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# Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2004

By  
The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
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## Introduction

On September 17, 2002, President Bush presented a new *National Security Strategy for the United States* based on the principle that promoting political and economic freedom and respect for human dignity will build a safer and better world. To guide and focus the national effort that had grown out of the war on terrorism, the strategy outlined a series of fundamental tasks which, among others, required our Government to champion aspirations for human rights and build democracy. In his second inaugural address on January 20, 2005, President Bush elaborated on that principle:

The survival of liberty in our land depends on the success of liberty in other lands.  
The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.

The United States and its international partners worked with many countries during 2004 to expand freedom by helping to protect the political rights of their citizens and to advance the rule of law in their societies. In a few cases, where concerns centered on the rights of the people to choose their own governments, dramatic developments focused global attention on their struggles and landmark achievements.

In the past three years since the removal of the Taliban regime, the people of Afghanistan have worked to accomplish the following:

- Diminish terrorism and improve security;
- Bridge traditional ethnic, religious, and tribal divides;
- Craft a new constitution faithful to their values and way of life;
- Extend fundamental rights to women and minorities; and
- Open their society to unprecedented political competition and freedom of expression.

The international community responded to this undertaking by accomplishing the following:

- Helping to register voters across a geographically scattered, largely illiterate population;
- Educating cadres of Afghan election workers and political participants in the conduct of elections and campaigns; and
- Joining with Afghan forces to provide security during pre-election preparations and during the actual voting.

In the presidential election, which took place in October 18, 2004 candidates vied for the votes of the 10 million registered Afghans, more than 40 percent of whom were women. Despite threats and attacks before the vote and serious technical challenges, more than 8 million Afghans including more than 3.2 million women cast ballots to chose their leader in a truly democratic election for the first time, with a majority selecting President Hamid Karzai.

In Ukraine, the presidential election campaign was marred by government pressure on opposition candidates and by widespread violations and fraud during the voting. The Kuchma government engaged in fraud and manipulation during the presidential election in both the first and second round of voting on October 31, 2004 and November 21, 2004. The government censored media outlets and journalists to influence news coverage, which sparked the so-called journalist rebellion among reporters who refused to follow government directives. Eventually, popular demonstrations against the official results of the flawed November 21, 2004 vote

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gradually swelled into an “Orange Revolution,” the campaign color associated with opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko, who was widely believed to have won the election.

Respect for human rights in Ukraine took a decided turn for the better when, on December 3, 2004 the country’s Supreme Court invalidated the runoff election as fraudulent, vindicating the observations of many domestic and international monitors about numerous violations of electoral procedures, harassment of opposition candidates, heavily biased coverage in government controlled media, and widespread voting and counting fraud. In the court-mandated repeat election on December 26, 2004, the people of Ukraine selected their new President. International observers of that vote, won by Yushchenko, noted the improvements in media coverage, increase in transparency of the voting process, decrease in government pressure to support a particular candidate, and fewer disruptions at the polls. The new President expressed a strong commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and observance of human rights.

In Iraq, people faced a series of difficult tasks as they prepared to choose their own leader through democratic elections, while the severity and ubiquity of terrorist attacks expanded the dimensions of the challenges. First, the Iraqi Governing Council achieved consensus on a framework for the transition of sovereignty back to Iraqi authorities under the aegis of the rule of law and clearly defined procedures by which Iraq’s citizens would be able to choose their own authorities and construct their own constitutional order. In March, the approval of the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) achieved these objectives and paved the way for the second step, the transition of sovereignty from the Coalition Provisional Authority to the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) on June 28, 2005.

Working with the assistance of the United Nations (U.N.) and other international advisors, the IIG established the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq, an independent election authority that established procedures for registration of and voting by Iraqis and expatriates in fourteen other countries. On August 15 and 18 2005, the National Conference convened and elected a 100-member Interim National Council. Elections for the Transitional National Assembly, the country’s legislative authority and the first step in the formation of an Iraqi Transitional Government, were scheduled to take place on January 30, 2005. According to the TAL, the transitional government will draft a permanent constitution that is to be ratified by August 2005, and new elections are to be held for a permanent government under that Constitution by December 2005.

We believe events like these elections will increase the prospects for peace, provide a solid grounding for self-government in these countries and help create momentum for the improvement of human rights practices for all people participating in them. Yet progress along this path will not be easy or rapid, at least at first, as the 196 detailed reports in this volume amply demonstrate. In a number of cases, these reports will show that human rights practices may actually have eroded despite the successful completion of internationally accepted elections, as has occurred in some respects with the judiciary and the media since the voting that took place last year in Venezuela.

It was in part the recognition of the complexity and difficulty of the task of promoting human rights that led Congress in 1977 to institutionalize the Department of State’s process of compiling these annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. By providing this compendium of witness to the global human rights experience, we hope that the record of this work in progress will help illuminate both future tasks and the potential for greater cooperation in advancing the aspirations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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## The Year in Review: Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Behind the detail of 196 country reports contained in the pages that follow, the developments and experiences in certain countries stand out due not only to the intensity of the human rights problems but also to our involvement with the victims and their governments during 2004.

The Government of Sudan's human rights record remained extremely poor as it continued to restrict freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, religion and movement. It arrested and harassed those who exercised these rights. At year's end, there were more than 1.5 million Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) in the Sudanese province of Darfur, and another 200,000 civilians had fled into Chad, where the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) coordinated a massive refugee relief effort. Approximately 70,000 people reportedly died as a result of the violence and forced displacement.

Despite the Government's repeated commitments to refrain from further violence in Darfur, the atrocities continued. Government and government-supported militias known as the Jinjaweed routinely attacked civilian villages. Typically, the Jinjaweed, often in concert with regular government forces, conducted attacks under cover of military aerial support. In September 2004, after carefully reviewing a detailed study conducted by independent experts covering the experience of more than 1,100 refugees, the former Secretary of State Colin Powell concluded that genocide had been committed against the people of Darfur, stated the following:

Genocide has been committed in Darfur and that the Government of Sudan and Jinjaweed bear responsibility and that genocide may still be occurring.

Government forces in that region routinely killed, injured, displaced civilians, and destroyed clinics and dwellings intentionally during offensive operations. There were confirmed reports that government-supported militia also intentionally attacked civilians, looted their possessions, and destroyed their villages. At the same time, year-end developments in negotiations related to the North-South conflict provided hope for peace and improvement of human rights practices in other areas of Sudan. By year's end, the Department of State saw significant movement on the preliminary accords between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement Army after twenty-one years of low intensity conflict.

In response to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK), North Korea continued brutal and repressive treatment of its people, the United States Congress enacted the *North Korea Human Rights Act of 2004*. The Act seeks to address the serious human rights situation in North Korea and to promote durable solutions for North Korean refugees, transparency in provision of humanitarian assistance, a free flow of information, and a peaceful reunification on the Korean peninsula.

In Belarus, police abuse and occasional torture of prisoners and detainees continued. The security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained citizens for political reasons; in addition, individuals were sued and sentenced to jail terms for such political crimes as "defamation" of state officials, often interpreted to include criticism of their policies. The Government of Belarus persisted in discounting credible reports regarding the role of government officials in the long-term disappearances of a journalist and well-known opposition political figures and failed to conduct full, transparent investigations into these disappearances. Instead, the Government of Belarus appointed Viktor Sheiman, linked to disappearances by credible evidence in a Council of Europe report, as Head of the Presidential Administration, thus perpetuating a climate of abuse with impunity.

In Burma, the Junta ruled by decree and was not bound by any constitutional provisions providing any fundamental rights. Security forces carried out extrajudicial killings. In addition, disappearances continued, and security forces raped, tortured, beat, and otherwise abused prisoners and detainees. Arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detention were frequent. Security

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forces also regularly infringed on citizens' privacy, forcibly relocated populations, and conscripted child soldiers.

The Government of Iran was responsible for numerous killings during the year, including executions following trials that lacked due process. There were numerous reports that security forces tortured prisoners and detainees. Additionally, there were arbitrary arrests, extended incommunicado detention, poor and overcrowded prisons, lack of access to counsel, punishment by the lash, and violation of personal privacy.

China's cooperation and progress on human rights during 2004 was disappointing. China failed to fulfill many of the commitments it made at the 2002 U.S. and China Human Rights Dialogue. However, at the end of the year, working level discussions on human rights, which had been suspended when the U.S. supported a resolution on China's human rights practices at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), were resumed. During 2004, the government of China continued to arrest and detain activists, such as individuals discussing freely on the internet, defense lawyers advocating on behalf of dissidents and the dispossessed, activists arguing for human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDs) issues, journalists reporting on severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), intellectuals expressing political views, persons attending house churches, and workers protesting for their rights. Abuses continued in Chinese prisons. The government continued its crackdown against the Falun Gong spiritual movement, and tens of thousands of practitioners remained incarcerated in prisons, extrajudicial reeducation-through-labor camps, and psychiatric facilities. The National People's Congress amended the Constitution to include protection of human rights, yet it is unclear to what extent the government plans to implement this amendment.

In Saudi Arabia, there were positive developments in a few areas, including a government-sponsored conference on women's rights and obligations and the formation of the first formal human rights organization permitted in the Kingdom. In October 2004, the government issued an executive by-law entitling some long-term residents to apply for citizenship, and by year's end, voter and candidate registration, albeit only for men, was well advanced for municipal elections scheduled for February 2005.

The record of human rights abuses and violations for Saudi Arabia, however, still far exceeds the advances. There were credible reports of torture and abuse of prisoners by security forces, arbitrary arrests, and incommunicado detentions. The religious police continued to intimidate, abuse, and detain citizens and foreigners. Most trials were closed, and defendants usually appeared before judges without legal counsel. Security forces arrested and detained reformers. The government continued to restrict freedoms of speech and press, assembly, association and movement, and there were reports that the government infringed on individuals' privacy rights. Violence and discrimination against women, violence against children, discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, and strict limitations on worker rights continued.

In contrast to developments in a number of countries that increased direct citizen control over government authorities, in Russia changes in parliamentary election laws and a shift to the appointment, instead of election, of regional governors further strengthened the power of the executive branch. Greater restrictions on the media, a compliant Duma (Parliament), shortcomings in recent national elections, law enforcement corruption, and political pressure on the judiciary also raised concerns about the erosion of government accountability. Racially motivated violence and discrimination increased, despite considerable legislative prohibitions. Authorities failed to investigate actions against minorities while subjecting them to more frequent document checks, targeting them for deportation from urban centers, and fining them in excess of permissible penalties or detaining them more frequently. Government institutions intended to protect human rights were relatively weak.

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The Government of Zimbabwe has conducted a concerted campaign of violence, repression, and intimidation. This campaign has been marked by disregard for human rights, the rule of law, and the welfare of Zimbabwe's citizens. Torture by various methods is used against political opponents and human rights advocates. War veterans, youth brigades, and police officers act with sustained brutality against political enemies. The Mugabe regime has also targeted other institutions of government, including the judiciary and police. Judges have been harassed into submission or resignation, replaced by Mugabe's cronies. The news media have been restricted and suppressed, with offending journalists arrested and beaten. Land seizures continue to be used as a tool for political and social oppression, and opponents of these destructive policies are subject to violent reprisals.

Respect for human rights remained poor in Venezuela during 2004, despite the government victory in an August referendum to recall President Chavez. Opponents charged that the process was fraudulent, but Organization of American States (OAS) and Carter Center observers found that the official results "reflected the will of the electorate." Throughout the year, the government increased its control over the judicial system and its interference in the administration of justice. non-governmental organizations were subject to threats and intimidation by government supporters. In December 2004, the legislature passed laws that erode freedom of the media, freedom of speech, and which in effect make criticism of the government a criminal offense. The U.S. government sanctioned the Venezuelan government for continuing to fall short in efforts to combat trafficking in persons.

Fidel Castro added another year to his record as the longest serving dictator in the world. The government retained its stance of rejection of all democratic processes and continued its harassment and intimidation of pro-democracy activists, dissidents, journalists and other professionals and workers seeking to undertake economic activities not controlled by the state. The majority of the seventy-five dissidents sentenced to long jail terms in 2003 remained incarcerated despite international protests, and the authorities arrested twenty-two additional human rights activists and sentenced them for acts such as "contempt for authority." Addressing abuses in Cuba continued to be a priority for the United States as a member of the U.N. Charter (UNCHR).

During its 2004 session, the UNCHR formally adopted a U.S.-sponsored resolution on Cuba, as well as resolutions on Turkmenistan, North Korea and Belarus for the second year in a row. A resolution on Burma was approved by consensus. With such member countries as Zimbabwe, Cuba, Sudan, and China, which fail to protect their own citizens' rights, the 2004 session of the UNCHR fell short in several respects. The Commission failed to adopt resolutions on the human rights situations in China, Zimbabwe and Chechnya. The United States continued to emphasize the need to improve the functioning of the Commission, especially by supporting the inclusion of more countries with positive human rights records.

The United States believes that democratically elected governments are more likely to respect their citizens' human rights. For this reason, the United States collaborated with other participating countries of the Community of Democracies (CD), a network of democratic countries working together to promote, solidify, and advance democracy throughout the world. In 2004, the U.S. joined other CD countries to help launch the formation of a democracy caucus, a group of like-minded countries that coordinates more closely in the UNCHR and other U.N. settings to advance goals consistent with democratic values. At the UNCHR, the United States, jointly with Peru, Romania and East Timor, introduced and succeeded in having adopted a resolution to enhance the U.N.'s role in promoting democracy. Among the resolution's recommendations is a call for the establishment of a mechanism a "Focal Point" within the Office

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of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, dedicated to helping new and emerging democracies access U.N. resources available to support them.

In addition to its support for the creation of the U.N. democracy caucus, the CD sought to support the development of democratic institutions and values through projects linking democratic countries. It sent a multinational delegation of democracy practitioners to East Timor to share best practices with Timorese officials. Likewise, a group of Iraqi, election-related officials traveled from Iraq to Lithuania to observe and learn about election processes. Unifying democratic voices against violations of basic human rights; the same rights that have been codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that that were reaffirmed in the CD's Warsaw Declaration and Seoul Plan of Action; is an essential way to maintain pressure on governments that deny and violate the rights of their own citizens.

### **Institutional Changes**

In Qatar, the process of constitutional change continued with the Emir's approval of the draft of a new constitution that voters overwhelmingly had approved in 2003. Although the Emir's family will maintain hereditary rule, the new constitution, expected to be enacted in June 2005, contains a number of human rights provisions.

In Pakistan, President Musharraf continued as Chief of the Army Staff, despite his promise to step down by year's end.

In Africa, the Central African Republic (CAR) enacted a new constitution and took a number of other steps to further an announced transition to democracy under President Bozize, who seized power in a March 2003 coup. In Guinea-Bissau, following a military coup in September 2003, the military installed a civilian government. In both cases, the stabilization of post-coup situations has been accompanied by a decline in the number of reported violations of human rights.

Turkey's desire to meet the E.U.'s Copenhagen Criteria to begin the accession process moved the government to pass an important package of reforms, which included the following:

- More liberal penal code;
- A set of constitutional amendments to combat honor killings and torture;
- Expand the freedom of religion, expression, and association; and
- Reduce the role of the military in government.

However, implementation of these reforms lagged. Security forces continued to commit numerous abuses, including torture, beatings, and arbitrary arrest and detention, although observers noted a decrease in such practices and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture reported that local authorities were making efforts to comply with the government's "zero tolerance" policy on torture. Honor killings continued. The government relaxed some restrictions on the use of Kurdish and other languages, but restrictions on free speech and the press remained.

The year witnessed increasing efforts by some governments to fight corruption. Costa Rica was the most ambitious in actually investigating former high-level officials, as it launched separate investigations for misuse of funds, kickbacks, and illegal contracts by three former presidents. In Africa, anti-corruption campaigns focused on pecuniary as well as human rights abuses by officials. Gambian President Jammeh's campaign centered on curbing official corruption to restore international credibility, and the work of the Commission of Inquiry led to the dismissal of a number of top officials and some prosecutions for economic crimes. Kenya created an anti-corruption czar, and the government opened a number of investigations into allegations of extrajudicial killings. In Zambia, a Police Complaints Authority instituted in 2003 to combat police misconduct continued investigations into complaints.

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## Political Rights

Regrettably, with the exception of Georgia and Ukraine, political developments in Eurasia remain a serious concern. Progress continues to be measured largely in terms of civil society development. More and more non-government organizations, opposition parties, and citizens are willing to organize and advocate for government accountability. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, opposition parties are unable to register. At the same time, governments of the regions are drawing the wrong lessons from Ukraine and Georgia and attempt to stifle civil society by harassing democracy non-government organizations through bureaucratic obstacles and specious legal means.

In Georgia, the progress that international observers noted in last January's presidential election set the stage for "the most democratic elections in Georgia's history" in parliamentary voting in March. Other governments in the region have made some limited progress in improving electoral processes by drafting new election codes. New election laws introduced in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are an improvement in some areas, but in all three countries, the laws continue to fall short of international standards. Likewise, elections in 2004 in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan marked limited improvements over previous ones, but domestic and international observers raised questions about voting irregularities, abuse or harassment of opposition candidates, or limitations on equal access to the media.

In Belarus, the government continued to deny citizens the right to change their government through a democratic political process. A seriously flawed referendum on October 17, 2004 removed constitutional term limits on the presidency. In advance of the referendum and the equally flawed parliamentary elections held simultaneously, the government suspended independent newspapers and disqualified many parliamentary candidates. The government used excessive force and in some cases beat and arrested political leaders who peacefully protested electoral fraud and the journalists covering the protests. During the year, the government also shut down a number of major registered non-government organizations that focused on political rights, and state security authorities increasingly harassed those that remained.

In October 2004, Bosnia and Herzegovina held its first self-administered municipal elections since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords. The elections were judged to meet international democratic standards.

A notably high voter turnout in a series of three elections in Indonesia paved the way for the transition in political power there from a defeated incumbent to an elected opposition leader. The process also marked the defeat of military and police candidates who stood for seats in Parliament.

In noteworthy elections in Africa, the incumbent political parties of Ghana and Mozambique gained re-election in processes that were judged generally free and fair. Sierra Leone held its first local government elections in thirty-two years, although there were irregularities in some areas.

In Burundi, concern focused on the delay in holding elections and the progress of the country's transition to democracy. The Transitional government failed to hold the local and national elections that are stipulated by the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, and at the end of the year it also delayed indefinitely a referendum on a draft constitution. The Maoist insurgency and the deadlock among Nepal's political parties also prevented the holding of elections there during the year and helped deepen the country's political crisis.

In Rwanda, greatly circumscribed political rights were further limited when leading human rights organizations were either shut down or effectively dismantled. The action was justified as part of a campaign against "divisionism," according to a government report that accused human rights groups, journalists, teachers, and churches of promoting an "ideology of genocide."

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The Iranian government's respect for the freedom and political participation of its citizens continued to deteriorate. Elections that were widely perceived as neither free nor fair were held for the 290-seat Majlis (Parliament) in February, 2004. The conservative, cleric-dominated Guardian Council excluded virtually all reformist candidates, including 85 incumbent members of parliament. Reasons cited included not showing "demonstrated obedience" to the current system of government. As a result of the seriously-flawed elections, reformers were reduced to a small minority of the parliament. Meanwhile, the conservative backlash against reformist trends and parties continues.

### **Internal and Other Conflicts**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone completed public hearings in which approximately 10,000 citizens participated to air grievances as victims or provide confessions from the civil war. The Commission suggested legal, political and administrative reforms to the government. The government also released numerous children who had fought as child soldiers. By year's end, the U.N. Mission to Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) had handed over responsibility countrywide to the Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the Sierra Leone Police, as UNAMSIL began preparations to withdraw by June 2005 as stipulated by its Security Council mandate.

After being elected in a runoff at the end of 2003, Guatemalan President Oscar Berger "re-launched" the 1996 Peace Accords as a national agenda and symbolically apologized to citizens on behalf of the State for human rights violations committed during that country's protracted civil war. The government also reduced the size of the military, eliminated some major commands and units and reduced the military budget. In August, the military made public a new doctrine, which includes provisions on the importance of protecting human rights.

As a result of negotiations throughout the year, the government of Colombia demobilized approximately 3,000 fighters from the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) in November and December. In addition, hundreds of municipal officials returned to their towns after the government established a permanent police presence in every urban center in the country. As a result, rates for homicides, kidnappings, and other violent crimes decreased.

In Haiti, domestic conflict continued throughout the year. The political impasse, combined with increasing violence between pro- and anti-Aristide factions, culminated on February 29, 2004, when President Aristide submitted his resignation and left the country. Despite the presence of U.N. peacekeeping forces, the constitutionally-established interim government remained weak. In September, pro-Aristide partisans in Port-au-Prince launched a campaign of destabilization and violence known as "Operation Baghdad." This campaign included kidnapping, decapitation and burning of police officers and civilians, indiscriminate shootings, and the destruction and incineration of public and private property. The violence prevented the normal functioning of schools, public markets, the seaport, and the justice system in Port-au-Prince for several weeks.

A series of conflicts continued to trouble South Asia. In Jammu and Kashmir and the northeastern states of India, violence continued, and security forces committed abuses with impunity, killing civilians and not just armed combatants. In Sri Lanka, both the government and the terrorist organization, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam, violated the ceasefire. In Nepal, the disappearance of persons in custody remained a very serious problem, and government security forces continued to have broad authority to arrest and detain individuals suspected of sympathizing with the Maoist insurgents. Security forces also used arbitrary and unlawful lethal force. As the Maoist insurgency continued, rebel militants tortured civilians, while government agents forcibly conscripted children as soldiers and conducted bombings that killed civilians.

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The Great Lakes region of central Africa, which encompasses the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda, has been plagued by civil war, large-scale interethnic violence, and massive human rights abuses associated with them for well over a decade due to the continuing presence of armed groups and militia that move between the countries. These groups compete with one another for strategic and natural resources and inhabit an environment of shifting alliances. Among the most worrisome groups in the eastern Congo are those who took sanctuary in the region after the 1994 Rwandan genocide. This same group continues to oppose the government of Rwanda and launch cross-border campaigns, as well as attack civilians in the DRC and commit numerous other abuses. There are also armed groups in the region who oppose the governments and peace process in Uganda and Burundi.

While prospects for peace in the Great Lakes region are promising, human rights abuses are almost routine. Children are the primary victims and are forcefully recruited, abducted, and turned into soldiers, although some of the governments have made progress in demobilizing child soldiers in their ranks. Some militia groups are predominantly comprised of children. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable, as rape increasingly is used as a weapon of war. The region is a home to approximately five million of the world's twenty-five million internally displaced persons and hosts a number of refugees. The United States is actively pursuing talks between the DRC, Uganda and Rwanda. We continue to monitor the situation in all the countries in the region by focusing attention on the threat posed by armed groups.

In Côte d'Ivoire, an attack on the rebel positions and an air strike on French peacekeeping troops in November broke the tenuous eighteen-month ceasefire between the government and rebels. Despite the embargo and threat of sanctions, the government has threatened to pursue a military solution to the conflict. President Bush determined that Côte d'Ivoire, once one of the United States' largest trading partners in the region through the *Africa Growth and Opportunity Act* (AGOA), was ineligible for AGOA this year due to concerns about the security situation and the general decline in the rule of law that make it a hostile place for foreign investment.

In Russia, the September attack on a school in Beslan in North Osetia and the ongoing disappearances of civilians detained by security forces underscored the extent to which both sides in the expanding conflict in the North Caucasus continue to demonstrate little respect for basic human rights. There were credible reports of serious violations, including politically motivated disappearances and unlawful killings, by both the government and Chechen rebels. Individuals seeking accountability for these abuses also continued to be targeted, and Chechen rebels continued to attack Russian civilians, including a bombing of a Moscow subway.

### **Integrity of the Person**

After years of controversy, the Chilean Supreme Court upheld an appeals court decision to lift the judicial immunity of former President Augusto Pinochet. On December 13, 2004, a prosecuting judge indicted Pinochet for crimes committed as part of "Operation Condor" during the 1970s.

In Central African Republic as the process of transition to civilian rule continued, the government disbanded the Security Investigation Division, a military intelligence unit that was accused of committing numerous human rights abuses, including torture, rape and extortion, during 2003. In December 2003, President Bozize reconvened the permanent military tribunal after an eight-year suspension. The tribunal considered cases on a variety of alleged human rights abuses including extrajudicial killings, rape and armed robbery.

North Korea remains one of the world's most repressive and brutal regimes. An estimated 150,000-200,000 persons are believed to be political prisoners in detention camps in remote areas, and defectors report that many prisoners have died from torture, starvation, disease,

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exposure, or a combination of causes. The regime also subjects citizens to rigid controls over many aspects of their lives.

In Egypt, the *1981 Emergency Law*, extended in February 2003 for an additional three years, restricted many basic rights. The security forces continued to mistreat and torture prisoners, which resulted in at least ten reported deaths in custody at police stations or prisons during the year. Arbitrary arrest and detention and prolonged pretrial detention remained serious problems. Dismal prison conditions persisted.

Widespread use of torture by the government of Syria resulted in at least eight deaths during the year. Arbitrary arrest and detention, prolonged pre-trial detention without trial, fundamentally unfair trials in the security courts, and deteriorating prison conditions all persisted. Throughout the year, the security services conducted mass arrests of Kurds in Hassakeh province, Aleppo, Damascus, and other areas. On March 12, security forces in Qamishli, in the northeastern Hassakeh province, opened fire on a crowd at a soccer match after clashes between Arab and Kurdish fans erupted. In the days of rioting that followed, dozens were killed, as many as 2,000 Kurds were detained, and nearly 300 Kurds remained in custody and were awaiting trial before the State Security Court and Military Court at year's end. The government also continued to withhold information on the welfare and whereabouts of persons who have been held incommunicado for years.

In Uzbekistan, torture was routine in prisons, pretrial facilities, and local police and security service precincts, and members of the security forces responsible for documented abuses were rarely punished. However, the government took some notable steps to address torture and establish police accountability. It created preliminary procedures within some divisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for investigating and disciplining officers for human rights abuses and allowed non-government organizations access to its prisons and to train prison guards in human rights practices. The government also cooperated with international forensic experts to take part in investigations of deaths in custody in which torture had been alleged.

### **Freedom of the Press**

A conservative backlash to democratic demands in Iran extended into a number of areas beyond explicit questions of political rights. For example, the investigation into the 2003 death of a Canadian/Iranian photographer who suffered a brain hemorrhage after sustaining injuries while in an Iranian prison stagnated during 2004. The government also gradually suppressed all independent domestic media outlets and arrested or intimidated their journalists into silence. In 2004 the last forum for free debate, web logs, came under pressure when the government began arresting their creators and forcing them to sign false confessions.

The increase in government pressure and control of media in Russia continued to weaken freedom of expression and independence of the media there, as a trend of increasing control and harassment of the press was noted in a number of Eurasian countries, especially Belarus and some countries in Central Asia. The Russian approach centered on use of controlling ownership of broadcast media to limit access to information on sensitive issues, such as Chechnya. Government pressure also increased self-censorship of journalists.

In Togo, after the government undertook formal political consultations with the E.U., it adopted a new press code with mixed results. It eliminated prison sentences for most journalistic offenses, but maintained them for inciting certain actions, such as ethnic hatred or violation of the law, as well as for publishing under a false name. The law also sets standards of professionalism for journalists and requires independent newspapers to ensure that at least one third of their staff meet the Government's standards.

While Algeria experienced its first contested democratic election in 2004, leading to the reelection of President Bouteflika, the government acted to increase restrictions on the media.

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The use of defamation laws and government harassment of the press significantly increased, leading to the imprisonment of several journalists for terms from two to twenty-four months, closure or suspension of two newspapers, and more self-censorship by the press.

Venezuela's international organizations and domestic journalists charged the government with encouraging a climate of hostility toward the media. Administrative acts, combined with a new law passed in December, created a climate of hostility toward the independent media with increasing threats of prosecution.

### **Freedom of Religion**

These issues are discussed in depth in the *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*, released in September 2004, while these Country Reports further highlight and update important developments. The *International Religious Freedom Act* requires that those countries that engage in particularly severe violations of religious freedom be designated as Countries of Particular Concern (CPC). In September 2004, the Secretary of State re-designated Burma, China, Iran, North Korea, and Sudan as CPCs, and designated for the first time Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, and Vietnam.

With the cessation of government-sponsored violations of religious freedom under Saddam Hussein, the Secretary acted to remove Iraq's CPC designation in June 2004. Since the liberation of Iraq by coalition forces, there have been no governmental impediments to religious freedom, and the Iraqi Transitional Administrative Law provides for "freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice."

The government of Saudi Arabia's actions in the area of religious freedom were disappointing. Throughout 2004, senior U.S. officials engaged Saudi authorities in an intense discussion of religious practices, and in September, the Secretary of State designated Saudi Arabia as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the *International Religious Freedom Act* for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The government rigidly mandates religious conformity. Non-Wahabi Sunni Muslims, as well as Shia and Sufi Muslims, face discrimination and sometimes severe restrictions on the practice of their faith. A number of leaders from these traditions have been arrested and imprisoned. The government prohibits public non-Muslim religious activities. Non-Muslim worshippers risk arrest, imprisonment, torture, or deportation for engaging in religious activities that attract official attention. There were frequent instances in which mosque preachers, whose salaries are paid by the government, used violent language against non-Sunni Muslims and other religions in their sermons.

Vietnam continued to restrict freedom of religion and the operation of religious organizations other than those approved by the State. The government failed to issue a nationwide decree banning forced renunciations of faith, did not end the physical abuse of religious believers, continued to hold a significant number of religious prisoners, and although it permitted the re-opening of some churches closed in the Central Highlands in 2001, it refused to allow the re-opening and registration of hundreds of others. However, following CPC designation, some improvements in religious freedom were evident. Some religious leaders expressed cautious optimism about a new Ordinance on Religion that the government released in November, and in December, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN) held its first National Congress in twenty years and named a new, independent leadership board.

Among the gains in freedom of religion covered by the Country Reports, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Armenia succeeded in October to register with the government after they had experienced a string of rejected applications. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a new state-level law on religious freedom passed both houses of the legislature. The law provides comprehensive rights to religious communities and confers a legal status upon them they had not held previously. And in Georgia, there were fewer reports of violence against minority religious groups this year.

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## Treatment of Minorities, Women and Children

On December 30, the Department of State completed its *Report on Global Anti-Semitism*, July 1, 2003-December 15, 2004. Drawing extensively on material from our embassies, non-government organizations and accounts submitted for these Country Reports, this separate compendium was prepared in accordance with a separate legislative provision.

The Czech and Slovak Republics, discrimination against Roma persisted, although both governments made efforts to improve the situation through such measures as revising legal norms and recruiting Roma to serve as community liaisons with the police forces or as health assistants.

In Croatia, the restitution of property to mostly Serb refugees has improved significantly, although local obstruction to the return of minority groups remained a problem. In Kosovo, acts of violence against the minority Kosovo Serb population and other non-Serb minorities took place during a series of riots over two days in March, demonstrating the continued tenuousness of minority rights there.

Thailand, the government's human rights record was marred by abuses committed by security forces against Muslim dissidents in the southern part of the country. On April 28, elements of the police and military killed more than 100 persons while repelling attacks by Muslim separatists in Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat provinces. On October 25, seventy-eight Muslim detainees being transported to an army camp died from asphyxiation after police and military forces stacked them into overcrowded truck beds.

Afghanistan and Iraq, women made unprecedented strides in exercising political rights by voting, holding public office and standing for election as candidates. In education and other areas as well, women made increasing strides in achieving basic rights. In Pakistan, special women's police stations with all female staff have been established in response to complaints of custodial abuse of women. Additionally, while honor killings continued in Pakistan, new legislation stiffened penalties for honor killings and criminal proceedings for the blasphemy laws and Hudood ordinances were changed to reduce abuses.

In a number of countries, one of the most significant problems related to the abuse of women and children is the failure of the state to combat vigorously against conditions that engender the trafficking of women and children.

In Burma, women and girls from villages were trafficked for prostitution at truck stops, fishing villages, border towns, and mining and military camps. Burmese men, women and children are also trafficked to other countries. Government economic mismanagement and forced labor policies worsen the situation.

In the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.), women and girls are used as prostitutes and domestic servants, and young boys are exploited as camel jockeys. A recent documentary on camel jockeys notes the very young age at which abuse often begins, the harsh conditions that may lead to serious injuries or death, and the malnutrition, and physical and sexual abuse by employers. The government has pledged and taken some measures of limited effectiveness against these practices.

State promotion of tourism drives the predatory interests that promote sex tourism and sexual exploitation of underage girls for prostitution in Cuba.

The booming oil sector in Equatorial Guinea contributes to making the country both a transit point and destination for trafficking of women for prostitution.

The estimates of the number of Indians trafficked into forced labor and the sex trade runs into the millions, in addition to thousands of Nepalis and Bangladeshis trafficked to India for sexual servitude. Trafficking in persons in India is a significant problem, and some government officials participated in and facilitated the practice. While India continues to lack a national law

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enforcement response to its trafficking in persons problem, some progress has been noted in individual states and the central government recently expressed a commitment to establishing and implementing a national anti-trafficking policy.

Violence and discrimination towards vulnerable groups continued to be a problem in Tanzania. In August, the semi-autonomous island of Zanzibar outlawed homosexuality and set severe penalties in its autonomous island territory. On mainland Tanzania, four million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), and despite a law partially outlawing the practice, police rarely enforced the law and the average age of the practice appeared to have decreased in an effort to avoid detection.

### **Worker Rights**

In Iraq, the exercise of labor rights remained limited, largely due to violence, unemployment, and maladapted labor organizational structures and laws, although, with international assistance, some progress was underway at year's end. According to the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), workers reported organizing unions in workplaces where they were forbidden under the laws of the former regime and revitalized union structures previously dominated by the Ba'ath party. The International Labor Organization (ILO) provided technical assistance to Iraq throughout the year to help bring its labor laws into line with international labor standards, rebuild the capacity of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, establish emergency employment services, and put in place training and skills development programs.

In April, a Commission of Inquiry appointed under Article 26 of the ILO Constitution visited Belarus to investigate a complaint that the government was systematically violating its obligations under the ILO's fundamental conventions on freedom of association and protection of the right to organize and bargain collectively, both of which it has ratified. The Commission's report, issued in October, concluded that the country's trade union movement was subject to significant government interference. The Commission recommended that the government take all necessary steps to register independent unions, amend laws and decrees restricting freedom of association, protect independent trade unionists from anti-union discrimination, and disseminate the Commission's conclusions and recommendations. It stated that most of these recommendations should be implemented by June 2005 at the latest.

Under the leadership of President Bush the United States has stepped forward with its democratic allies to reaffirm our commitment to human rights and democracy. We rest upon the principle that nations governed by free people will be the cornerstone for the development of a world that is more peaceful for all. The execution of our democratic duty depends on the determination and passion of its promoters. Let the following Country Reports serve as an indicator of the progress made and as a guide for the challenges ahead.