks on the Release of Department's New Annual Publication

Washington, DC. June 24, 2003



MR. REEKER: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome back to the State Department. Welcome to our special briefing this morning on "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record from 2002-2003." As advertised, we have the Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Richard Armitage, to deliver some brief remarks, and then Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Lorne Craner, will have additional remarks and be able to take your questions. So, with no further ado, I would like to turn the podium over to Deputy Secretary Armitage.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thank you, Phil. Good morning. In 1948, when much of the world was still a post-war landscape of wreckage and rubble, the community of nations came together to build a new moral landscape, one based on a common standard of universal human rights. The governments of the world have reached for that standard ever since with varying degrees of success.

You might say that the U.S. Government has counted those degrees of success in inches. Every year, for the last 25 years, we have released a ten-inch-high report on human rights violations around the world. The bulk alone speaks volumes about the distance the world still needs to travel between the reality of the day and the high standard we all want to reach.

Documenting that distance is an important exercise. In some cases, scrutiny alone can motivate governments and individuals to change for the better. And while we in the United States Government believe in the power of information, we also believe in the importance of action. And so the employees of the Department of State are out in force around the world, working every day to make human rights a reality.

So I am pleased today to release for the first time a public record of those efforts.

This document, "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy," looks at our work in some 92 countries with especially problematic and persistent human rights violations.

In these pages, you will find countries such as Burma and Burundi, where brutal regimes and relentless conflict have exacted a terrible daily toll of human misery. Acting alone and in concert with other governments and organizations, the United States has brought pressure to bear on both countries to release prisoners and to respect human rights, to reform the government and to reach for peace. We have worked to help create better living conditions for local populations in both places by supporting projects on everything from post-traumatic counseling to the demobilization and rehabilitation of child soldiers.

But you will also find Bahrain in these pages, a country we consider to be a key player in the war against terrorism, but one which we nevertheless hold to that same high standard. And, indeed, Bahrain has shown a commitment to improving its protection of human rights, which we have supported just as in Burundi and just as in Burma with a variety of civil society projects.

And I could go on. After all, I haven't even made it out of the Bs yet. But I think you can see the common thread that links the entities together. With friends and with foe alike, the United States is engaged in diplomacy, policy and hands-on projects to redress wrongs, but to also address the structural flaws that can lead to such violations in the first place. Indeed, freedom and human dignity are indivisible. And so it follows that many of our programs and policies are aimed at developing democratic institutions and representative governments.

But what you should really know about all of the demarches and all of the dialogues and the thousands of projects you will read about in these pages is that this is actually what we do every day; this is our daily regimen at this Department of State. It is also a representative sample of the hard work of many hands, including our partners in Congress, other agencies and organizations overseas and here at home, as well as other governments and brave individuals.

And counted among those brave individuals are our own Department of State personnel, such as the staff who stitch together the untold stories that make up this report and those cited in the closing chapter for their extraordinary dedication. I commend them for all of their work and I commend them to you as exemplars of the way in which this Department is implementing the vision of this President and the values of our American people every single day.

So, with that, I am delighted to give the helm to Assistant Secretary Craner, who is the one who orchestrated this mighty effort.

Lorne.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: Well, thank you all for being here for today's release of "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy." For a quarter of a century, the State Department has issued a separate volume, "The Annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices." That document has a hard won reputation as the most comprehensive, accurate volume on human rights conditions around the globe.

But many have asked about the connection between these reports and our policy. For all of their value in spotlighting human rights abuse, the Country Reports don't answer a very simple question: "What are we doing about it?"

Since becoming Assistant Secretary two years ago, I have wanted to include in our reporting a compendium of the work we are doing to advance human rights and democracy. We will not shy away from criticizing human rights violations abroad.

But, in addition, we want to take concrete steps to help the builders of democracy.

In short, our support for human rights is more than a once-a-year exercise in identifying abuses. It is a day-in/day-out effort of the Department of State, other U.S. Government agencies and U.S. missions overseas. This new annual report,

"Supporting Human Rights and Democracy," answers the "What are we doing about it" question for 92 of the world's most serious human rights violators.

I want to thank everybody in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor for their hard work in compiling this report. I want to particularly acknowledge Liz Dugan and Sally Buikema of my bureau, and the editors-in-chief, Cynthia Bunton, of our Country Reports Office, and Rob Jackson of the Office of Promoting Human Rights and Democracy.

I want to thank the other personnel in my bureau who worked on this report, the other bureaus in the Department, other U.S. agencies and U.S. missions overseas who have contributed to the report. Most of all, I want to thank the foreign service officers -- and you will see many of their names in the very back of this book -- who have demonstrated through their activities an unwavering commitment to advancing U.S. interests by support for human rights and democracy around the world.

Thank you and I'll take your questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, there are 92 countries in this report. Does this mean that the countries we don't have in this report have good records? For example, Turkey is not included in this report.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: We were asked by the Congress to issue a report, not on all countries that are members of the UN, as we do for the Annual Country Reports, for this one. We were asked to do a report on countries where there is pervasive torture, disappearances and other serious violations of human rights. And so we came up with a list of 92 where those things occur regularly.

QUESTION: Yes. The last Human Rights Report, U.S. Human Rights Reports, questioning on Venezuela, the independence of powers, the strength of the Venezuelan institutions and the freedom of expression. I just want to know, it's in any way different, this report, and which incident would have in the relationships between Venezuela and the United States?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: No, I think we still -- we still have concerns about Venezuela, including independence of the media, independence of labor unions, and other issues. And I know we are working very, very closely with the OAS to try and better the situation there.

QUESTION: The report talks a lot about the Millennium Challenge Account, at least addresses, says this is going to be important, particularly for Africa. But this program doesn't seem to have gotten off the ground. Can you give us a sense of where you are on that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: Where we are on it is working through with Congress how much is going to be in the first year. The Millennium Challenge Account is designed to expand by 50 percent over the next -- in the next three years, our assistance, foreign aid abroad, to add an extra \$5 billion in year three to that account, and, thereafter, to continue at that level. It's designed to help countries that are advancing politically, economically and socially, that have demonstrated a commitment to improving their lot on those scores.

Where we are right now is walking through with Congress and working through with Congress how much the first year of funding is going to be. But, as I said, it was designed originally to be a three-year ramp-up to the full amount of \$5 billion.

QUESTION: Assistant Secretary, what would you say to -- I mean --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: What page are you on?

QUESTION: I have a question about people who are -- what would you say to people who would argue that because Israel and Turkey are not in this list that you have somehow spared U.S.'s -- America's closest allies, who other independent groups have singled out in the past for their human rights abuses?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: If you look closely in the Middle East section, you'll see West Bank and Gaza are in there.

QUESTION: West Bank, Gaza --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: -- are in there.

QUESTION: With regard to Turkey --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: Within Israel, we have never -- we have always said within Israel the human rights situation is good, but the human rights situation in the West Bank caused by Israel and by the Palestinians is not good, and so we address that in this report.

QUESTION: My mistake. But what about Turkey? I mean, Turkey is a --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: We don't find that same level as these other countries, but you will find many, many U.S. allies. You find all of Central Asia in this. You find many countries in the Middle East that are allies. You won't lack for allies, if you look through the report.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, is it fair to say that these are the 92 worst?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: That's a fair assessment, both democratically and human rights. You can have countries that are progressing on democracy, but they still have human rights problems. And you see many of those in here. Another revealing -- I mean, this is 92 out of 195 or -96 countries around the world. We had a gathering of what was called the Community of Democracies in Seoul last November, and you had well over 100 countries there. If you match up the two lists, there will probably be a little bit of overlap between the two, but not very much at all.

QUESTION: Can you say, as a general matter, that there are places where the United States is less aggressive in promoting human rights for fear of running afoul of an ally?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: No, I think you can certainly say that we don't have a cookie-cutter approach to democracy around the world. The way we are addressing it in some countries, we might not address it in others. And I have to say,

as a former practitioner from outside of government, in doing that every country is different.

And where every country ends up is different. Mongolia is a democracy, Mali is a democracy, Mexico is a democracy, but they are all headed in different democratic directions. And so you want to, where you can assist those countries, you want to help them in different ways.

QUESTION: Yeah, first of all, the Press Office ran out of hard copies. Will your Bureau make more available to the press?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: Yes, yeah, they are being printed as we speak. But we also have them on CD, I think.

QUESTION: Well, I know, but it's not quite -- for people as old as I am, it's like really important that we have it.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: I'll give you mine.

QUESTION: Great, I'll follow that up.

On a somewhat more serious note, I presume that the report covers things like interrogations, torture of detainees, and so on, and so forth. And as you know, there were reports last year, in particular, that the United States was dropping off various detainees from the war on terror to friendly states where more, perhaps, persuasive means could be used in order to obtain information.

Do you address this at all? And do you address the fact of those reports and their impact on your efforts to improve the situation in abusive countries?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: We don't address them in this volume, but I am happy to do so here.

Number one, the U.S. doesn't tolerate, condone or permit torture when we hold people. Before we would be willing to turn somebody over to a third country, we insist that they make the same pledge to us. And absent that pledge, we don't turn them over.

As far as what impact has this had on my talks with other countries, I have to tell you, other than France, it has never come up. And I have spent a lot of time in Central Asia, Zimbabwe, China, Colombia, Peru, many, many countries around the world, where these kinds of issues do come up, and I have never had it brought up with me by any of those countries. So it doesn't affect my ability to do my job.

I think, partly, (a) because, in the beginning, I don't think they would have the nerve to bring it up, given -- but those were in the days when these kind of salacious rumors were flying around. I think now that it's clear that that never was the case, that may be another reason why they don't bring it up.

QUESTION: I read the part about Burma, Myanmar, and this report didn't mention about the recent detained --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: It went to press right before that incident.

QUESTION: Yes. Could you add something on the recent detention of the Aung Sang Suu Kyi?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: Yeah, I testified -- if anybody is interested in this, I testified about a week ago, in front of Senate Foreign Relations on this. As you all know, we are outraged by what has happened in Burma. We consider the attack on her the work of government thugs.

We have lost our patience with the Burmese Government. And so we are working through with Congress what additional sanctions will be levied. But we are also talking to our allies in Europe and our ASEAN allies about what further steps they can take to try and remedy the situation in Burma, to get Suu Kyi out of jail, and to get a real dialogue going that leads to democracy.

QUESTION: Really related more to the Secretary of State's column in the *New York Times* this morning. What does the United States think that the neighbors of Zimbabwe can do that, for instance, the West or the United States can't to promote human rights?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: This kind of comes to the last question. What I have found in this job and before is that if -- if the U.S. condemns what a country is doing, and Europe condemns what a country is doing, that's very, very helpful. But it is most helpful in the case of Burma, in the case of Zimbabwe, in the case of Belarus, as another example, if the neighbors start to bring pressure on the regime.

In the case of Burma or in the case of Zimbabwe, they ought to be concerned. They ought to be concerned because those regimes are sullyng the reputation of their region, (a); (b), in the case of Burma, you have drug threats; in the case of Burma and Zimbabwe, you have refugee threats; in the case of Zimbabwe, the economic situation in Zimbabwe is dragging down the South African economy.

So what we hope they will do in both cases is to make it clear to both regimes that their kind of government is not welcome in the region anymore. The Africans have talked about NEPAD, about peer review in terms of democracy, and this is certainly a case that's right for peer review by them.

QUESTION: You mentioned that you don't turn over detainees unless you extract a pledge that they will not be tortured.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: Have you followed up with any of the countries to make sure that that pledge has been adhered to?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: You would have to check with Pierre, but I believe we haven't turned over -- in time-wise, we haven't turned over anybody for long enough that they've been in the country for long enough that we would go back and check. I think it's very, very recently that we have turned over people who have not been released within the country. There were a number who were released within Afghanistan. But that is a practice that we followed in extradition cases, for example, where we insist on the same thing, that we go back and follow up on that.

QUESTION: You made a passing reference to France, and I didn't understand.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: The question, basically, was has anybody overseas pushed you on this issue or bugged you on this issue or asked you about it. And the answer was no, but the French.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up on what you said about it's our hope that the neighbors in Zimbabwe and Burma would say that the kinds of governments in Zimbabwe and Burma are not welcome in the region? Do you want to take that a little further and just simply say that it's the U.S. policy that the Government of Mugabe and the Government of Burma, right now, change?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: Well, I think the Secretary this morning talked about Mr. Mugabe leaving.

QUESTION: Yeah.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: And I think when he addresses -- when he calls the Burmese regime thugs, those are not the kind of people we want to see in government.

We have made very, very clear that in both cases we hope that a negotiated process will lead to the exit of those who currently hold power and a democratically elected government.

QUESTION: Some people are in any way skeptical of such reports of human rights. What are you telling to those people, their non-belief in that? Where are the concrete results of such --?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: That they don't believe in human rights?

QUESTION: No that they don't believe in such reports.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: Where are the concrete results? Go to Eastern Europe and see the concrete results. Go to South Korea and see the results. Go to most of Latin America and see the results.

When I started working in Washington 20 years ago, there were almost no democracies in Latin America. Today, almost every country is a democracy. They are not without their troubles. We are not without ours. Those are the concrete results of this kind of work. Go through all of Eastern Europe and much of the former Soviet Union -- again, not without their problems. Go to South Korea. Go to Taiwan. Go to many countries in Africa.

Talk to the people who are in government now. Ask them, "Did you ever come to the U.S. on an exchange program?" "Did anybody from AID help you 10 or 15 years ago?" "Did anybody from the National Democratic Institute help you in the '90s?" And you're going to find a lot of yeses for the people who are in power who are governing democratically, who are trying to make their economies better. You're going to find a lot of them who say, "I might not be here but for what the Americans did." I have met many, many of those people around the world myself.

MR. REEKER: Thank you all very, very much. Thank you, Lorne.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRANER: Thanks.