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# Department of State Comments on the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997*

By

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and

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[The following comments are extracted from a news briefing conducted at the Department of State on January 30, 1998, in conjunction with the Department's release of the annual Human Rights Report.]

**ACTING SECRETARY TALBOTT:** Let me begin by just emphasizing that Secretary Albright had very much wanted to be at this podium here, herself, today to release the *1997 Country Report on Human Rights*; but I think as all of you are aware, she is in Madrid for another in a series of very important discussions with regard to the situation in Iraq.

In fact, what I'd like to do is exploit her absence a little bit, and use precisely the subject of her current round of diplomacy to make a point about the timeliness of this particular report. The challenge that the United States and the international community face in Iraq is a powerful illustration of why the United States must continue to make support for human rights a cornerstone of our diplomacy. It's a basic premise of our foreign policy that governments that respect the dignity and freedom of their own citizens are much more likely to be responsible members of the international community. The converse is also true. Regimes that rule by repression and violence at home are more likely to threaten their neighbors and world peace as a whole.

Saddam Hussein is exhibit A. He's inflicted arbitrary arrest, torture, summary execution and a reign of terror on the Iraqi people. He's forcibly displaced tens of thousands of Kurds, Shi'a, and other minorities. It's no wonder that a tyrant who would gas his own people during the 1980s would be trying today to develop nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and the missiles to deliver them beyond his borders; all, of course, in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

So it's against the backdrop of that very immediate threat that we are working, through our democracy and human rights policy, to encourage the emergence over time of an expanding community of nations that's committed to certain basic principles of governance—principles that include freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, the conduct of free, and fair elections, and adherence to the rule of law.

The report that we are releasing today is the 21<sup>st</sup> in an annual series that goes back to 1978. It examines developments over the past year in all of the categories that I just mentioned. It does so for 194 countries, across cultures and on every continent. It assesses progress and setbacks, and sometimes there is evidence of both in the same country.

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Before turning the briefing over to John Shattuck, who will walk you through some of the specifics, I'd like to touch on one more general point about human rights that goes to the heart of our response to the financial crisis that is now gripping Asia. There is a connection between economic freedom and political freedom, between open markets and open societies, between transparency of governance and the resilience of an economy.

Asia is a case in point. From the people power revolution that swept the Philippines in the 1980s to the emergence of South Korea as a vibrant, multiparty democracy in the 1990s, much of the Asia Pacific has adopted the democratic values that guide our own nation. That progress has been an important complement to the region's extraordinary economic growth; in particular, the emergence of an Asia middle class that has demanded more freedom for themselves and greater accountability from their leaders.

But the financial crisis of the past year has put Asia's political progress at a very real risk. In some cases, the prosperity generated by over a generation of growth has been erased virtually overnight, raising the danger that those who have suffered most might begin to question the wisdom of continuing down the path toward democracy and open society. That's another reason why we have strongly supported the efforts of the IMF to assist the troubled economies of Asia in regaining their equilibrium and in implementing essential reforms that will promote greater transparency and openness.

One final point, if I may, speaking of openness. We feel that, generally speaking, the communications revolution that is sweeping the world also has helped to encourage the kind of political change that is in America's national interest. The same information superhighway that moves the currencies of the global economy around the planet at the speed of light also transports the ideas and images of freedom across the boundaries of politics and ideology.

We are trying to plug into that phenomenon ourselves here at the State Department. The report that we are releasing here today will be on the Internet within minutes. Last year's installment received over 130,000 hits in the first 24 hours after its release. This year, we expect that number to increase significantly. That means the report will be on the screens of literally millions of government leaders and activists, NGO workers, reporters, scholars, business people and many others. The information and analysis that it provides will, we hope and believe, be ammunition in the right hands.

Finally, let me just say that this report is the product of tens of thousands of hours of hard work, observation, collection of data, analysis and careful drafting and very clear-headed thinking. For the past five years, the Secretary of State—first Warren Christopher, now Madeleine Albright—has relied on John Shattuck to lead that effort. So I think it's appropriate that I should now turn the podium over to him.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** I'd like to make a few opening remarks, and then take your questions.

In 1997 we saw both heartening evidence of progress and disturbing evidence of major human rights abuses throughout the world. Despite the tremendous wave of change in recent years that led to real reform and a new birth of democracies in many countries—especially in Latin America and Eastern Europe—there are still too many places where people face repression because of what they say or believe; because they stand up to authoritarian regimes or paramilitary forces; because they defend their rights, their families, their homes.

Because of this, there is always the need for the sober and objective evaluation of the status of human rights that we strive to provide in our annual country reports. The human rights standards used to measure progress in these reports are the standards of the Universal

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Declaration of Human Rights. The principles are universal in nature; they apply to everyone, and all governments are responsible for upholding them. The country reports are the tool to ensure that human rights concerns are taken into account in all US relationships; to alert us to dangerous trends; to spotlight abuses; and to provide a yardstick to show progress.

In the 1997 reports, we have sharpened and broadened two especially important priority areas: religious freedom and women's human rights. This year we have seen some major developments on the international level. We welcome the appointment of Mary Robinson as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as the expansion of her responsibilities to improve UN coordination of human rights policy.

The International War Crimes Tribunals have been strengthened as they continue their difficult work, slowly bringing to justice those who participated in the horrendous acts of genocide in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. The effort to establish a permanent international criminal court gained momentum last year, as President Clinton and other world leaders pointed to the urgent need for a global institution of justice.

I'd also like to note a major trend that is recorded in our reports this year—more and more people in countries around the world are insisting on their basic freedoms and democratic rights. This trend gained momentum with the end of the Cold War, and it can now be found in virtually every one of the 194 countries that are covered by our reports. A striking example in 1997 was Albania, where citizens pulled their country away from chaos by insisting on elections and changing their government.

Looking back at 1997, let me review with you the highlights of our reports. I'd like to start with Bosnia, because it belongs at the top. I believe when the dust settles, history will mark 1997 as the turning point toward peace and justice in Bosnia.

The number of war criminals taken into custody tripled last year from eight to 24, through arrests conducted by NATO and turnover of war criminals under pressure from the international community; and multiple trials began in The Hague. Through a series of elections, pluralism began to take hold in some Serb areas, and the Pale war criminals and hard-liners were increasingly isolated.

More refugees began to return to their homes. Joint institutions of justice, such as the International Police Task Force, were strengthened to provide protection for human rights. The NATO Stabilization Force was extended to provide the international backbone for stepping up implementation of the Dayton accords.

Of course, much more needs to be done; and this is why our continued engagement is essential. Bosnia marks the most significant and the most difficult human rights progress of 1997.

Let's look, then, at the record of three different countries—groups of countries: authoritarian regimes, countries in conflict and countries in transition. First, authoritarian regimes. In China, there were some positive steps, although the government continued to commit widespread and well-documented human rights abuses. Positive developments included the release of a few political prisoners, continued legal reform and a somewhat greater tolerance of dissent. The abuses stem from the government's continuing aversion to dissent, fear of unrest and inadequate legal protection of basic freedoms. Large numbers of people remain detained for the peaceful expression of their political and religious views.

In Burma, the military government changed its name, but not its policies. It continued to repress the democratic opposition led by Aung San Sui Kyi, and security forces committed

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serious human rights abuses, including extra-judicial killings and rape. In Nigeria, there has been little meaningful progress on the promised transition to democratic rule, and major human rights abuses continue.

In Syria, there was little movement toward opening up an autocratic system. In Cuba, despite the welcome visit by the Pope, extensive repression continues. In Iraq, as the deputy secretary has indicated, the government forced the displacement of tens of thousands of Kurds, Shi'a, and other minorities, and there were credible reports of mass extra-judicial killings.

In Libya, an entrenched dictatorship denied the basic rights of the people. In Iran, serious human rights abuses persisted, although its new president has pledged support for the rule of law and increased personal freedoms. In Saudi Arabia, restrictions on freedoms, including the denial of basic rights to women and the denial of freedom of religion, continued.

Let's look at a second group of countries, countries in conflict. Ethnic and religious conflict remain the most intractable and dangerous problems in the world today. Cynical leaders can fan the flames of religious or ethnic difference to create a cycle of repression, retribution, and abuse. Even where military or paramilitary forces are the chief protagonists in violent conflicts, it is innocent civilians who pay the heaviest price.

In Algeria, alarming brutality, including massacres, systematic rape, and other sexual violence against women continues. In light of the differing accounts about the origin of these abuses, the need for a credible international fact-finding mission is clear. In the Great Lakes countries of Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi, ethnic killings and other fundamental abuses of human rights continued with impunity and on a wide scale. In Sudan, severe problems of religious persecution and slavery persist.

In Afghanistan, the repressive Taliban controls the majority of the territory, while the country remains in a state of near anarchy. The Taliban continues its policy of blatant abuse and discrimination against women, a record that Secretary Albright has described as despicable. In Colombia, security forces, paramilitaries and guerrillas committed extra-judicial killings, almost always with impunity. Paramilitaries, at times with the collaboration or acquiescence of the military, were responsible for massacres of unarmed civilians.

Finally, let me review a third group of countries, what we call countries in transition, many of which present a mixed picture, with competing internal trends toward progress and backsliding. First, looking at those in which progress has occurred, in Romania and Bulgaria, despite significant remaining obstacles, we have seen the consolidation of democratic reforms. In Albania, as I said earlier, a dramatic turnaround occurred when the international community, led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, coordinated an effective response to the threat of chaos and helped to put the country back on a democratic track.

Liberia held free and transparent presidential and parliamentary elections, ending more than seven years of civil war in that country.

In Guatemala, the peace accords signed in December 1996 have formed the basis of efforts at national reconciliation, and have led to a decline in abuses by the security forces. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which held hearings throughout the year seemed to be having a healing effect on that nation's troubled past. The government plans to set up a fund to compensate victims of apartheid-era violence.

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In Haiti, despite the serious setbacks of the past year, the government continues to seek resolution of political conflicts within a non-violent constitutional framework, and human rights abuses have been sharply curtailed since 1994.

In Bangladesh, there has been significant progress towards eliminating child labor in the garment exporting industry. In Egypt, there were numerous human rights abuses, although the record improved somewhat compared to recent years. In Indonesia, restrictions continued on freedom of association and worker rights, and on allowing the people a real voice in the choice of their leaders. There was little progress on international efforts to find a solution to the problem of East Timor, and security forces continued extra-judicial killings, disappearances and torture.

In Vietnam, despite modest improvements, the human rights record continued to be poor, with significant restrictions on freedom of speech, association and religion. In Serbia, repression continues unabated, particularly in the Kosovo region where the 90 percent ethnic Albanian population is denied basic human rights and Serbian police have used excessive force against peaceful demonstrations.

In Turkey, widespread human rights abuses continued, although the new Yilmaz government publicly committed itself to significant reforms to expand freedom of expression and address the problem of torture. In India, we continue to be concerned about abuses by government forces fighting separatist insurgencies; but we acknowledge the effective work of the National Human Rights Commission.

In Russia, the government enacted a restrictive and potential discriminatory law on religion, which has raised questions about Russia's commitment to international agreements honoring freedom of religion. However, high-ranking Russian officials have consistently stated that the law would be applied in a liberal, tolerant manner, thereby preserving religious freedom.

In Cambodia, the democratic process begun under UN auspices through the 1993 elections was derailed by violent conflict last July. No one has been held accountable for the extra-judicial killings, and limitations on a free press and the right to a fair trial continue.

In Belarus, there was a continued drift toward presidential dictatorship and suppression of personal freedoms of speech and assembly. In Croatia, although we welcomed increased cooperation with the War Crimes Tribunal, the government used domination of the media and control of the judiciary and electoral process to harass and sideline the democratic opposition.

In Mexico, there were positive political developments, including free and fair elections in July. However, continuing violence in Chiapas—notably the December massacre of 45 indigenous people—cast a shadow over the human rights situation. Finally, in Pakistan, Christians and Ahmadis continue to be persecuted by Islamic extremists; although we were encouraged by the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif speaking out on behalf of religious minorities.

So that is a tour of the world from the human rights and democracy perspective. And now I'd be happy to take your questions.

**QUESTION:** There's no balance in the report on Panama. Since we have such an intricate and intense relationship with that country, and are in the midst of negotiations on the multilateral drug center, I would like to ask you, there are three issues here. One is the Gonzalez trial—you're familiar with it—the trial of the man who was accused of killing an American soldier, Zak Hernandez; and that is denounced. Then there is the Gorriti case, which is also criticized. Now, Gorriti right now is facing a criminal trial. And then there is a reference to the Supreme

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Court Justice Hoyos, who it says here has declined to prosecute four judges accused of corruption. Now, two days ago, President Clinton sent Hoyos a congratulatory message on the opening of a new center on Supreme Court justices in Panama. Isn't there a contradiction? I mean, could you give us a balance of the situation in Panama, please?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** I'm going to—as I will with almost any detailed question about the report—let the report speak for itself. I think these reports are carefully and thoroughly prepared, and I'd be happy to provide you with more information. But in view of the limited time here, I prefer to focus on the broader questions, not specific, relating to the report itself.

**QUESTION:** But you did give a balance on several countries where you measured pluses and minuses.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Well, I think the report on Panama, I would argue, is also balanced.

**QUESTION:** One of the areas that attracts the most media interest is the situation in the territories, both Israeli-controlled and under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. I wonder if you could review that for us?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Well, again, I think the reports do speak for themselves. I think the efforts to cover both Israel and the territories were very detailed, and a great deal of information is contained within those reports. I think you'll find evidence of human rights abuses in both Israel and the territories, and I think the reports are extensively documenting that.

**QUESTION:** John, I'd like to ask you about the language on China, especially when compared with last year's. The language on China is quite forthcoming, almost generous, when it says that ordinary citizens have more freedom than ever before. I don't want to raise questions of politicization of the report, but I wonder if the language on China is calibrated—if there's a political input into the language on China, in the sense that we have had and continued to pursue a more cooperative or cordial relationship with China over the past year. Does this reflect that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Well, I think the positive developments that I've noted I think are a reflection of, to a certain extent, the success of the policy. But the positive developments are facts, and they must be put in the context of the broader situation in China, which remains, as we have said in the reports, one where there is a very wide-scale and continuing violation of human rights and, in many cases, a climate of extreme difficulty in the area of freedoms of speech, freedom of religion.

There have been some positive developments, and these reports are always intended to reflect and encourage further positive developments when they actually occur, but they need to be put in the context of the broader picture that is painted in those countries. There has been no major change in China over the last year, nor would one expect there to have been over the course of a year. The issue of promoting human rights is a long-term one, and major human rights difficulties in China and other countries persist.

When there are positive developments, such as the release of prisoners who have been imprisoned for their political and religious beliefs, or the signing of international treaties, we will note those. And that's what we have done in this report.

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**QUESTION:** My question is regarding the right of the United States to be a kind of judge for human rights abuses in other countries. But in this report, like always, nothing is mentioned about the human rights abuses in the United States. Last year was the execution in the United States, when the rate was high. According to the Vienna Convention, Mexico and other countries appealed for citizens that were executed in the United States. So my question is, when we are going to have in these reports the abuses of human rights in the United States? And also, there is a double standard policy in the United States, in this report in the case of Chile. It says that human -- (inaudible) -- by the military regime is still in investigation. I recall that the United States supported that regime at the beginning to destroy the communist government of Señor Allende.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Well, let me answer your first question, and I'm glad you asked it because it's a question I'm asked every year and I always enjoy answering it. The United States puts great emphasis on its own human rights record. Indeed, in many, many forums it produces information about that—the Civil Rights division of the Department of Justice is constantly producing reports on its activities in enforcing the civil rights laws of the United States.

President Clinton has made a major focus on issues of racial discrimination and racial justice in the most recent year. And a great deal of information is being generated by commissions that he has put together on that. The U.S. Civil Rights Commission is another source of information. The United States two years ago issued a report to the United Nations about its own enforcement of the international covenant on civil and political rights.

We take very seriously our own obligations, and we believe all countries should do so. We also have major difficulties in our own country, and we're very open and transparent about trying to give maximum coverage to those issues involving human rights in the United States.

**QUESTION:** You have named here only 20 countries out of 194 countries, including India and Pakistan it also includes in this report. Are you saying that these are the worst countries on this Earth as far as human rights are concerned, out of 194? I mean, why only 20? And this time you have India and Pakistan also.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** These countries, I think, are of great interest and they reflect, as I said in introducing the reports, a very mixed picture. I've painted a picture of progress, sometimes simultaneously in countries, progress and problems. That's certainly the case in India.

These countries are examples of what you will find in the report. Frankly, they are the countries about which I am most frequently asked. So we try to bring information about those countries up to a much more public posture in answering these questions.

**QUESTION:** Just a matter of historical interest, going back to last year, for example, did any countries protest the assessment in this report? And what do you do when you do get complaints like that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** There are constant dialogues between the United States and other countries on human rights, over issues in the human rights reports. And in fact, it is in many ways one of the most constructive vehicles for having the discussions that we think are quite appropriate for all countries to have with each other. It is the responsibility of all countries to uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And when we can get as specific and concrete as we can by reviewing issues in these reports, the dialogues can be all the more effective. They are true dialogues, because certainly there are issues that can be raised about the United States in dialogue with other countries.

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**QUESTION:** Just to follow up, do you modify the subsequent reports on the basis of this dialogue?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** These reports are based entirely and exclusively on facts. The facts are very carefully checked. They come from multiple sources. The information is presented by our embassies, certainly, coming into the State Department; but then other sources within countries—non-governmental organizations, the government itself. But no information will be included if it cannot be verified through other sources or if it isn't qualified by indicating that it is only reported. So we don't make changes based on particular entreaties from another government, unless there's factual information that warrants a change.

**QUESTION:** You said that the reports speak for themselves. However, not being American, I think I would appreciate a little bit of guidance. Page seven on the report on Germany, it says that Scientologists continue to report discrimination. But you don't seem to take a stand yourself. So what is the view of the State Department? Are Scientologists discriminated against in Germany, yes or no?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** We have significant information from a number of sources that indicate problems of discrimination. We've had good discussions with the German Government about this, and certainly the overall record of the German Government on human rights is very strong.

But our concern is having individuals judged, based exclusively on their membership and not on any particular acts that they may have engaged in. Certainly, that is a serious problem of freedom of association, and that's the way it's treated in this report.

**QUESTION:** The first one, could you please characterize the human rights situation in Lebanon? And the second question is I was looking at the Iraqi report, and it mentions the economic sanctions in passing, and the result, you said in the report, that the economy has been stagnant. Could you please tell us whether the sanctions, international sanctions, abuse the human rights of the Iraqi people?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** The Lebanon report, again, will—when I say speak for itself, I mean the facts and information is in there that you can see. I think, as we've noted in previous years and again this year, there are serious problems of human rights in Lebanon, and they are documented in the report. The situation is significantly improved from several years ago.

In the case of Iraq, again, I'm going to comment only on the political and civil rights issues that are covered in the report. We have not gathered information in any depth about economic situations.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, the subjects that you're discussing here today are frequently used by Congress in deciding how to conduct its relations with other countries, in terms of assistance, whether it's military, economic. I think you're due to testify this coming week on this report. Do you see anything in this report that you would consider likely to alter relations with any of the countries in here, in either direction—either improving or degrading?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** The reports have to be read over time, and they are one of the ways in which we make our assessments about engaging with other countries. There may well be some particular aspects of these reports—I have highlighted, for example, the Bosnia report. I think the significant progress that has occurred in 1997 in implementing the Dayton peace accords is documented in these human rights reports and clearly sends a

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message of the urgency of continued engagement by the United States and other countries. And that will be a major subject, I'm sure, when I testify on Capitol Hill next week.

**QUESTION:** On China?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Just now you said there is no major change in China over the past year. Well, I'd like to know, what kind of major improvements the United States hopes to see on human rights in China, under the better environment of the bilateral relations? And also, is the United States going to take another initiative at the Geneva human rights convention this year?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** On the subject of China, certainly we have noted some positive developments. And we would like to see, and I'm sure China in its own interest, would like to see more positive developments. Certainly, the signing of the international covenant on civil and political rights, and its ratification so that it is clear, as one of the principle international documents in the area of human rights, that it would apply fully to China. The release of additional prisoners, indeed, all prisoners who have been imprisoned for their political and religious beliefs, and a greater opportunity for Chinese citizens to exercise their freedom of religion without interference by government—there has been some progress in those areas, but certainly additional progress is called for. And there are plenty of other examples as well. We welcome China's engagement with the international community on legal reform. One of the major products of the summit of President Clinton and President Jiang was an agreement to work to develop legal institutions and the rule of law, which can lead to more predictability and protections for the right of citizens and ordinary Chinese. As to the question on the resolution that the UN Human Rights Commission, our concern throughout is the improvement in human rights in China. I've noted that there have been some positive steps. We hope to see further progress, and we are about to begin consultations with other members of the commission about a resolution on China, again, this year. And our position will depend on human rights developments in China.

**QUESTION:** Is there a time frame for that?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Well, as you know, the commission begins to meet in early March and goes through the end of April. So that's the significant time frame.

**QUESTION:** As you know, last year some passages caused quite a great deal of irritation among German Government officials. And the German Foreign Minister brought it up in his talks with Madeleine Albright. Are you saying that this has had no effect on the phrasing and the toning of this year's report? No toning down whatsoever?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Let me say that we have a very high regard for Germany's record on human rights. That's documented and clearly stated in the report, and that was a major topic of the discussion that Secretary Albright had with Foreign Minister Kinkel. We want to make it clear that the issue over which we may disagree on issues of freedom of association should not be a problem in our bilateral relationship.

For us the central issue is freedom of association. We believe that individuals should be treated on the basis of their acts, and not on the basis of mere membership in certain groups. And we've maintained a dialogue with many elements of the German Government, as well as with other interested parties in Germany. That is, I think, a very clear statement of where we are in this. We certainly will report all accurate information relating to human rights that we know of in any report.

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**QUESTION:** Can I go back to Latin America? You keep accusing in this report President Samper of receiving illicit drug money in the past and using it to influence, to censor the press in Colombia. Why is that so important this year—the case of Colombia?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Why is it important this year?

**QUESTION:** Why is it so important, yes, the censoring of the press?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Well, the censorship of the press is a basic problem of human rights. When press censorship occurs, the public is denied freedom of expression and freedom of the press, which are at the heart of any democracy. Certainly any country where that issue emerges will be covered in our human rights report.

**QUESTION:** Regarding Sudan, there have been some questions raised by individuals in this country concerning the credibility of reports of slavery. What is your perspective on that? And how is the US embargo against Sudan impacting on human rights there?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Sudan has one of the worst human rights records, certainly, in Africa. Credible reports of continued slavery and serious problems for religious organizations in Sudan, particularly Christians, were at the heart of this year's human rights report. My own deputy was dispatched to Sudan—Gare Smith—on a mission two months, three months ago. The United States has made the judgment that the kind of measures that are imposed on Sudan are necessary to send a very clear signal that this kind of activity is not only a violation of human rights, but seriously destabilizing in the region.

**QUESTION:** I've been reading the Colombia report, and I have a question. I don't know if I understand properly what you say here. It seems to me you are saying that Colombia has a deliberate state policy that allows human rights violations.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** The report says what it says. I'm not going to interpret it further here, but it's very clear as to what it says; and there are serious human rights problems in Colombia that are documented a great deal in the report.

**QUESTION:** Could you update us on the state of negotiations between Vietnam and the United States on the release of political prisoners?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** The issue of political prisoners, and particularly people who have tried to exercise their right to religious freedom in Vietnam, as well as political freedom, is at the top of our bilateral agenda on human rights with the government of Vietnam. There have been a number of discussions, including at the level of deputy assistant secretary, specifically on human rights. There is a human rights dialogue that takes place approximately every six to eight months with Vietnam. And there have been a few political prisoners released. This will remain a central focus of our work on Vietnam.

**QUESTION:** On South Asia, Mr. Shattuck, during the late '80s and early '90s, human rights, particularly in India and Sri Lanka, used to be a top priority on the agenda of bilateral relations. Would you say that, on balance, after the setting up of the National Human Rights Commission, both in India and Sri Lanka, on balance, there has been an alleviation of human rights in both these countries? And why are you treating Pakistan sort of with kid gloves, saying that you're quite happy with Nawaz Sharif's statements that everything is hunky-dory?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Well, I think our reports are very clear that we don't treat Pakistan with kid gloves, and there are many issues that are addressed involving significant religious persecution in Pakistan. But as I say, we will also—wherever we find a

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statement that is helpful, we want to highlight that because it is very important to try to encourage those kinds of statements.

On the establishment of national human rights commissions, these are positive developments, but they have to be weighed against other situations involving human rights abuses in the countries in question—Sri Lanka or India, in this case.

**QUESTION:** But what happened? Human rights has sort of disappeared from the agenda of discussions that you have? Does that mean that—you know, human rights used to be a top priority on the agenda a few years ago, but in both countries, human rights has sort of disappeared.

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Well, I don't agree with you. Human rights issues are raised repeatedly at all levels, including by the high-level visits that we've had in both India and Pakistan and other parts of South Asia. It's very much a central part of the agenda.

**QUESTION:** U.S. assistance in the fight against drugs has been pending now for many months because of concerns of the military and some units violating human rights in Colombia. How much longer do you think it's going to take for the US to be satisfied with the requirements that you're asking from the Colombian Government and the military in order to give the assistance? And are you concerned that all this long wait could even affect your purpose of fighting drugs, basically for the good of your nation?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** The United States Congress, working with the Administration, has made very clear that it will not provide assistance to units of the Colombian military that have records of major human rights abuse. And that is well known to the government of Colombia. If such units that do not have records of abuse can be identified, and those that have engaged in major abuses can be taken from the area where the assistance would be given, we would go forward with the assistance. We think it's important.

**QUESTION:** The country reports document a disturbing trend showing an increase in xenophobia, anti-Semitism, as well as discrimination against religious minorities in Germany. What's being done to correct this particular human rights problem?

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHATTUCK:** Well, again, these issues are domestic issues in all of the countries in question, and certainly Germany is well aware of the challenges that it faces in these areas. I think the German Government has generally been very responsive in trying to address any problems of anti-Semitism or other serious difficulties that have emerged from fringe elements inside Germany. I think Germany is addressing those problems.