

Western Hemisphere 2002 - 2003 Report on Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record

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Democratic institutions and civil society face serious challenges in several countries in the Western Hemisphere. Protection of fundamental human rights, including labor rights, often needs strengthening, especially in the eight Latin American countries we have highlighted. Weak judicial systems in the region have been cited for failing to enforce the rule of law and protect fundamental human rights, thus undermining democratic stability. Reconciliation, including support to human rights investigations of abuses during military dictatorships and other non-democratic governments, and accountability for past abuses remain critical.

In 2002 and 2003, the United States has focused on consolidating democratic institutions and promoting accountability and respect for human rights in the Western Hemisphere. Current activities include projects to strengthen democratic mechanisms and institutions in Venezuela through cooperative efforts with the Organization of American States (OAS), government officials, political parties, unions, civil society organizations, and business community organizations across the Venezuelan political spectrum. In Colombia, the U.S. is working with the Government to tackle the root causes of human rights abuses and democratic instability while continuing to invest in emergency humanitarian assistance and protection measures necessary to address the internal armed conflict. We have launched a program to protect threatened members of the judiciary in Colombia through temporary relocation and training in a third country. The U.S. Department of State has also worked with USAID to strengthen electoral processes and voter registration and education in Peruvian and Nicaraguan elections, and to support an archival project in Paraguay working to make human rights records accessible to the public.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN VENEZUELA

This project administered by the National Endowment for Democracy supported Organization of American States-led efforts to promote political dialogue in Venezuela. The project focuses on strengthening political parties, trade unions, and civil society; conflict resolution; education reform; and land reform. Additional sub-projects will address drafting of a suffrage law and training journalists. The polarization of Venezuelan society, attempts to arrest strike leaders, and wholesale dismissal of oil company employees have limited the impact of programs. The most visible result to date has been in regional projects on conflict resolution which have helped minimize the spread of political violence to the provinces and local government. The International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute continue to work in non-partisan efforts to promote party-building and positive democratic alternatives as Venezuelans prepare to vote in a recall referendum later this year.

COLOMBIA

While Colombia is a multi-party, constitutional democracy, a major internal armed conflict pits the Government against leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries --

both financed by drug trafficking and other criminal activities. This has created an environment in which serious violations of human rights, almost all of which are committed by guerrillas or paramilitaries, are commonplace. The civilian judiciary is independent of the executive and legislative branches, but confronts profound challenges from corruption and intimidation by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and other wealthy criminal organizations. More significantly, the cumbersome inquisitorial judicial system is overworked and faces serious resource constraints, a situation that has made impunity the single greatest threat to the integrity of the Colombian state and the creation of a culture of respect for human rights.

The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Colombia is both proactive and responsive, tackling the root causes of human rights and democratic instability while continuing to invest in emergency humanitarian assistance and protection measures necessary to address the internal armed conflict. Key strategic objectives include protection for threatened populations, increased access to justice, support for judicial reforms and the rule of law, promotion of local governance and peace initiatives, and provision of humanitarian assistance.

Working with the Colombian Ministry of Interior, the U.S. has provided protection assistance to 2,068 people and 36 offices under threat. The protection program includes threatened human rights workers, union leaders, journalists, and members of the left wing Patriotic Union Party. In 2002, it was expanded to include mayors, city council members and municipal human rights workers after the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) started to systematically threaten them. Equally important, the program's Early Warning System expanded to 12 regions. This allowed it to respond effectively to 116 of 121 alerts, potentially preventing massacres, forced displacements, and other egregious human rights violations.

Recruitment of child soldiers is a growing problem in Colombia. The Colombian government estimated that 12,000 to 15,000 children were members of illegal armed groups in 2002. The U.S. supports a program with the Government of Colombia for the re-integration of child soldiers from illegal armed groups. In 1999, the first center for the specialized treatment of ex-combatant children was opened. To date, this program has benefited approximately 636 ex-combatant children and has projected funding through 2004.

The U.S. has funded 21 Justice and Peace Houses -- one-stop legal assistance shops -- thereby improving access to justice for approximately 1.4 million poor and marginalized Colombians. In order to strengthen the Government of Colombia's capability to investigate and prosecute human rights cases, the U.S. supports the Human Rights Unit in the Prosecutor General's Office. This support has included the formation and training of 11 satellite Human Rights Units. These units are made up of forensic specialists, investigators, and prosecutors. In addition, the donation, installation and training on the various forensic systems have substantially improved law enforcement's ability to investigate and prosecute human rights crimes in Colombia. For example, Integrated Ballistic Identification Systems have been installed in five locations throughout Colombia while the Automated Fingerprint Identification System is being upgraded and networked. The combination of trained units and increased forensic capabilities has resulted in an increased ability to investigate and prosecute human rights violations.

The U.S. has worked to help reform Colombia's criminal code and move the system towards an accusatorial system. This should help accelerate the legal process -- legal

cases move exceedingly slowly in Colombia. The U.S. funded site visits for judges and legislators to observe the accusatory system in practice in Puerto Rico. The U.S. has organized joint accusatory trial technique courses for judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and investigators, and implemented an instructors' course at the Prosecutor General's training facility. The instructors then conduct courses in forensic specialties, new prosecutorial methodology, basic investigative skills, trial techniques, interview techniques and crime scene management. To date, more than 2,500 prosecutors, investigators, and judges have been trained in such courses. In response to the approximately 3,000 kidnapping cases per year, the U.S. has assisted the Government of Colombia in developing and implementing a comprehensive program to investigate and prosecute kidnapping and extortion offenses. Six courses in the areas of Human Resources Intelligence Management, Racketeering Enterprise Investigations, Kidnaping Investigations and Ransom Investigations, and Interview and Interrogation have been held for 180 law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and military personnel. The intimidation of witnesses and judicial sector personnel is also a serious problem. The U.S. has provided training and equipment for GOC protective force personnel in both the witness and dignitary protection areas, including personnel from the Bogota Mayoral Office and other ministers' security details.

The Local Governance Program, which works to improve the capacity of municipal governments to involve citizens in local decision-making, provide services, and effectively and transparently manage resources, supported the establishment of 66 social infrastructure projects in 27 municipalities. These projects are administered through local citizen oversight committees that establish project priorities and oversee their management and financing. In addition, USAID successfully completed a nationwide public awareness anti-corruption campaign that reached six million citizens through radio, newspaper, and television messages and standardized internal control units in five governmental agencies. The U.S.-funded Peace Initiative Program provided \$2.5 million in grants to 21 private and public sector Colombian organizations working to promote a culture of peace in the country.

The on-going armed conflict in Colombia has resulted in the displacement of approximately 2 million people. The U.S. is funding seven international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Colombia, providing emergency humanitarian assistance to newly displaced persons during their first three months of displacement. The U.S. is also providing mid- to long-term assistance to displaced persons through six IOs and NGOs. The latter programs focus more on economic reintegration of displaced where they reside rather than relocation.

Violence against labor union leaders and activists continues to be a serious problem in Colombia. In order to combat this problem, the USG is supporting a temporary relocation and training project. In its first year, 27 trade union members received training in the U.S. to improve the organizational, collective bargaining, and public/community relations skills of Colombian trade unions. The U.S. is working to ensure compliance with labor conditions in the Andean Trade Preference and Drug Eradication Act, and is encouraging efforts to modernize national legislation in accordance with Colombian commitments to the International Labor Organization.

CUBA

Facing an openly and actively hostile Government, the United States Government and the U.S. Interest Section (USINT) in Havana confront significant challenges in

their ongoing efforts to promote human rights, free access to information, and respect for democratic ideas in Cuba. Public diplomacy initiatives that would elicit only mild and favorable comment elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere threaten, to a surprising degree, the Cuban Government's traditional control over all aspects of life including access to information and opinion. Knowing that the Government has repeatedly acted to block such activities and stifle independent Cuban voices, the U.S. must operate quietly and creatively to support the Cuban people as they move toward democracy.

To better meet these goals, our strategy consolidates an array of programs to promote democratization, respect for human rights, and development of a free-market economy into the Enhanced Outreach Initiative (EOI). This initiative focuses on practical informational programs to promote democratic reforms and strengthen civil society, including discrete projects to support broader and balanced civil access to information. In addition, USINT follows the cases of more than 350 prisoners of conscience in Cuban jails, including more than 77 arrested since March 18. Their ongoing reporting supports broader U.S. efforts to draw international attention to the gravity of the human rights situation in Cuba.

The most significant human rights issue, in an extraordinarily repressive environment, is systematic official mistreatment of any citizen with the courage to challenge a rigid adherence to the "untouchable" socialist system. The Government works to harass, dissuade, and punish any independent voice, including those citizens who sought peaceful and productive change through the constitutionally sanctioned Varela Project. Targets of official repression include political dissenters, journalists, union members, and even librarians working outside the state monopolies. The regime resists international efforts to improve the treatment of its many prisoners of conscience, refusing an official mission of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and repeatedly denying access requests by the International Committee for the Red Cross.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Weak Dominican public institutions at times fail to protect fundamental human rights and enforce the rule of law, undermining democratic consolidation in the Dominican Republic. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for the Dominican Republic worked to ensure free and fair elections, promote respect for human rights, end unwarranted police killings, eliminate child labor, combat domestic violence, and support judicial reforms and the rule of law.

The U.S. promoted the rule of law in the Dominican Republic by seeking major reforms in criminal procedures, Public Ministry career laws, criminal investigation methodology, and legal aid to indigents and public administration. The 2002 Criminal Procedure Code will, once fully implemented, streamline the criminal procedure process and provide greater legal protections to the accused. Civil service legislation approved in April 2003 establishes a transparent system for selection, performance evaluation, and removal of career prosecutors, improving practical implementation of the new criminal code and overall institutional efficiency. U.S. technical assistance and training should ensure smooth implementation of these reforms.

Continued U.S. representations to the Government of the Dominican Republic (GODR) led to General Marte Martinez replacing notorious former National Police Chief Candelier. This change of leadership directly contributed to a reduction in

unwarranted police killings and enhanced cooperation between police and civilian authorities.

U.S. technical assistance and training strengthened the efficiency and effectiveness of the judicial system. With our help, the GODR initiated a public defense program to promote greater access to justice for indigent Dominicans. The U.S. installed a criminal case tracking system in the National District and provided assistance on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, allowing expedition of final judgments and a reduction in pre-sentencing incarceration.

In October, the U.S. organized an assessment report on Dominican military- and police-run prisons, which contributed to humanitarian prison infrastructure improvements, including military doctor visits to address prisoners' health concerns. The U.S. hosted a year-round series of human rights seminars and conferences by the Dominican Military Institute of Human Rights, focused on the development of a "Consensus Document on Military and Human Rights." The U.S. continued to incorporate basic human rights instruction in all U.S. military provided training.

Throughout the year, U.S. officials provided speeches, press assistance, and information promoting police reform, protection of human rights, judicial and legislative reform, civic education, and other aspects of human rights and democracy building. Speaker programs brought U.S. experts to address Dominican audiences on a wide range of topics, including civilian oversight of the police, the protection of human rights by the police force, effective anti-trafficking in persons (TIP) legislation, and constitutional reform.

The U.S. also sponsored Dominican participation in civic education, democracy and human rights exchange programs in the U.S. In September, government officials and community activists came to the U.S. to attend a training seminar on the prevention of domestic violence. Participant follow-up included initiatives to set up a shelter for battered women and develop educational outreach programs on domestic violence prevention.

The U.S. provided technical assistance to both the Congressional Commission in charge of the Police Reform Draft Bill and legal and human rights civil society organizations working to debate and analyze the bill. Final legislation incorporated international standards of police performance in terms of transparency and professionalism. Once implemented, the Act will have an important impact on respect for human rights and due process.

Throughout the year, the United States continued to encourage robust Government support for efforts to eliminate child labor, dedicating over \$1.75 million per year to multi-year programs. These included programs targeting the worst forms of child labor and projects to rescue over 8,000 Dominican children working in the sex industry and under harsh conditions at coffee plantations and tomato plantations. The United States continued to work closely with the GODR to combat trafficking in persons (TIP) and alien smuggling. Among other activities, the U.S. supported anti-TIP meetings with key officials, encouraged the activities of the first Latin American Reception Center for Trafficked and Migrant women, and funded technical assistance to prepare anti-TIP legislation.

ECUADOR

Ecuador has a history of political instability, pervasive corruption, and a weak judicial system, all of which contribute to human rights abuses. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Ecuador addresses a wide range of critical issues, including support for fair and transparent elections, labor rights, judicial reforms and the rule of law, human rights education, and protection and humanitarian assistance for Colombians who have sought refuge in Ecuador. Outreach to a large but often marginalized indigenous community includes new programs to enhance political inclusion and improve civic understanding of key judicial reforms. This human rights and democracy strategy is coordinated with broader regional efforts, as part of the Andean Regional Initiative.

One of the greatest contributors to human rights problems in Ecuador has been a poorly organized, underfunded, and often corrupt judicial system. The U.S. supported projects to strengthen both monitoring of human rights in the judicial system and overall judicial effectiveness. These programs, which received over \$100,000 in U.S. support during 2002, provided practical education in human rights to judges, lawyers, university professors, and NGO representatives. In 2001, a new Criminal Procedure Code went into effect that fundamentally changed the structure and process of the judicial system. U.S. programs educated nearly a thousand judicial employees on the new criminal procedure system, trained law professors, provided training and brochures on the new code to NGOs and indigenous communities, and conducted a thorough evaluation of the new code. This evaluation with recommendations has been presented to high-level justice sector officials.

The U.S. sponsored Ecuadorian participation in human rights, anti-corruption, and administration of justice exchange programs in the U.S., and brought internationally recognized speakers to address Ecuadorian audiences on topics including constitutional law and human rights and incorporation of human rights content in university curricula. Through the Embassy, we publicly supported the work and protection of individual human rights defenders in Ecuador, and improved interagency coordination to ensure thorough human rights vetting of military units proposed for U.S. training and/or support. Human rights training was integrated into all U.S.-supported military exercises and operational training conducted in Ecuador.

The U.S. worked to provide extensive and non-partisan technical support to the 2002 presidential, congressional, and municipal elections in Ecuador. Related programs under a \$1.4 million USAID grant included support to elections observation efforts, a review of the voter rolls, results transmission, voter education, and civic events that encouraged healthy debate. We also led donor support for the start-up of the first national, non-partisan domestic observation organization, "Participación Ciudadana."

Through this organization, we tracked campaign spending and mobilized over 4,000 volunteers to monitor the elections and conduct an independent "quick count" to help verify the accuracy of election results. Over 20 volunteers from our Embassy and the Consulate in Guayaquil also participated as election monitors for the Organization of American States. These efforts contributed to the most transparent and fair elections in Ecuador's history, which in turn boosted the legitimacy of those elected. Ecuador is a participant in a new regional program to strengthen democratic elements in political parties and improve outreach to marginalized groups.

The U.S. called for reforms in those elements of the Ecuadorian labor code that do not meet international standards. Following a physical attack on striking banana plantation workers in May 2002, our Embassy met with the striking workers and

requested the Ecuadorian Government conduct a thorough investigation and prosecute those found responsible for the violence. The U.S. also funded International Labor Organization projects to assess and begin to address a serious child labor problem in Ecuador.

Finally, the U.S. provided funding to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) to support refugee centers and assistance for Colombians seeking refuge in Ecuador as well as small but critical development projects in impacted communities along the northern border with Colombia.

GUATEMALA

Guatemala's human rights situation is worrisome, and has deteriorated after significant improvement following the end of the internal conflict in 1996. The 2002-2003 human rights and democracy strategy for Guatemala works to protect human rights, promote the rule of law, and consolidate democracy in Guatemala. It includes diplomatic and programmatic efforts to ensure implementation of the Historical Clarification Commission (HCC) recommendations, strengthen the human rights movement, promote respect for human rights and the rule of law in judicial and security institutions, increase tolerance and respect for ethnic diversity, and institutionalize democracy.

The year 2002 was difficult for Guatemalan human rights activists, with more than 160 threats against them and an escalation in general violence around the country. U.S. officials met with human rights activists throughout the year to show our support for their work and concern for their safety, using our considerable access to local press and influence with the Government to weigh in on high-profile human rights cases, and to emphasize that democracy and human rights are the cornerstone of U.S. policy towards Guatemala.

U.S. support for reconciliation focused on exhumations of clandestine cemeteries and associated mental health services. 2002 operations were temporarily suspended at the Forensic Anthropology Foundation of Guatemala (FAFG), the U.S.-funded organization in charge of exhumations, after multiple death threats forced the director to leave the country for several months. The U.S. held a press conference, in concert with other donor countries and various GOG ministers, calling for Government protection of the organization. U.S. officials also visited FAFG headquarters and exhumation sites to show solidarity with forensic anthropologists and human rights activists, and issued statements of concern and support for this critical work. The U.S. provided security briefings to the entire FAFG staff and assisted informally with their hiring of a security service. Despite these threats and intimidation, the FAFG soldiered on. With the 60 exhumations completed in 2002, FAFG has now exhumed approximately 250 different sites, including those in areas most affected by the internal conflict.

Throughout 2002, U.S.-funded mental health programs for victims of the internal conflict were expanded beyond family members affected by exhumations to address continuing psychological needs. Funds under the Congressional earmark for victims of torture were used to provide psychological treatment for survivors and victims of torture in coordination with the Ministry of Health, local institutions, and NGOs. One bright spot during 2002 was the June appointment of a new Human Rights Ombudsman, Sergio Morales. U.S. officials supported the selection process and

generated civil society support for this initiative through the U.S. Human Rights Program. Morales is the first Ombudsman from civil society and a significant improvement over his predecessor. The U.S. Human Rights Program continued support to the National Movement for Human Rights, a consortium of 74 human rights NGOs, which held its first national congress this year and is working to enhance coordination between 12 regional offices and enhance their influence on national policy issues such as Morales' election.

Human rights groups believe clandestine structures with roots in the military and a cadre of retired military officers are behind the threats and intimidation levied against human rights workers. The U.S. worked with human rights activists and government officials throughout the year on a proposal for a special investigative commission; this culminated in a March 13 agreement between the Government and the Guatemalan Human Rights Ombudsman to create a United Nations/Organization of American States-led special commission (CICIACS) to investigate these clandestine groups. The U.S. will continue to provide technical and financial support to human rights NGOs, the Human Rights Ombudsman and the Government as they work to develop and implement CICIACS.

The United States supported the extension of the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) through the end of 2004, concerned that an earlier departure could adversely affect human rights verification. U.S. officials visited MINUGUA and Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH) offices monitoring the transition of verification work. MINUGUA and PDH representatives alike noted the need for additional training of Guatemalan professionals and the still-weak capacity of institutions slated to take over MINUGUA's responsibilities. The U.S. supported MINUGUA's efforts to develop a national strategy on resource-sharing with domestic actors and worked to strengthen links between the auxiliary offices of the PDH and the human rights NGOs in the regions most affected by the internal conflict. Strengthening justice in Guatemala is fundamental to our human rights strategy. The U.S. opened 11 Justice Centers in different departments (provinces), supported indigenous language translators, created a special victims' assistance unit within the Public Ministry, and strengthened judicial and university training programs. The Centers provide access to justice for traditionally marginalized groups and work on region-specific programs with civil society. The rule of law was also supported through visible U.S. presence at all public human rights trials in Guatemala City, including high-level attendance at both the Bishop Gerardi and Myrna Mack trials and appeals, and through frequent meetings with plaintiffs, lawyers and prosecutors, and supporting judges in these cases.

Our Civil Society program supports the efforts of two NGO coalitions to combat racism and discrimination in both urban and rural areas. PAQ'UCH, one of these coalitions, has maintained productive dialogue with the GOG since early 2002 and participated in the last Consultative Group meeting. PAQ'UCH was instrumental in the establishment of the Presidential Commission Against Racism and Discrimination of Indigenous Peoples. UTZIL, the second coalition, is developing the "Pluricultural Society" program, using workshops, seminars, and cultural activities to raise public awareness about ethnic discrimination. On Columbus Day, UTZIL hosted a successful all-day event at the National Palace of Culture showcasing indigenous customs. Additional civil society programs are supported at all levels, including multiyear assistance to domestic violence programs, local governance initiatives, and special development programs for poor rural communities. These local programs also

supported greater grassroots awareness of human rights and of conflict resolution and reconciliation.

The United States actively monitors threats to workers rights, including threats against and murders of union members and leaders, and works to ensure compliance with labor conditions in U.S. benefit programs and trade agreements. We fund Solidarity Center training for labor rights groups and unions, work to help resolve disputes where appropriate, and encourage efforts to harmonize national legislation with International Labor Organization commitments.

The United States continued to combat trafficking in persons in Guatemala through a variety of programs, including humanitarian support to victims of trafficking, a shelter for women victims of trafficking at Tecun Uman, and preventative public information campaigns.

HAITI

The U.S. promoted the rule of law in Haiti through frequent high-level meetings and public statements that emphasized promotion of an independent judiciary and police enforcement of court orders, including the arrest of criminals with outstanding warrants and the release of those still in detention despite valid release orders. The U.S. urged an end to Government encouragement of "zero tolerance" vigilantism, and voiced concern at impunity for human rights violations by notorious figures such as Ronald Camille and Amiot Metayer. To promote better professional relations between often threatened journalists and the legal community, the highest ranking Haitian-American judge in Florida moderated U.S.-sponsored discussions on accountability, public service orientation, public oversight and transparency, performance standards, and the importance of press and judicial impartiality. The sessions closed with a commitment by participants to greater media access to judicial processes and better media reporting on working conditions that hamper the legal community. Through the International Foundation for Elections Systems (IFES), the United States also conducted seminars and workshops for more than 40 civil society organizations advocating rule of law and judicial independence during the year; this program has already resulted in the formation of a new federation of bar associations.

Child labor in Haiti, especially internal and external trafficking of children as domestic workers or "restaveks," is a serious human rights and labor concern. The United States strongly encouraged the Government of Haiti to fight such trafficking in persons, resulting in the introduction of a new law prohibiting child trafficking. The U.S. also funded several key programs targeting the problem. These included a joint International Labor Organization (ILO)/International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) project on child labor, whose director participated in the February 2003 global conference on trafficking in Washington, which highlighted new strategies and methods to raise public awareness and work with local officials to eliminate the problem. Supported by additional U.S. funding, UNICEF research worked to identify the means and methods used to traffic Haitian children to the Dominican Republic for domestic servitude or agricultural labor, while the National Coalition for Haitian Rights' New York Office began an educational campaign to eliminate local support for the practice --including enhanced parental awareness -- and to rescue mistreated children from abusive work situations.

The U.S. International Visitors' (IV) Program sent more than 70 attorneys, civil society leaders, journalists, scholars, government officials, and NGO representatives from Haiti to attend policy development, human rights practices and advocacy, women's rights, and conflict resolution seminars in the United States. An estimated 800 Haitians benefited from follow-on programs implemented by IV participants, including a weeklong series of lectures on human rights and a two-day forum on conflict resolution that drew crowds of civil society representatives from one of the poorest and most violent slums in Haiti. Ongoing demonstrations of U.S. support for the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms included the Ambassador's personal and public delivery of the Country Report on Human Rights Practices to a prominent human rights non-governmental organization (NGO), the Platform for Human Rights, and visits to prisons and the homes of victims to monitor conditions and obtain personal testimony regarding human rights violations.

Working through the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, the United States has encouraged the Government, civil society groups, and American and Haitian NGOs to strengthen and enhance political party development. These programs included development of the civic action website called "Haiti - Get Involved," training on political opinion polling, and founding a resource center to document and disseminate anti-corruption policies and the best practices of state and private entities.

PERU

Emerging from a decade of authoritarian government, Peru is in the process of democratic transformation, with growing recognition of press freedoms and the role of civil society. President Toledo has affirmed that strengthening democracy and protecting human rights are priorities. However, continued judicial inefficiency and corruption, impunity for public security forces engaged in illegal extrajudicial killings and torture, and poor to harsh prison conditions contributed to human rights abuses in some areas. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Peru addresses a wide range of critical issues, including significant support for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, fair and transparent regional and municipal elections, human rights and democracy education, and the restructuring and reform of government and public security forces. Outreach to civil society included an innovative program to promote a culture of lawfulness in public schools and a series of ongoing democracy and anti-corruption discussions including both government and civil society participants. This human rights and democracy strategy is coordinated with broader regional efforts as part of the Andean Regional Initiative. One of the greatest contributors to human rights problems in Peru has been a partisan, inefficient, and corrupt judiciary, coupled with lack of due process and the use of excessive and illegal force by public security forces. Several key programs targeted these areas of concern. First, a model curriculum for junior high students, based on living within a culture of lawfulness, was adapted to Peru in coordination with the country's Ministry of Education. This school-based training program is now in its second year. Second, a program to support the Government's restructuring of the police and military is underway, implemented by contracted U.S. law enforcement experts and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). This includes the establishment and training of a police Internal Affairs Group to investigate allegations of corruption and human rights violations, and support to human rights training of police officers. Through the Embassy, we also improved interagency coordination to ensure thorough human rights vetting of military and police units proposed for U.S. training and/or support.

Key to a successful democratic transition in Peru is public awareness of human rights abuses of the past, and the quest for both justice and national reconciliation. To this end, the U.S. is the largest single donor to Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC has a mandate to analyze the political, social, and cultural conditions that fostered an era of violence between May 1980 and November 2000. During this period more than 25,000 persons were killed and an estimated 6,089 disappeared. While the Commission has no authority to prosecute human rights offenders, it works to clarify abuses of human rights committed by terrorists and the State; locate the victims or their remains; determine individual or institutional responsibility for violations; propose a system of reparations for the victims' families; recommend institutional, legal, and educational reforms; and propose initiatives to advance peace, the rule of law, national reconciliation, and democracy. In addition to direct and indirect financial support to the TRC, the U.S. has declassified and released thousands of pages of pertinent documents requested by the Commission. We also supported the vital work of the Peruvian Human Rights Coordinator, including assistance programs for identified victims of torture.

The U.S. promoted government reform and decentralization with a variety of programs. These included technical assistance and U.S. monitors for November 2002 regional and municipal elections, support for the public defender's office, electoral reform support, and programs to enhance congressional and judicial reforms, including technical assistance to the legislature. Public outreach and education efforts included an international visitors program on human rights and judicial reform, a series of ongoing democracy and anti-corruption meetings with government officials and civil society participants, and public video conferences with U.S. and Peruvian experts discussing democratic transitions and domestic violence issues. The U.S. has supported modernization of the labor ministry and the improvement and dissemination of core labor standards. Finally, a series of appearances by a distinguished American guest speaker on civil rights and the African-American cultural identity was of particular interest to an often-neglected Afro-Peruvian audience.

VENEZUELA

Venezuela's political and social divisions were exacerbated this year by a lengthy national strike, inflammatory political rhetoric, and confrontational Government statements that frequently led to violence against perceived political opponents, labor leaders, and the media. Public confidence in democratic institutions was further eroded by widespread police abuse of detainees, as well as corruption and inefficiency in the judicial and law enforcement systems that has spurred a disturbing rise in vigilante justice. In this environment, the 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy focused primarily on strengthening key civil society institutions, encouraging dialogue (including public and official awareness of human rights and the rule of law), and opposing civil violence and extra-constitutional changes in government. This human rights and democracy strategy is coordinated with broader regional security and humanitarian efforts, as part of the Andean Regional Initiative.

Growing and potentially violent political polarization between supporters and opponents of President Hugo Chavez is one of the greatest threats to democracy and human rights in Venezuela. Through the U.S. Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy, the U.S. promotes democratic stability and strengthens key institutions in Venezuela with a variety of democracy-oriented projects, implemented through small grants to non-governmental organizations.

With \$2.44 million in these 2003 grants, we support key objectives including conflict management, transparency in government, anti-corruption, improved civil-military relations, union outreach to informal workers, and a strengthened civil society including local government, justices of the peace, education associations, and labor unions.

The U.S., as a member of the Friends of the Organization of American States (OAS) Secretary General's Mission for Venezuela, continues to support the OAS Secretary General's efforts to foster dialogue between the Government and the opposition and to achieve the peaceful, constitutional, democratic and electoral resolution in Venezuela called for in OAS Permanent Council Resolution 833.

In the wake of a series of violent attacks that followed official criticism of the media, the U.S. renewed its public support for freedom of speech and an independent and impartial press. The U.S. met repeatedly with government officials to promote human rights and freedom of association, and to express our concern at armed attacks on anti-government demonstrators, journalists, and human rights defenders.

U.S. assistance to the Venezuelan military integrated training on human rights and civil-military relations in all military assistance and ensured, through a strict vetting process, that no human rights abuser benefited from U.S. training or assistance. The U.S. provided funding to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to enhance support to critical new offices and volunteers on the border with Colombia. With this assistance, UNHCR also hopes to initiate a refugee registry system by the end of 2003. UNHCR indicates that between 20,000 and 50,000 Colombians "of concern" now reside in Venezuela. Despite the lack of official Government recognition of status or implementing legislation to facilitate refugee claims, undocumented Colombians continue to seek economic stability and refuge in Venezuela. Response to the humanitarian needs of these refugees often falls to members of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working along the Venezuelan border with Colombia. The Embassy selected seven of these human rights defenders for human rights training and exchange programs in the U.S. this year. Another project brought Venezuelan judges to the U.S. to study the administration of justice and rule of law.

Additional U.S. programs trained local immigration officials to prevent alien smuggling and trafficking in persons through Venezuelan ports of entry, and promoted public awareness of the rights of children, adolescents and girls.