



Testimony of

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, Freedom House is pleased to testify today on the new report issued by the State Department on “Supporting Human Rights and Democracy.”

The release of this report is an important new initiative. Freedom House has often expressed its concern that in many cases the annual human rights report issued by the State Department does not have a significant impact on U.S. diplomatic and programmatic actions. This report is a critical first step towards addressing that concern.

There is much to commend in the new report. The countries chosen include some of the worst performers in Freedom House’s annual survey of Freedom in the World (see: www.freedomhouse.org/research/mrr2003.pdf) It is an impressive compilation of a portion of the work the U.S. government is doing to promote democracy and human rights. The report does not even represent the totality of U.S. efforts, as the U.S. also works to strengthen democracy in many countries that are not being discussed here today.

The range and depth of current U.S. government democracy promotion work is the culmination of efforts by Congress, non-governmental groups and individuals within the State Department and USAID to integrate democracy and human rights concerns into U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance. I would like to recognize the important contributions of two of the leaders within the State Department who are here today, Harold Koh and Lorne Craner, as well as the tireless work of Jerry Hyman, now Director of USAID’s Democracy and Governance Center, who has worked for over a decade on these issues.

Freedom House applauds the Bush Administration for the high priority it has given to the promotion of democracy and human rights in its National Security Strategy, as well as in new initiatives such as the Millennium Challenge Account, and the Middle East Partnership Initiative. The U.S. should be recognized for its high-profile work in raising concerns about human rights violations in Belarus, Burma, Cuba, Zimbabwe and parts of Central Asia. It should also be commended for its emphasis on encouraging democracy and the rule of law within Afghanistan and Iraq.

However, there are a number of countries that we believe should receive more diplomatic attention and focus from the U.S.

- One such case is Uzbekistan, where we fundamentally disagree with the recent Administration determination that the government is making “substantial and continuing progress” in human rights and democracy. Given the deplorable human rights situation on the ground, that judgment was not only unwarranted, it poses a risk of undercutting U.S. influence at a time when it is desperately needed to bring about concrete improvements in the Uzbek government’s poor human rights performance.
- While we applaud the Administration’s successful efforts to free democracy leader Saad Eddin Ibrahim in Egypt, we believe that the U.S. needs to make

greater use of our influence with the Egyptian government to bring about genuine political reforms within that country.

- We also urge the U.S. to place a higher priority on human rights and democracy issues in its relations with Russia. Much more attention needs to be focused on the Putin government's brutal policies towards Chechnya. We should also raise our concerns over the Russian government's relentless chipping away at independent media within Russia proper.
- Perhaps the greatest human rights challenge that we face today is China. We disapprove of the Administration's decision not to sponsor a resolution on China at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva this past spring. Moreover, the report's description of China-related policies and programs is unimpressive, and one hopes it is not representative of the full extent of U.S. efforts to bring about progress in human rights and democratic reform.

Turning now to foreign assistance, we urge the Administration and Congress to take steps to ensure that MCA funds do not reward dictatorships and human rights abusers, such as Vietnam. We appreciate the Administration's inclusion of Freedom House ratings in the MCA decision-making process. However, we worry that the current formula, and the absence of any experts on political rights and civil liberties as members of the new governing board, could result in funding decisions that may send a mixed signal as to the Administration's commitment to the spread of democracy.

A larger issue is the total amount of available U.S. assistance that directly supports democracy and human rights objectives. Such democracy assistance has been leveraged in recent years to support successful political reforms in countries ranging from the Philippines to Poland to Chile and, more recently, in Slovakia and Serbia. While the funds allocated for democracy assistance have greatly increased in the last fifteen years, many important challenges remain that merit increased U.S. resources.

The need for democracy assistance is particularly acute in the Middle East and Africa, which are the two regions where the majority of the world's most repressive states can be found. In the wake of the September 11th tragedy, there has been a great deal of attention focused on the democracy deficit in the Middle East. So I would like to focus my remarks on Africa, where overall democracy assistance levels have largely remained stagnant after initial increases in the early 1990s. Despite the fact that Africa is the region with the second highest proportion of "Not Free" countries, the continent only receives 10 percent of overall U.S. democracy assistance.

This problem of insufficient resources will be further compounded by the fact that the vast majority of African countries will fail MCA democratic governance, rule of law and human rights criteria. It is thus essential that the Administration increase both diplomatic and programmatic resources and efforts devoted to promoting democratic progress in its relations with Africa.

Kenya is a case in point. In the past year, Kenya has shown encouraging signs of a movement towards democracy. The new government still faces enormous challenges in the areas of corruption and rule of law. But as things currently stand, the U.S. is slated to spend less than \$2 million to support further democratic reforms in Kenya, only a quarter of what the U.S. now invests in Albania.

In other regions where democratic progress has occurred but democratic institutions remain fragile and reform incomplete, such as Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America, the Administration is reducing its support for democracy, which risks reversals.

The bottom line should be clear: the Administration should seek and Congress should allocate adequate funds for democratic promotion. But to do so, the State Department and USAID need to revamp their budget processes to allow for a global – not just a regional – perspective on establishing clear priorities. The U.S. government must have an overall strategic vision – and a budget allocation process – that ensures that funds for democracy are requested and allocated so as to meet the most compelling challenges. They simply do not have one now.

The lack of a global Administration strategy for democracy promotion is reflected in the report we are discussing today. In reading the document, there is no sense of the relative priority among the countries discussed. The report makes little attempt to illuminate the scale of human rights abuses from country to country. I am providing to the Committee a comparative ranking of countries that are discussed in the report, based on the latest Freedom House ratings, which may be helpful in making such determinations. The list also includes a number of human rights abusers – such as Turkey – which were left out of this first report without any explanation.

Indeed, the overall level of U.S. resources being applied to the promotion of democracy and human rights is not clear from the document. It is essential that future reports systematically list the total size of the program for each country, both in country narratives as well as in an overview chart at the beginning of the report. That chart should also include the total amount of U.S. assistance going to promote democracy and human rights, and indicate the rise and decline of democracy support over the recent period. It would also be useful to indicate the major areas where assistance is provided: rule of law, human rights, elections, civil society, independent media, or corruption.

On a more positive note, I want to conclude with just a word about some of the programs that Freedom House is implementing in a number of countries in this report, thanks to the support of both USAID and the State Department. We have been actively engaged in reform efforts in Central Europe, in Ukraine, and in Belarus. Moreover, as a result of increased attention to human rights in Central Asia, Freedom House is implementing human rights defenders strengthening programs in Uzbekistan – one of the most repressive regimes – as well as Kyrgyzstan, where we also are in the process of opening a new independent printing press with U.S. government support.

We also enthusiastically endorse the Administration's new emphasis on democracy and human rights in the Middle East. In Morocco, Freedom House has worked with USG resources to strengthen the professional capacity of the human rights defender community, and provided experts that led to legislative changes in the new criminal procedure code. We also have an ongoing program in Algeria, where our work with human rights groups on disappearances in the civil war has led the Algerian government to give more priority to this important issue.

In conclusion, we want to commend Congress for requiring, and the Administration for preparing this report. We recognize the important work that is already ongoing, but we urge the Administration to place greater priority on democracy and human rights in both its diplomatic strategies and its assistance decisions in order to meet the very real challenges that remain.