

# 1986 Human Rights Report

[The Department of State publication, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1986*, was released in February, 1987. The following is an extract from the Introduction to that publication.]

As we again survey human rights conditions in the world, we are once more struck by the close correlation between the existence of a democratic form of government and respect for the integrity of the person. In 1986 we are pleased to note the further consolidation of democratic rule throughout Latin America as Guatemala elected a new government and the Haitian dictatorship came to an end. Only a small handful of countries in the Western Hemisphere remain under dictatorial rule and practice the human rights deprivation with which dictatorships are associated. This spectacular shift to democracy throughout Latin America during the last five years is indeed most gratifying to all those committed to the cause of human rights.

We are pleased also with the return of the Philippines to the democratic fold and the renewed respect for the rights of the individual in that country. Some progress has also been registered in a few other states, but at the same time we have witnessed serious regression in South Africa and the continuation of bleak and stultifying dictatorial rule in a great many other countries. The details are set forth herein.

## DEFINITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights, as defined in Section 116(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act, include freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; prolonged detention without charges, disappearance due to abduction or clandestine detention, and other flagrant denial of the rights to life, liberty, and the security of person. Internationally recognized worker rights, as defined in Section 502(a) of the Trade Act, include (A) the right of association; (B) the right to organize and bargain collectively; (C) prohibition on the use of any form of forced or compulsory labor; (D) a minimum age for the employment of children; and (E) acceptable conditions of work with respect to minimum wages, hours of work, occupational safety and health. (Categories A and B are covered in Section 2.b. of each report, C in Section 1.d., and D and E in a final section, Conditions of Labor.)

In addition to discussing the topics specified in the legislation, our reports, as in previous years, cover other internationally recognized political and civil rights and describe the political system of each country. We have altered our previous discussion of the economic, social, and cultural situations by focusing on the issue of discrimination in these fields.

In applying these internationally recognized standards, we seek to be objective. But the reports unashamedly reflect the U.S. view that the right of self-government is a basic political right, that government is legitimate only when grounded on the consent of the governed, and that government thus grounded should not be used to deny life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Individuals in a society have the inalienable right to be free from government violations of the integrity of the person; to enjoy civil liberties such as freedom of expression, assembly, religion, and movement, without discrimination based on race, ancestry, or sex; and to change their government by peaceful means. The reports also take into account the fact that terrorists and guerrilla groups often kill, torture, or maim citizens or deprive them of their liberties; such violations are no less reprehensible if committed by violent opponents of the government than if committed by the government itself.

We have found that the concept of economic, social, and cultural rights is often confused, sometimes willfully, by repressive governments claiming that in order to promote these "rights" they may deny their citizens the right to integrity of the person as well as political and civil rights. There exists a profound connection between human rights and economic development. Experience demonstrates that it is individual freedom that sets the stage for economic and social development; it is repression that stifles it. Those who try to justify subordinating political and civil rights on the ground that they are concentrating on economic aspirations invariably deliver on neither. That is why we consider it imperative to focus urgent attention on violations of basic political and civil rights, a position given renewed emphasis by the 1984 Congressional Joint Resolution on Torture. If these basic rights are not secured, experience has shown, the goals of economic development are not reached either.

## UNITED STATES HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY

From this premise, that basic human rights may not be abridged or denied, it follows that our human rights policy is concerned with the limitations on the powers of government that are required to protect the integrity and dignity of the individual. Further, it is in our national interest to promote democratic processes in order to help build a world environment more favorable to respect for human rights and hence more conducive to stability and peace. We have developed, therefore, a dual policy, reactive in the sense that we continue to oppose specific human rights violations wherever they occur, but at the same time active in working over the long term to strengthen democracy.

In much of the world, the United States has a variety of means at its disposal to respond to human right violations. We engage in traditional diplomacy, particularly with friendly governments, where frank diplomatic exchanges are possible and productive. Where we find limited opportunities for the United States to exert significant influence through bilateral relations, we resort to public statements of our concerns, calling attention to countries where respect for human rights is lacking. In a number of instances, we employ a mixture of traditional diplomacy and public affirmation of American interest in the issue.

The United States also employs a variety of means to encourage greater respect for human rights over the long term. Since 1983 the National Endowment for Democracy has been carrying out programs designed to promote democratic practices abroad, involving the two major United States political parties, labor unions, business groups, and many private institutions. Also, through Section 116(e) of the Foreign Assistance Act, funds are disbursed by the Agency for International Development for programs designed to promote civil and political rights abroad. We also seek greater international commitment to the protection of human rights and respect for democracy through our efforts in the United Nations and other international organizations.

Preparation of these annual Country Reports constitutes an important element of our human rights policy. The process, since it involves continuous and well-published attention to human rights, has contributed to the strengthening of an international human rights agenda. Many countries that are strong supporters of human rights are taking steps of their own to engage in human rights reporting and have established offices specifically responsible for international human rights policy. Even among countries without strong human rights records, sensitivity to these reports increasingly takes the form of constructive response, or at least a willingness to engage in a discussion of human rights policy. Experience has thus demonstrated that Congress did indeed act wisely in calling upon the State Department to prepare these Reports.

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