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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

By

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Chairman, Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations

and

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Ranking Minority Member

House of Representatives,
Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Washington, D.C.

Hon. Clement J. Zablocki,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Chairman: As members of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations, we believe that Congress has an important legislative and oversight role to play in human rights issues, bilateral and multilateral, in U.S. foreign policy. This compilation of basic human rights laws and international instruments should greatly assist the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Congress in carrying out this role.

Part I consists of the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, as well as excerpts from current U.S. statutes relating to human rights.

Part II contains the basic international human rights instruments prepared by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and adopted by the United Nations: The Universal Declaration on Human Rights; the International Covenants; and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The key U.N. Charter articles relating to human rights are also included. While it is not possible to include the texts of all international human rights instruments adopted by the United Nations, its Specialized Agencies, and bodies, part III provides the texts of conventions frequently noted in hearings, briefings, and in related matters for ready reference.

Part IV contains regional human rights instruments adopted by the Council of Europe, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Although the United States is neither a member of the Council nor the OAU, the human rights instruments adopted by these organizations demonstrate the

important work in this area that the respective member governments of each organization have contributed.

Part V contains the texts of conventions on war crimes as well as the international humanitarian laws of armed conflict. These impose important obligations on states which have ratified them and are increasingly referred to today in regard to various armed conflicts taking place in the world.

Part VI contains a description of organizations established within the U.S. Government, the United Nations, and regional international organizations that have responsibility for implementing provisions of the various human rights provisions referred to in the text of the international instruments in this compilation. In addition, reference is made to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Red Cross Conferences because of their role in the implementation of the International Humanitarian Laws of Armed Conflict.

The three appendixes provide current information on the status of ratification of the various multilateral human rights instruments -- those adopted by the United Nations and by the International Red Cross Conferences.

We would note that the United States has ratified the U.N. Charter and the four Geneva conventions on international humanitarian law; it has supported the U.N. General Assembly's adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and has signed the Final Act of Security and Cooperation in Europe. The United States has also signed and submitted to the U.S. Senate the Convention on Genocide, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the American (San Jose) Convention, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. However, the U.S. Senate has not yet given its advice and consent.

Ms. Vita Bite of the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division of the Congressional Research Service provided us with reports on U.S. laws that form part I of this compilation and was helpful in making available copies of the African Charter, the European Human Rights Convention, its Protocols and Social Charter as well as the 1977 Protocols. Mr. Andre Surena of the Office of the Legal Advisor, Department of State, provided documentation on the status of the ratification of multilateral (U.N.) human rights instruments. Margaret E. Galey, staff consultant to the Committee on Foreign Affairs; Robert Michael Finley, staff director of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organization; and Cynthia D. Sprunger, minority staff consultant to the committee, all played important parts in designing, organizing, and carrying out this project.

[Editor's Note: The Human Rights Documents contents list is provided here for a more comprehensive view of the document. Readers who want to obtain a copy of the full document can write to the Superintendent of Documents.]

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