
Remarks on the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2003

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[The following are excerpts of the speech presented to Congress in Washington, D.C., February 25, 2004.]

It is my pleasure to present the State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the Year 2003*. These congressionally mandated reports reflect the deep dedication of the United States to the cause of freedom worldwide. [The complete State Department's Country Report on Human Rights Practices is available at the following web site <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/c1470.htm>.

As President Bush put it in his State of the Union Message in January: "Our aim is a democratic peace, a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman."

A world in which human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected and defended is a world of peace in which tyrants and terrorists cannot thrive. President Bush regards the defense and advancement of human rights as America's special calling, and he has made the promotion of human rights an integral and active part of his foreign policy agenda. That is why the annual *Country Reports* are more than a valuable informational tool, they are a vital policy instrument. *The Country Reports* help us to identify and close gaps between principles and practices, between internationally agreed human rights standards and the actual enjoyment of such rights by a country's citizens. The United States is strongly committed to working with other governments and civil society around the world to expose and end existing human rights violations, and to foster the legal and democratic reforms that can prevent further violations from occurring.

We have done our utmost to ensure that these *Country Reports* are accurate and objective. We trust that they will provide as useful set of a information to other governments as they do for our own government. And we hope that they will further the cause of courageous men and women across the globe who work for human rights and democratic freedoms within their own countries and throughout the international community. The past year saw important strides for human rights and democratic freedoms. I will cite only a few. When last year's *Country Reports* were issued, United States (U.S.) forces and our coalition partners were fighting in Iraq against an outlaw regime which had flouted twelve years of United Nations Security Council resolutions, not least of all resolutions on human rights. Today, Iraq no longer threatens international peace and security. Saddam Hussein's torture chambers have been put out of business. Mass graves no longer await his victims.

And we are working intensively with our coalition partners and the United Nations to help the Iraqi people achieve a united, stable country, and move toward democracy and prosperity under a representative government that respects the rights of all of its citizens. In 2003, an Afghanistan freed from the dual tyranny of the Taliban and the terrorists established a new constitutional order which recognizes fundamental freedoms, including the rights of women and minorities. Now, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, we are working to ensure that respect for fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, and democratic norms are built into international reconstruction efforts and put into practice by the new leaderships.

In 2003, NATO and the European Union prepared to welcome new members who over the past decade have embraced democracy and accepted international human rights standards and mechanisms. Having benefited from over ten years of U.S. democracy support efforts, the people

of Georgia charted a peaceful course to responsive and representative government. Last year, in furtherance of President Bush's United States and Middle East Partnership Initiative, we worked across the region to assist political, economic and social reformers. Those seeking freedom in the Middle East began to receive the same support that we have long provided to citizens of Latin American, Central European, Asian and African countries.

In 2003, the United States Congress passed the President's Millennium Challenge Initiative, a revolutionary initiative, the most substantial international development assistance effort since the Marshall Plan. In the years ahead, the Millennium Challenge effort will act as a powerful spur to improved human rights performance, since funding from that initiative will only go to those developing countries that govern justly, promote economic freedoms, and invest in their people, especially the rights of their people.

Indeed, throughout the globe in 2003, the United States helped to build democratic institutions, promote good governance and strengthen civil societies by supporting the rule of law, independent media, religious liberty and the rights of minorities. We defended the rights and enhanced the political, social and economic standing of women. And we led the international effort against human trafficking. Yet, even a cursory reading of the *Country Reports for 2003* confirms that many too many governments across the globe still violate the most basic rights of their citizens. As President Bush put it in his speech to the National Endowment for Democracy last November:

These regimes cannot hold back freedom forever and, one day, from prison camps and prison cells, and from exile, the leaders of new democracies will arrive . . . and we will stand with oppressed peoples until the day of their freedom finally arrives.