

Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports, May 2008

Preface:

As President Bush has said: “Freedom can be resisted, and freedom can be delayed, but freedom cannot be denied.” As long as men and women in countries around the globe cannot fully exercise their most fundamental freedoms of belief, speech, association and assembly, we who live in liberty must work to defend and advance human rights and other democratic values across the globe.

Pursuant to the Advancing Democratic Values Act of 2007, the Department of State has prepared this report on U.S. efforts to promote democracy and human rights in nondemocratic countries and countries undergoing democratic transitions worldwide. The Act further specifies that we continue our cooperation with nongovernmental groups and individuals to advance human rights and democratic principles. Indeed, partnerships with NGOs—indigenous and international—are essential to the development and success of free societies and play a vital role in ensuring accountable government and democratic change.

Upon consultation with NGOs, and in keeping with the Act’s definition of nondemocratic and democratic transition countries, we have reported on our priority efforts in 106 countries. The specific activities we highlighted in this report—bilateral programs, public diplomacy, multilateral initiatives, cooperation with international and indigenous organizations, and assistance programs—are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive, of the full range of U.S. undertakings in the human rights and democracy fields.

As the report shows, we have concentrated our efforts on practical ways to strengthen the core elements that must be present in countries around the globe if human rights and democratic principles are to be exercised and protected effectively: (1) free and fair electoral processes, with a level playing field to ensure genuine competition; (2) good governance, with representative, transparent, and accountable institutions operating under the rule of law, including independent legislatures and judiciaries; and (3) robust civil

societies, including human rights and democracy defenders, independent media, and labor unions.

Our objective is to expand the circle of democratic, well governed states that enshrine liberty under the rule of law, respect the rights and provide for the needs of their people, and act responsibly in the international system. The United States cannot do this for other countries. Nor should we. It must be their choice and their initiative. We can help, however, and we must help. This is partnership, not paternalism. The partnerships for democratic change that we are forging with governments, NGOs, and courageous men and women across the globe are helping to build a freer, safer world for all.

With these thoughts, we hereby submit the Advancing Freedom and Democracy Report for May 2008.

Acknowledgements:

The Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports were drafted at U.S. missions abroad. They were edited by the editorial staff within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor with input from other Department of State and USAID offices. The editorial staff consisted of: Editor in Chief – Stephen Eisenbraun; Office Directors – Bruce Connuck, Victoria Middleton, and Francisco Palmieri; Senior Editors – Karen Gilbride, Cheryl Harris, Lisa Heller, Jane S. Kim, Gregory Maggio, and Daniel L. Nadel; Editors – Joseph S. Barghout, Kate Berglund, Serban Brebenel, Sarah M. Buckley, Laura Carey, Elise Carlson-Rainer, Ryan J. Casteel, Sharon C. Cooke, Susan Corke, Stuart Crampton, Tamara L. Crouse, Mollie Davis, Douglas B. Dearborn, Cortney Dell, Joanne Faulkner, Saba Ghorri, Karen Gilbride, Patrick Harvey, Lisa Heller, Simone Joseph, Sidney Kwiram, Jessica Lieberman, Kathryn Lurie, John McKane, Gaither Martin, David Mikosz, Steve Moody, Jennie Munoz, Catherine Newling, Michael Orona, Karen Paikin, Peter Sawchyn, Amy Schmisser, Wendy Silverman, Erin Spitzer, Rachel Spring, Julie Turner, Rachel Waldstein, Nicole Wilett, and Isabelle Zsoldis; Contributing Editor – Lynne Davidson; Editorial Assistant – Carol Finerty; Technical Editor – Kimberley Jorgensen; and Technical Assistant - Eunice Johnson.

[How the Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports Are Organized:](#)

The reports are divided into four parts. Part one is a concise statement, similar in content to the first and second paragraphs in the introduction to the Department of State's *Annual Country Reports on Human Rights*, regarding the political and human rights conditions in each country. Part two is a statement of the U.S. government's priorities to promote democratic principles, practices, values, and human rights. It also includes specific actions and activities, to the extent anticipated, to be undertaken and supported by the chief of mission and other U.S. officials. Part three highlights the greater range of the post's ongoing diplomatic, public diplomacy, foreign assistance, and other public actions to address the priorities stated in Part two. Part four is a continuation of a description of post activities as they relate to the promotion of all fundamental human rights and democratic governance not highlighted previously.

Western Hemisphere:

Bolivia:

Part 1

Bolivia is a constitutional, multiparty democracy. In 2006 a Constituent Assembly of elected delegates began drafting a new constitution. An inability to reach agreement between the ruling Movement Toward Socialism party and opposition parties led to severe and occasionally deadly clashes between their respective supporters. A national referendum on the draft constitution was planned for 2008. The government generally maintained effective control of the security forces and respected the human rights of its citizens. Human rights problems included: killings and other abuses by security forces; societal violence and vigilantism, including lynchings; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; threats to civil liberties, including the right to a fair and public trial; erosion of press freedom; corruption and lack of government transparency; discrimination based on gender and ethnicity; trafficking in persons; child labor; and brutal working conditions in the mining sector.

Part 2

The U.S. government's human rights and democracy strategy focuses on promoting political and social stability by strengthening democratic institutions through increased transparency and more effective governance. In developing strategy priorities, embassy officials consult with government institutions, NGOs, labor unions, and other organizations, and work closely with these groups to encourage reforms and discuss problems related to human rights and democracy. U.S. priorities include ensuring that government security forces respect human rights; this is accomplished by conducting training and by encouraging cooperation among law enforcement agencies during investigations and prosecutions of alleged human rights violations. U.S. officials work closely with the Organization of American States and other regional partners to promote peaceful and democratic solutions to the country's complex political challenges, including the content of a proposed new constitution, and devolution of authority to departmental governments.

The U.S. government collaborates with the executive, judicial, and legislative branches at the national level, regional and municipal governments, and other key democratic institutions to improve effectiveness, transparency, and access to justice. The United States uses diplomatic engagement, public outreach, foreign assistance programs, and related initiatives to advance strategy objectives.

Part 3

To support democratic political processes, U.S. officials routinely highlight the importance of democracy and human rights during senior-level visits and in discussions with the government, members of civil society, and the press. The United States views civil society and the media as key facilitators of democracy promotion. Responding to journalist and media organization concerns about government antipress rhetoric, the United States regularly organizes workshops and conferences about journalistic ethics and the role of the media in a democracy. These seminars generate substantial debate on practicing responsible and ethical journalism in a difficult political environment. The United States also works with civil society organizations and the media to increase

citizen participation in democratic processes, train future leaders, improve local government, strengthen the judicial system, and promote respect for the rule of law.

A U.S. government-supported, Web-accessible database of Bolivian jurisprudence, which has already received over 28 million site visits, provides the legal community and civil society with a transparent and speedy means to review court decisions. A U.S. government-financed case tracking system enables prosecutors and police to manage more effectively caseloads and attend to citizen complaints. U.S. officials work with a network of more than 100 local NGOs to strengthen civil society advocacy and oversight of the justice system reform process and promote public awareness of citizen rights and responsibilities under the law, and the importance of the justice reform process. The network sponsors public discussions on proposals to harmonize community justice practices with the formal justice system, a key topic of national debate. The U.S. government continues to fund a government tracking system in Cochabamba, La Paz, Santa Cruz, Oruro, and Potosi to increase transparency and public spending efficiency.

To address civil society concerns about improving access to justice, the United States funds several programs that work with the judiciary to improve efficiency and foster cooperation among government institutions. One program with the Ministry of Justice provides legal services for the poor through 10 integrated justice centers in El Alto, La Paz, the coca-growing regions of the Chapare and Yungas, and Santa Cruz. These centers, which have resolved 60,000 cases since 2004, provide citizens with access to mediation and other justice services and establish a positive government presence in areas where respect for rule of law is fragile.

Part 4

The U.S. government focuses considerable attention on empowerment of indigenous communities and women. In six departments, U.S. programs promote dialogue and teach conflict resolution skills to indigenous leaders and other members of civil society regarding transparency, land tenure, democratic leadership, and citizen rights and responsibilities. Three U.S. programs send poor and indigenous university and high school students to colleges in Massachusetts and Arizona to study American society and

democracy. The U.S. government also sponsors awareness-raising seminars regarding the prevalence of violence against women and children, using speakers from the legislature, the public prosecutor, officials from the police family protection brigade, and civil society. Working with the regional caucuses, the United States provides training to all members of the National Congress, with an emphasis on female legislators.

U.S. officials routinely underscore the importance of human rights by raising the issue in U.S. security assistance programs that train the country's police and military personnel on topics such as internationally accepted principles of nonlethal crowd control and criminal investigation. The United States provides technical assistance and financial support to three police trafficking in persons units operating in La Paz, Santa Cruz, and Cochabamba.

Colombia:

Part 1

Colombia is a constitutional, multiparty democracy. In 2006 independent presidential candidate Alvaro Uribe was reelected in elections that were considered generally free and fair. Although the government's respect for human rights continued to improve, serious problems remained. Societal problems and human rights abuses included: unlawful and extrajudicial killings; forced disappearances; insubordinate military collaboration with illegal groups; torture and mistreatment of detainees; overcrowded and dangerous prisons; arbitrary arrest; high number of pretrial detainees, some of whom were held with convicted prisoners; impunity, corruption, and an inefficient judiciary subject to intimidation; harassment and intimidation of journalists and human rights groups; violence against women and children; trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation; societal discrimination against women, indigenous persons, and minorities; and illegal child labor.

Part 2

The U.S. government's human rights and democracy strategy focuses on strengthening democratic processes and institutions, supporting civil society organizations, providing

short-term emergency humanitarian assistance, increasing access to justice, training security forces in human rights, and protecting vulnerable populations. The United States is working to strengthen the government's implementation of political reforms that increase democratic inclusion and competition among political parties.

U.S. assistance strengthens Colombia's ability to enforce its laws effectively and to broaden access to justice. Through assistance focusing on improving security, protecting human rights, and combating narcotics trafficking, the United States is helping to strengthen respect for rule of law, improve the country's ability to protect human rights, and extend democratic governance to recently stabilized conflict areas.

Part 3

To promote democracy through political reform, U.S. technical assistance to political parties is playing a key role in modernizing internal party structures, improving accountability and transparency of party activities, and contributing to more representative political parties. U.S. government programs promote respect for the rule of law and transparency in the criminal justice system. These programs have focused on designing and beginning the new oral accusatory system, implementing the 2004 criminal procedure code, strengthening court administration, and improving access to justice for vulnerable communities. Through U.S. assistance to the new accusatory justice system, cases are now moving forward from arrest to verdict in months instead of years and conviction rates have risen from less than 3 percent to more than 60 percent.

To address ongoing challenges regarding human rights abuses, the United States funds the Early Warning System, which is operated by the Office of the National Ombudsman. Funding also supports authorized regional Early Warning offices that alert state institutions to situations that could lead to serious human rights abuses. The system issues risk assessments and alerts that prevent or mitigate human rights abuses by providing local civilian and military authorities with recommendations for preventive actions. Through logistical support to human rights units in eight regional police offices, U.S. assistance has strengthened the National Police's awareness and ability to respect human rights. With U.S. funding and support, the Ministry of Interior and Justice Protection

Program has protected 9,444 at-risk persons; provided armored walls and secure doorways for the offices of NGOs and unions; and trained trade unionists, journalists, political candidates, and other vulnerable groups on preventive security measures. U.S. funding has helped 10 at-risk communities undertake contingency planning, trained local officials and communities in prevention and protection strategies, and provided psychosocial assistance.

To facilitate the reintegration of demobilized members of paramilitary and guerilla groups, the United States provides technical assistance to monitor demobilization proceedings, the activities of the demobilized, economic reintegration programs-- including 31 reference and opportunity centers--and institutional strengthening of the government's reincorporation program. The U.S. government is providing technical assistance to the government's Center of Coordination for Integrated Action to extend state presence and democratic security in underserved areas and improve government responsiveness and accountability to citizen needs. The U.S. government works to help improve the government's ability to respond to the needs of displaced persons, and has been providing funding to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Part 4

The United States is strengthening civil society's role in promoting human rights in a number of areas, including through awarding more than 30 grants to NGOs for legal advocacy, human rights monitoring, institutional strengthening, and combating impunity. U.S. assistance has also supported a civil society network of 10 NGOs that provides legal and psychological assistance to approximately 3,000 victims of human rights abuses.

U.S. funding has been supporting civil society organizations that promote and protect the rights of Afro-Colombians. U.S. technical support to the Ministry of the Interior and Justice's Afro-Colombian Office and the Afro-Colombian Congressional Caucus strengthens efforts to respond to the threats and challenges facing Afro-Colombian communities. The United States also funds the Martin Luther King Fellowship program to provide English-language scholarships, educational advice, and leadership training to Afro-Colombian university undergraduates.

To address the serious concerns over trafficking in persons, the United States supports public information programs against trafficking and works with the International Organization for Migration and local NGOs to improve call centers for victim assistance and prevention, and support public awareness campaigns.

Cuba:

Part 1

Cuba is a totalitarian state led by a president, General Raul Castro. In 2008 National Assembly elections that were neither free nor fair, the Communist Party won 98 percent of the vote. President Raul Castro was granted provisional control by his brother, Fidel Castro, in a proclamation issued in July 2006 after the latter underwent medical treatment. In February 2008 the National Assembly appointed Raul Castro president of the Council of State. The government systematically denied citizens freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and other basic human rights. The numerous human rights violations included: arbitrary detention and imprisonment; beatings of prodemocracy activists by police and state security forces; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions, including denial of medical care; numerous political prisoners; severe restrictions on press and media freedom; and police harassment, especially of youth, Afro-Cubans, and homosexuals.

Part 2

Although the United States does not maintain diplomatic relations with Cuba, it continues a multifaceted effort to support the Cuban people's aspirations for an accountable, transparent government that respects human rights. The U.S. government's strategy for promoting democratic principles and practices and human rights focuses on supporting the country's people to manage social, political, and economic transformation. This process requires public diplomacy efforts to support civil society to create the kind of society desired by the people.

To accomplish these aims, the United States promotes efforts to support independent civil society, particularly through providing information to groups encouraging political

pluralism, the rule of law, and human rights. The strategy uses public actions, through U.S. government statements and media interviews, as well as multilateral initiatives, to raise awareness about the government's abuse of democratic values and human rights. U.S. officials consult regularly with civil society organizations on how to improve the country's poor human rights record.

Part 3

To counter the regime's rigid restrictions on access to information, including its complete control and operation of the media, the U.S. government makes substantial efforts aimed at providing information to enable citizens to make their own informed decisions about their future. The United States operates the largest free, uncensored Internet facilities in the country.

U.S. officials interact regularly with civil society and prodemocracy activists and encourage other governments to do the same. U.S. officials invite prodemocracy advocates to a wide variety of mission functions and receptions, including the Fourth of July reception as well as events commemorating Human Rights day and African American History Month. U.S. officials invite representatives of foreign embassies and international organizations to these functions and encourage these missions to invite Cuban activists to their official events. The mission, in accordance with an October 2007 speech by President Bush, urges foreign embassies to provide Internet access to local civil society. The U.S. government continues to draw to the attention of the large international media presence, the diplomatic community, and the numerous visiting delegations the regime's dismal human rights record and advocates in its discussions with them a transition to a democracy. To raise international awareness about the treatment of political dissidents and other victims of the regime, U.S. officials meet regularly with representatives of various groups suffering human rights abuses, documenting incidents for dissemination to other governments and for inclusion in the annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.

Part 4

The U.S. government also encourages efforts to assist local civil society groups, including faith-based organizations, to hold courses in computer skills, English language education, critical thinking, and other topics. These programs are helping civil society develop essential skills for the successful, peaceful transition of the country to a form of government freely chosen by its people.

Ecuador:

Part 1

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Guatemala:

Part 1

Guatemala is a democratic, multiparty republic. Presidential elections held in 2007 were considered by international observers to be free and fair. Although the government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, serious problems remained, including: widespread societal violence; arbitrary arrest and detention; corruption and substantial inadequacies in the police and judicial sectors; lack of respect for the rule of law; violence and intimidation against human rights defenders and journalists; violence against women; and ineffective enforcement of labor laws. Infiltration of organized crime in many sectors of society and widespread concerns about violence and lack of security undermined citizen confidence in the security, prosecutorial, and judicial sectors and eroded support for democratic institutions.

Part 2

The U.S. strategy for promoting democracy and human rights focuses on strengthening democratic institutions and encouraging transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. The United States aims to enhance the capacity of civil society to serve as a partner in consolidating democracy. This strategy, developed in

consultation with civil society and indigenous community leaders, prioritizes improved governance and support to government, civil society, and private business for strengthening public sector accountability and transparency. The strategy also includes supporting independent media, and fostering a professional military and national civilian police that respect human rights.

To achieve strategy objectives, the United States focuses on programs that encourage decentralization of central government functions and stronger, more effective local government institutions to increase citizen participation in decision making. The United States uses diplomatic engagement, public outreach, foreign assistance programs, and related initiatives to advance strategy objectives.

Part 3

The United States holds regular meetings with congressional representatives, political party leaders, and government officials to advance democratic principles and the rule of law. To strengthen justice sector capacity to consolidate reforms initiated under the peace accords, U.S. programs provide substantial material and technical assistance. These programs have expanded the government's 24-hour criminal court system with the addition of two new courts in high-crime areas near Guatemala City. Using the 24-hour courts model, the United States is supporting Guatemala Supreme Court efforts to restructure the country's criminal courts to improve case management and pretrial oral hearings.

U.S. assistance continues to promote police reform and efforts to fight corruption. Mission officials have been providing technical assistance for developing a police inspector general unit and an office of professional responsibility to combat the high incidence of police corruption. These new units are already facilitating investigations and applying sanctions against officers found guilty of corruption. U.S. programs provide technical assistance for mandatory human rights training for all military personnel. The mission also meets regularly with military authorities to ensure their continued cooperation in lawsuits involving human rights abuses committed during the internal armed conflict.

In a major effort to assist the country in combating impunity, the United States has committed significant political and financial resources to the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). The U.S. Mission is working closely with CICIG's commissioner to ensure that the organization will be able to realize its mandate to assist the police, prosecutor, and other government institutions in investigating and dismantling criminal organizations.

Through targeted foreign assistance, the United States is also furthering efforts to improve relations between civil society and the government in addressing past human rights abuses. The U.S. government supports a working group made up of human rights defenders and government officials to process important lawsuits relating to massacres and other serious human rights abuses committed during the country's internal armed conflict. This program is directed at providing closure to family members of victims and breaking the cycle of impunity and lack of respect for the rule of law. The program also provides capacity-building technical assistance and training to human rights organizations, including those promoting the rights of indigenous peoples, to enhance their ability to be more effective advocates for the rights of their communities.

U.S. support continues to enable a forensic anthropology foundation to conduct exhumations and forensic analyses of victims of massacres and forced disappearances that occurred during the internal armed conflict. Through U.S. assistance in 2007, the foundation undertook 128 exhumations throughout the country. The U.S. embassy also supports the work of the National Reparations Program that provides compensation to civilian victims of the internal armed conflict.

Part 4

U.S. officials meet frequently with journalists, human rights defenders, labor leaders, and indigenous activists to express support and to raise awareness about the important human rights work of these groups. Embassy personnel also regularly urge government officials to investigate threats and attacks against trade unionists and human rights defenders, and to provide additional appropriate protection for these vulnerable groups. The embassy's

advocacy in specific cases has resulted in reinstatement of terminated employees and increased security for labor union leaders.

The U.S. government has active outreach programs to promote the social inclusion and political participation of the country's historically marginalized indigenous communities, which represent 44 percent of the population. The programs aim to raise awareness of indigenous rights and improve access to health care services and education in indigenous areas. The mission and two local nongovernmental organizations have been providing journalism training to 120 reporters from Mayan communities. The embassy also regularly sends persons from indigenous communities to the United States to participate in the International Visitor Leadership Program. The participants enhance their expertise regarding a wide range of topics, including public administration, political decision making, and government accountability.

The United States places a high priority on public diplomacy to advance human rights and democracy. In their ongoing dialogue with senior members of the government, U.S. officials advocate for greater government attention to key democracy and human rights problems, including protection of trafficking victims, domestic violence, and labor exploitation.

The U.S. government regularly reports on and advocates for human rights and worker rights, including addressing threats and other abuses against trade unionists and human rights defenders. Working closely with NGOs and government representatives, U.S. officials monitor U.S.-funded human rights and labor projects, and work with the Ministry of Labor, the private sector, and worker organizations to provide technical assistance and training to strengthen institutional capacity, raise awareness of labor rights, and improve a culture of compliance with labor laws. To address the serious problem of trafficking in persons, U.S. officials meet with government representatives and civil society leaders to improve protective services for trafficking victims, and to strengthen legislative and prosecutorial efforts to combat trafficking.

Haiti:

Part 1

Haiti is a constitutional republic. International observers assessed the 2006 presidential and parliamentary elections as generally free and fair, after which President Rene Preval and the new parliament took office in May of that year. The government did not hold follow-on indirect elections that would have completed the construction of local government institutions and would have created a Permanent Electoral Council. Neither did it hold the expected November 2007 elections. The government reconstituted the existing Provisional Electoral Council in December 2007 with a mandate to schedule new elections to renew one-third of the Senate in 2008. Despite some improvements, the government's human rights record remained poor. Human rights problems included government ineffectiveness in addressing killings and other abuses by gangs and other armed groups; Haitian National Police (HNP) participation in kidnappings; dangerous prison conditions; arbitrary threats and arrests; lack of judicial effectiveness and independence; violence and discrimination against women; child abuse and internal trafficking of children for domestic labor; and ineffective enforcement of trade union rights.

Part 2

The U.S. strategy for advancing freedom and democracy focuses on the following priorities: promoting peace and security; and strengthening democracy, governance, and the rule of law. In developing strategy priorities, the U.S. government consults with government institutions, NGOs, trade unions, and other organizations, and works closely with these groups to encourage reforms and discuss problems related to human rights and democracy. These priorities respond to the challenges the government faces, including corrupt, weak and nontransparent institutions; lack of confidence in the dysfunctional judicial system; and violent and lawless neighborhoods in major population centers.

The embassy seeks to resolve short-term insecurity and instability and foster longer-term government commitment to and participation in sustainable programs to promote

democratic principles, practices, and human rights. These efforts include securing free and fair local and national elections, supporting good governance and justice sector reforms, and fostering the social reintegration of trafficked children. The U.S. uses diplomatic engagement, public outreach, foreign assistance programs, and related initiatives to advance strategy objectives.

Part 3

The United States continues to strengthen democracy and governance through direct technical assistance and support of on-the-ground partners. U.S. technical assistance is helping the government finance procurement of ballots and other voting materials for the upcoming senatorial elections. The United States is also partnering with an elections NGO to provide technical expertise to the Provisional Electoral Council. In the Sud, Sud-Est, and Centre Departments, a U.S. program fosters effective and responsive municipal-level governance by strengthening institutions and facilitating citizen participation.

The U.S. government advances respect for the rule of law by providing logistical assistance for expediting trials and supporting a roving justice of the peace program that enables residents in rural areas to resolve minor conflicts peacefully. The rehabilitated court building in Cite Soleil also promotes the rule of law by housing a citizen complaints office, law clinic, and legal assistance program. U.S. funding to rehabilitate the Cite Soleil court building is enabling residents to pursue peaceful and lawful resolutions of local disputes.

The U.S. government continues to promote peace and security through technical assistance, equipment, and training, including human rights training, of more than 600 new police academy graduates, including 86 women. This U.S. assistance is promoting improvements in the HNP's performance and public image. U.S.-sponsored efforts to promote citizen security also include initiatives for vulnerable groups. In Cite Soleil, a volatile neighborhood on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, the United States sponsors an out-of-school youth program that has helped approximately 350 young persons acquire vocational training. As part of the U.S. embassy's active public diplomacy agenda, mission officials regularly discuss human rights and labor rights priorities with

government officials and NGOs, including holding public dialogues on the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.

Part 4

To address Haiti's challenges to government accountability and transparency, and respect for the rule of law, the U.S. government provides technical training to the Financial Intelligence Unit in the Ministry of Justice, the Bureau of Financial and Economic Affairs in the Judicial Police, the HNP, and the criminal justice system for investigating and prosecuting persons accused of corruption. The United States is also funding the establishment of an anticorruption computerized control system for the Ministry of Economics and Finance.

The trafficking of children for the purpose of domestic servitude as "restaveks" remains a serious problem, with estimates of as many as 300,000 children laboring in this form of exploitation. To support the government's efforts to combat the restavek phenomenon, U.S.-funded programs operated by NGOs are implementing public campaigns to raise awareness about trafficking, provide services to victims, and coordinate efforts for legislative reform. The programs also provide trafficked children with food, medical care, transportation, informal education, and shelter, and are focused on safely returning rescued children to their regions of origin within the country.

Honduras:

Part 1

Honduras is a constitutional democracy. November 2005 national elections were considered by international and domestic observers to be generally free and fair. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces. Human rights problems included: unlawful killings and beatings by members of the police, government agents, vigilantes, street gangs, and former members of the security forces; failure to provide legal due process; politicization, corruption, and institutional weakness of the judiciary; erosion of press freedom; intimidation of human rights defenders; government

restrictions on recognition of NGOs; trafficking in persons; and ineffective labor law enforcement.

Part 2

The U.S. strategy for promoting democracy and human rights is directed at continuing support for democratic political processes and improving human rights conditions, particularly regarding respect for the rule of law and transparency. Priority objectives include supporting free and fair elections in November 2009 and assisting government initiatives for investigating allegations of corruption and electoral fraud. In developing strategy priorities, U.S. officials consult with government institutions, NGOs, labor unions, and other organizations and work closely with these groups to encourage reforms and discuss problems related to human rights and democracy. Strategy objectives also include strengthening the effectiveness of civil society organizations that promote democracy, as well as combating trafficking in persons and child labor. The United States uses diplomatic engagement, public outreach, foreign assistance programs, and related activities to advance strategy objectives.

Part 3

To support the promotion of free and fair November 2009 elections, the United States is actively working with government institutions and civil society organizations. The U.S. government funds the Federation of Honduran NGOs and a coalition of civil society organizations, the Civic Movement for Democracy, to support dialogue and implementation of reforms to the 2004 electoral law, as well as voter education, poll worker training, and domestic election observer programs. U.S. officials coordinate their efforts with other bilateral donors to support institutional strengthening of Honduran government election organs, such as the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

Addressing corruption and institutional weakness are major parts of the embassy's current activities. The United States offers technical and financial resources to public and private organizations, including providing speakers and training to government officials, NGOs and civil society representatives on transparency, rule of law, citizen participation, and

accountability. The U.S. government's Good Governance and Decentralization program strengthens the capacity of local governments to improve accountability to citizen demands. The program fosters citizen engagement and dialogue with government representatives. Its focus on political decentralization will increase government responsiveness to citizen needs, and citizen participation in public decision making. The embassy also supports the Strengthened Rule of Law Program that advocates for the implementation of the new transparency law and civil procedure code to provide greater access to public information and modernize the civil justice system.

As part of the U.S. embassy's active public diplomacy agenda, mission officials regularly discuss human rights and labor rights priorities with government officials and NGOs, including holding public dialogues on the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.

Part 4

U.S. officials provide technical assistance to strengthen the democracy promotion activities of several civil society organizations and coalitions. These NGOs focus on government oversight, including local government accountability, public monitoring of government use of public resources, and legislative reforms. For example, the U.S. government is sponsoring workshops for civil society members, student leaders, and government representatives. These workshops are raising awareness and support for the implementation of a draft NGO law that would establish a legal framework for NGOs consistent with international norms and practices. U.S. officials are helping the government reach Millennium Challenge Corporation compact goals through a remediation plan that promotes transparency and combating corruption. To support compliance with this plan and to further respect for rule of law and good governance generally, the mission provides training to government officials, NGOs, law students, and others on the newly enacted civil procedure code and transparency laws.

To underscore the embassy's strong interest in ensuring respect for human rights within the country's security forces, the U.S. is funding 10 projects, including human rights practices training to military personnel, and working with the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF) to draft a human rights practices training manual for HOAF leadership. In

supporting initiatives to combat the serious problem of trafficking in persons, the United States funds government and NGO capacity building efforts to assist trafficking victims. These include training for approximately 120 justice officers and civil society representatives regarding prevention, identification, assistance, protection of victims, and prosecution of alleged human traffickers.

The U.S. government continues to support a wide range of important labor rights projects. These initiatives address improving the quality and effectiveness of inspections, resolving worker-management conflicts, strengthening labor justice, and providing occupational health and safety training, especially in the agriculture production sector. At the regional level, the United States sponsors training for Honduran Labor Ministry officials on labor law requirements under the Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement. U.S. programs also fund the International Labor Organization's International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor as well as the efforts of other international organizations and civil society groups to combat and gather information about the worst forms of child labor. The U.S. government also advocates directly on behalf of the right of workers to form unions, and through regular discussions with the Ministry of Labor has facilitated the resolution of several controversial labor disputes. A number of these controversies have involved violations of the right of association in the apparel assembly sector. To support efforts that address the gang violence problem in a humane manner, U.S. government-funded regional antigang initiatives include vocational training programs and building partnerships with the private sector to provide job opportunities for former gang members.

Nicaragua:

Part 1

Nicaragua is a constitutional democracy. After winning the 2006 national election with 38 percent of the vote, Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista National Liberation Front was sworn in as president in January 2007. Although international observers judged the election to be generally free and fair, 8 percent of the final results were not made public.

Ongoing human rights problems included: arbitrary application of justice and lack of respect for the rule of law; corruption and politicization of the judiciary, the Supreme Electoral Council, and other government institutions; intimidation of NGOs and journalists; violence against women; trafficking in persons; discrimination against indigenous communities; and violations of trade union rights.

Part 2

The U.S. strategy for advancing freedom and democracy is directed at strengthening the country's democratic institutions through: promoting democratic principles and human rights; supporting good governance, transparency, and respect for the rule of law; defending an independent media; and strengthening civil society. These priorities reflect the needs of NGOs and indigenous communities who share with U.S. officials their growing concerns about restrictions on democratic freedoms and civil rights. In developing these priorities, U.S. officials regularly consult with indigenous leaders, private sector representatives, women's rights activists, and other members of civil society. Based on these groups' inputs, a key strategy priority for the United States is supporting free, fair, transparent, and inclusive municipal elections in November 2008. The United States uses diplomatic engagement, public outreach, foreign assistance programs, and related initiatives to advance strategy objectives.

Part 3

To promote free elections and citizen participation in the 2008 elections, the U.S. government is providing political party technical support and civil society voter registration training. The United States is also funding a dynamic program to assist persons with disabilities to engage more effectively in civic participation and exercise their voting rights. To support the promotion of good governance, U.S. programs are working to help fight corruption, improve the country's legal and regulatory framework, and support a fair and effective judiciary. The U.S. government is providing financial and technical capacity-building assistance to civil society organizations that have formed a coalition to advocate for respect for the rule of law and government accountability. The coalition has reached an agreement with the National Assembly to include civil society's

inputs in the selection of judges for the supreme court. U.S. support for judicial reform also involves training judges to improve oral skills and the drafting of decisions. The United States has also funded 22 conflict resolution centers that employ 500 U.S.-trained facilitators.

The U.S. government uses targeted foreign assistance to provide small grants to community-based projects to promote democratic development. These grants are making substantial advances in supporting civil society democracy objectives, including training 90 Miskito and other indigenous community leaders on public policy and freedom of expression; giving leadership, democratic values, and human rights courses to 150 National Engineering University students; and providing courses on participation, negotiation, political parties, and human rights to 120 women from six rural municipalities.

To support transparency and media freedom, U.S. programs include an ongoing U.S.-funded "Trust for the Americas" journalism capacity-building project and related efforts to assist NGOs that were key players in the development and implementation of the country's first freedom of access to information law, which was passed in 2007. To promote greater awareness and demonstrate the U.S. commitment to a free media, U.S. officials sponsored a six-day Speaker Program in the indigenous-Afro community municipality of Bluefields and five other cities, where a prominent U.S. expert held a dialogue with approximately 100 journalists, media leaders, and academics on the importance of access to information in a free society.

Part 4

Through public diplomacy, the United States engages with a spectrum of prodemocracy civil society actors and government officials. The ambassador regularly delivers speeches, gives media interviews, authors newspaper editorial and opinion articles, and participates in public events to highlight the U.S. commitment to democracy and human rights, and to underscore civil society's indispensable role in a democracy. Using public diplomacy to support indigenous rights, the ambassador has made six visits to the northern and southern Atlantic indigenous autonomous regions to consult with local

leaders regarding human rights and democratic participation needs in light of the devastation wrought by the September 2007 Hurricane Felix. The United States is also using public diplomacy to build capacity for raising awareness and respect for women's rights. U.S. officials have enabled several women's rights advocates, including an attorney from the Criminal Division of the Public Ministry and the director of an NGO that protects child victims of trafficking, to participate in International Visitor Leadership Programs.

U.S. assistance programs to combat trafficking in persons include funding an NGO project to train police officers and other government officials on identifying and protecting trafficking victims and an international organization's campaign to raise awareness about trafficking in remote parts of the country. To promote respect for labor rights, the U.S. government is funding programs to improve the quality of Ministry of Labor inspections, train labor judges and attorneys in labor law jurisprudence and international standards, and establish the first workers' rights information and assistance centers in Central America.

Paraguay:

Part 1

Paraguay is a multiparty, constitutional democracy. Citizens elected Fernando Lugo of the Patriotic Alliance for Change as president in April 2008 in a generally fair and free election. The government generally respected human rights with some notable exceptions, including: killings and arbitrary arrests by the police; corruption, inefficiency, and external interference in the judiciary; lengthy pretrial detention; trafficking in persons; and lack of enforcement of labor laws.

Part 2

The U.S. strategy to promote democracy and human rights focuses on: combating corruption and strengthening democratic institutions and respect for the rule of law, including building the capacity of the government to undertake legislative and judicial

reforms. In developing strategy priorities, U.S. officials consult with government institutions, NGOs, labor unions, and other organizations, and work closely with these groups to encourage reforms and discuss problems related to human rights and democracy. Promoting a free and fair April 2008 presidential election was an immediate priority; the elections were generally free and fair. U.S. government priorities also include supporting efforts to combat trafficking in persons. The United States uses diplomatic engagement, public outreach, foreign assistance programs, and related activities to advance strategy objectives.

Part 3

To support a free and fair presidential election, the U.S. government has provided technical and financial assistance, including support for campaign monitoring and election observation, focusing on party finance reform and transparency. The United States has made financial contributions to cover costs for international and domestic electoral observers. This has included support to an NGO partner and an international organization to deploy separate international observation missions. The United States uses public diplomacy to advance awareness about the importance of elections and other democracy and human rights topics through press conferences with journalists and meetings with local and national political leaders.

U.S. efforts to promote just and democratic governance are also directed at combating corruption, increasing accountability and transparency in local government, and encouraging respect for the rule of law. U.S. programs, actions, and activities to combat impunity include financial assistance and technical support to civil society organizations, the Finance and Customs ministries, the comptroller, local governments, and justice sector institutions. For example, U.S. technical assistance to the attorney general's office has improved coordination and the successful prosecution of corruption cases, including the conviction of several high-ranking public officials. U.S. officials also provide training and advice to the Finance Ministry and the Central Bank to foster transparency and accountability. The U.S. embassy hosts antimoney laundering conferences to encourage a culture of lawfulness and raise public awareness about combating corruption.

U.S. government support for law reform has helped the government approve a new penal code that contains strong provisions for prosecuting money laundering and trafficking in persons. U.S. officials also advise the multiparty congressional committee, tasked with drafting the new criminal procedure code, on pretrial and criminal procedure rules and procedures for enforcing court decisions. U.S. government programs also train judges, prosecutors, and investigators on trial advocacy, evidence, investigation, and interviewing techniques.

Part 4

To identify key constraints on democracy and respect for the rule of law, the embassy manages a high impact technical assistance program that supports two civil society organizations focusing on consolidating the judicial ethics code. Through U.S. assistance, the supreme court has established customer service desks and a telephone hot line to respond to citizen questions about access to justice; many of the callers are women, youth, and persons from indigenous communities seeking assistance regarding domestic violence and discrimination.

The U.S. uses the Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold Program to promote transparency and responsive government by strengthening the investigative capability of the prosecutor and the Finance Ministry. These efforts build the capacity of the judicial disciplinary system and promote accountability and transparency.

U.S. officials work closely with the government and NGOs involved in combating trafficking in persons, assisting the government to raise public awareness of the problem and develop a national database for managing trafficking cases. The U.S. funded the opening of a new women's shelter in Asuncion for trafficking victims, as well as a project to combat trafficking along Paraguay's border with Argentina and Brazil. The project has been holding informational seminars for government officials on methods of combating trafficking and promoting government and civil society collaboration in fighting the problem. In March 2008 the Paraguayan citizen who coordinates the project was given the 2008 U.S. Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award for her efforts to focus public attention on combating trafficking.

Peru:

Part 1

Peru is a multiparty republic. In June 2006 Alan Garcia of the Popular Revolutionary Party Alliance won the presidency in elections that were basically free and fair. The civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces. The following human rights problems were reported: abuse of detainees and inmates by police and prison security forces; harsh prison conditions; lengthy pretrial detention and inordinate trial delays; attacks on the media by local authorities; government corruption; violence and discrimination against women; sexual abuse and other violence against children; trafficking in persons; discrimination against indigenous people and minorities; failure to apply or enforce labor laws; and child labor in the informal sector. The terrorist organization Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) linked to narcotics trafficking was responsible for killings and other human rights abuses.

Part 2

The U.S. government fosters democracy and human rights in Peru by promoting economic transparency, decentralization, judicial reform, and strengthening political parties. The U.S. government encourages human rights by fighting child labor and child sexual exploitation and supporting programs for greater political participation by marginalized groups. The United States assists government efforts to reduce corruption and increase funding for health care and public education based on the country's qualification for the Millennium Challenge Account's Threshold Program in 2007.

To help increase economic transparency and fight corruption in the extractive industries sector, the U.S. government funds a program to bring together government officials, civil society, and private sector representatives to discuss the impact of proposed mining activities in select regions. In developing strategy priorities, U.S. officials consult with government institutions, NGOs, labor unions, and other organizations and work closely with these groups to encourage reforms and discuss problems related to human rights and democracy. The U.S. government uses diplomatic engagement, public outreach, foreign assistance programs, and related activities to advance strategy objectives. The U.S.

government supports training in financial investigation techniques, including money laundering, as part of the implementation of the new judicial criminal codes.

Part 3

To promote political party participation and electoral reform, the U.S. government supports a program that consults with political parties, NGOs, and national and local government officials to review possible amendments to electoral laws. The U.S. government also funds a program to strengthen political parties through improved legal framework, greater outreach to marginalized communities and other constituents, and the creation of stronger, issue-based party platforms.

U.S. programs train approximately 100,000 persons in participation in government decision-making and support democratic decentralization efforts in more than 500 municipalities in the departments of San Martin, Ucayali, Huanuco, Pasco, Junin, Ayacucho, and Cusco.

Part 4

The U.S. government plays an active role in promoting human rights through a variety of initiatives. The U.S. government sponsors outreach and public awareness programs, including International Visitor Leadership Programs, speakers, and public videoconferences with U.S. and Peruvian experts to promote greater public awareness about judicial reform, transparency, fighting corruption, and improving race and gender relations.

Unresolved problems arising out of the country's 1980-2000 internal armed conflict continue to undermine respect for human rights and the rule of law. Many victims of abuses committed during that period remain missing, and alleged perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity. The U.S. government supports two human rights programs, the first of which helps individuals and communities address the mental health needs of those affected by violence. The second program removes thousands of unfounded or erroneous arrest warrants, many more than 20 years old, against persons for terrorism.

Another U.S.-funded project conducts exhumations and uses forensic analysis to identify the remains of victims of past human rights abuses committed during the Fujimori administration and other periods of the internal armed conflict, with the goal of overcoming institutional obstacles to prosecution and combating impunity.

The U.S. government continues to promote efforts to eradicate child labor through working with at-risk and out-of-school children in Lima, Callao, Iquitos, and Cusco. The program reaches more than 3,000 at-risk children and provides out-of-school working children with social services and enrollment in non-formal and/or formal education. It increases capacity among regional and municipal government and civil society organizations to execute incentive programs for poor families to send their children to school.

To address the serious problem of trafficking in persons, the U.S. government continues funding programs that support local NGOs in their advocacy with the government to implement antitrafficking initiatives. These programs include developing a statistical database and police training to track trafficking cases and campaigns to promote new legislative reforms and greater public awareness about trafficking. To foster greater respect for worker rights, U.S. programs fund a project to train labor inspectors regarding enforcing worker rights, labor contracting, and occupational health and safety.

Venezuela:

Part 1

Venezuela is a constitutional democracy. In December 2007 the government held a public referendum on a constitutional reform package in which voters narrowly defeated the proposed changes in a generally free and fair electoral process. The following human rights problems were reported: unlawful killings; disappearances involving security forces; torture and other abuse of detainees; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; corruption, inefficiency and politicization of the judicial system; searches of private homes; official intimidation and attacks on independent media; widespread

corruption at all government levels; violence against women; trafficking in persons; and restrictions on trade union rights.

Part 2

The U.S. government's strategy for promoting democratic principles, practices, and human rights focuses on supporting citizen efforts to strengthen independent civil society, particularly through support to groups working on political pluralism, respect for the rule of law, press freedom, and other human rights. The U.S. government uses public diplomacy, targeted foreign assistance, and cooperation with other governments to advance strategy objectives. These objectives encourage citizen participation, promote human rights, contribute to a free press, and strengthen democratic institutions.

Part 3

Enhancing political pluralism and respect for the rule of law also remain key U.S. strategic objectives. To help strengthen the country's debilitated political parties, U.S. funding supports nonpartisan projects focused on party renewal and internal democratization. These projects, which the U.S. government offers across the political spectrum, provide technical assistance to enhance party responsiveness to members and constituents.

U.S. programs focused on promoting respect for the rule of law and strengthening judicial processes are providing training to local law enforcement institutions to combat organized crime and money laundering. One grant offers training to judges and prosecutors on due process and criminal investigative procedures. U.S. officials attend criminal trials of persons associated with the political opposition to demonstrate U.S. concern regarding the exercise of due process. Also, U.S. experts conduct programs with NGOs on anticorruption strategies. U.S. officials invite opposition leaders and government supporters to U.S. government events in the country to demonstrate U.S. support for democracy, political tolerance, and rejection of judicial intimidation.

Through a combination of laws governing libel and broadcast media content, legal harassment, and physical intimidation, the government limits freedom of speech and

press, creating a climate of self-censorship. Through public diplomacy initiatives, U.S. officials continue to express concerns about government restrictions on freedom of speech and the press. U.S. officials invite media experts to the country to discuss the state of press freedom in Latin America. The United States also hosts conferences to highlight the pivotal role played by a free and independent media in democracies. U.S. programs provide grants to support press freedom seminars for law students, media involvement in human rights reporting, and strengthening the press corps' investigative journalism skills.

Part 4

To address concerns about the government's proposed international cooperation law, the United States works closely with other Western Hemisphere and European partners. If passed, this law would undermine the independence and autonomy of civil society, restrict NGO ability to receive foreign donor support, and give the government greater control over NGOs. The United States provides support for a spectrum of NGOs and other civil society groups, especially those focused on encouraging peaceful debate and conflict resolution. This assistance fosters a culture of democratic participation and tolerance through civic education and by encouraging active citizen engagement in building responsible governance institutions. U.S. programs support strengthening human rights NGOs that are operating in an environment of government pressure and harassment. One program trains human rights organizations and practitioners using strategies successfully employed by human rights defenders in other countries. The program also seeks to increase NGO institutional capacity through exchanges and solidifying links with other human rights groups in the region.

The United States actively works with civil society groups that address labor rights, trafficking in persons, and women's issues. The embassy uses video conferences and exchange visits to raise awareness about human rights issues, such as eliminating violence against women. The United States supports a program to strengthen the ability of labor unions to forge collective bargaining agreements, advocate for worker rights, and educate the public on the importance of worker rights. The United States has supported several NGO efforts to present cases before the Inter-American Commission on Human

Rights. The U.S. government continues to stress to the government the need to do more to combat trafficking in persons.

To foster relationship-building on democracy topics, the United States continues a series of exchanges between young political leaders from the United States and Venezuela. One example is a 12-day study tour in Washington D.C., Mississippi, and Colorado for a delegation of Venezuelan citizens representing a wide range of political views.