

Statement of Senator Daniel K. Akaka

Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia

“A Reliance on Smart Power – Reforming the Public Diplomacy Bureaucracy”

September 23, 2008

Public diplomacy is an essential tool, as it was in the past, in our efforts to win the Global War on Terrorism.

During the Cold War, public diplomacy helped spread our values of freedom and democracy to those who were struggling behind the Iron Curtain. After the Cold War, the need for public diplomacy to some appeared less certain. Political pressure to do away with organizations of the Cold War increased and the United States Information Agency, along with two other agencies, was merged in 1999 into the State Department.

The tragedies of September 11th renewed interest in public diplomacy as a means to convince foreign publics, especially those in Muslim countries, that we were friends and potential partners. An array of commissions urged improvements to our public diplomacy efforts, and President Bush soon formed policy coordinating committees at the National Security Council to better harmonize public diplomacy efforts. At the same time, others called for creating a new public diplomacy agency, dramatically increasing resources, encouraging more exchange programs, engaging in a war of ideas, and communicating across all types of media.

There is now a clear consensus that our public diplomacy is a vital tool in America’s diplomatic arsenal and our use of it must be improved. The recognition of America’s need for more effective public diplomacy extends beyond its borders.

In this recently published report by The Asia Foundation, both Asian and American leaders recommend a new program of cultural, artistic, and intellectual interaction between the civil societies of both the U.S. and Southeast Asia. Southeast Asian representatives called for in particular the creation of new American centers to promote a better understanding of the United States. It is important that it is foreigners who are demanding to better understand the United States.

In today’s hearing, I want to examine more closely the following issues:

- Is our existing public diplomacy strategy accomplishing its objectives;
- How well are agencies coordinating;

- What improvements need to be made to the public diplomacy structure in Washington and in the field;
- What role should the private sector play; and
- What are the State Department's human capital and program gaps in public diplomacy?

I also want to stress my belief that all of our diplomats, especially those who project our image to another nation's public, need to continue to develop a deeper appreciation and understanding of the culture within which they will work.

The U.S. is a country that values democracy and freedom. For the U.S. to continue to recover its international reputation, it not only needs to live up to its values, but also share them in an effective manner with the world. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today.