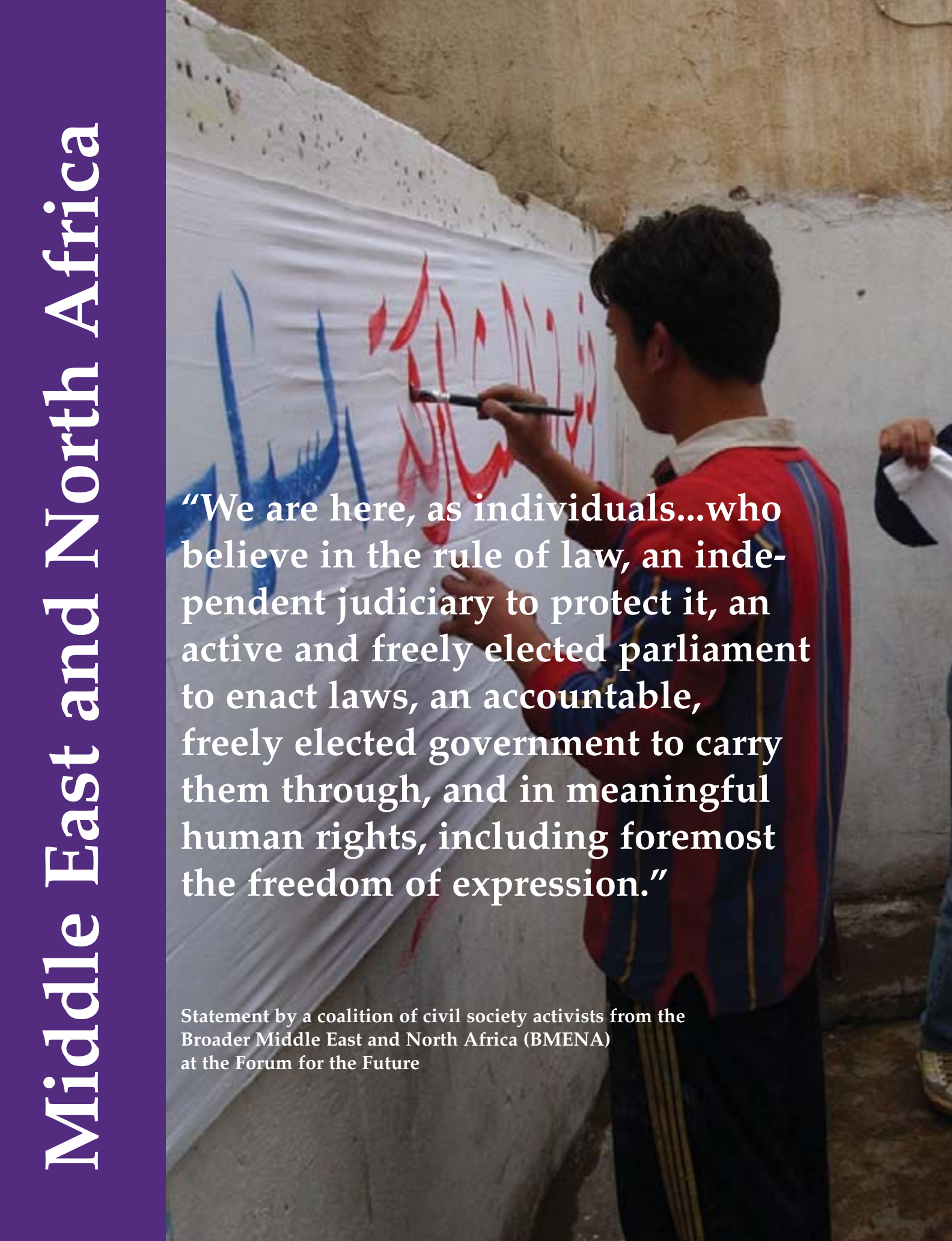


Middle East and North Africa



“We are here, as individuals...who believe in the rule of law, an independent judiciary to protect it, an active and freely elected parliament to enact laws, an accountable, freely elected government to carry them through, and in meaningful human rights, including foremost the freedom of expression.”


Statement by a coalition of civil society activists from the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) at the Forum for the Future



Baghdad, Iraq

Professional banner writers work on election campaign banners.

AP Photo



Events in the Middle East in 2004 vividly demonstrated U.S. commitment to promoting democracy and respect for human rights. In Iraq, people braved intimidation and threats of death for the opportunity to participate in elections to shape their own future. Throughout the region, the United States supported local reform efforts through partnership with regional leaders, reform-minded government officials, civil society activists and representatives of independent media.

Through diplomatic engagement and practical programming, the United States promoted good governance and encouraged broad political participation. United States efforts focused on improving transparency, efficiency and responsiveness in public institutions through enhanced administrative and financial capabilities, the expansion of social services and increased accountability. Collaborating with other diplomatic missions, U.S. officials at all levels pressed government representatives to take proactive approaches to democratization. The United States worked within regional frameworks like the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA) and with multinational and international organizations, including the EU and the UN, to promote democratic reform. The United States and Morocco co-hosted the first Forum for the Future that brought together government ministers, business leaders and civil society representatives from the G-8 and BMENA to discuss democratic, economic and social reform in the region.

Efforts to engage civil society moved forward, but obstacles remained. The United States raised awareness among government officials of the important role for civil society in democracies. Through programs and outreach, including exchanges and scholarships, the United States encouraged grassroots organization and participation in local administration. The United States pushed for repeal of onerous laws and regulations restricting the registration and activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In the Occupied Territories, U.S. programs focused on civil society strengthening with a particular emphasis on women and youth. The United States worked with NGOs in Iraq to implement an extensive civil society program, launching over 30,000 activities to foster civil society involvement in the political process. Despite repeated U.S. requests, the Government of Algeria refused to register Freedom House and other foreign NGOs, and it restricted their activities.

Promoting freedom of expression and press liberties were priorities for the United States. United States programs trained reporters on the role and responsibility of the media in a democracy and helped legislators and government officials understand the value of a free media. Through public diplomacy, the United States increased access to information. While in some cases opportunities for freedom of expression and civic activism improved, criticism of the Government or ruling elites often prompted swift and repressive government action. The use of defamation laws to arrest and detain members of the media and harassment of the media in some countries increased. For example, the Government of Syria arrested political activist Aktham Naisse for allegedly spreading false information and undermining the Government.

The United States supported rule of law and judicial reform efforts across the region, emphasizing greater independence and transparency and supporting development of judicial codes of conduct. Ensuring respect for due process and improving pretrial and trial procedures remained U.S. priorities. Torture, arbitrary arrest, prolonged incommunicado detention, excessive use of force and reliance on restrictive emergency laws remained problems in many countries. The United States supported improved training for security forces with specific human rights components, as well as greater accountability and drafting of new penal codes. The Governments of Algeria and Morocco showed willingness to address abuses of previous regimes, but resisted full investigations and accountability. Protecting women's rights and combating gender-based violence were central themes of U.S. policy.

United States officials met regularly with religious leaders and promoted interfaith dialogue and freedom of religion. The United States facilitated meetings to address the concerns of minority faiths and raised with government officials the concerns of religious communities, including non-Muslims and Muslim minorities in Saudi Arabia and Christians, Jews and Baha'is in Egypt.

To combat trafficking in persons, including the worst forms of child labor, the United States pressed governments to acknowledge the seriousness of the problem and take immediate steps to combat it. The United States encouraged governments to cooperate with local and international NGOs and develop national plans of action. In the first project of its kind in the region, Lebanon's immigration service partnered with NGOs to protect trafficking victims.

Iraq Get Out the Vote Project

In the run-up to the historic January 2005 elections in Iraq, the United States partnered with local and international non-governmental organizations to support national Get Out the Vote (GOTV) efforts, carried out in conjunction with U.S. Public Diplomacy programs. With support from the U.S. Government, the National Endowment for Democracy, National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute worked closely with local grassroots organizations to launch a multi-pronged campaign to increase awareness of the electoral process and encourage public participation in elections in a society where civil society and political activity had long been oppressed. United States Embassy officers met constantly with Iraqi political figures and government officials to encourage the widest possible participation in the elections and the most transparent electoral process possible.

Television, radio and print campaigns described the voting process and stressed the importance of voting. The Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq disseminated information on voter registration, voting procedures and other aspects of the process. The United States funded surveys to better understand voters' knowledge of and interest in the political process to help local organizations tailor their efforts. Local outreach helped civic leaders and political parties engage potential constituents, and millions of posters and leaflets were distributed to neighborhoods all over the country. A new Media Center provided a place to tape GOTV commercials, and al-Sharikiyah TV Station encouraged public participation through daily TV spots.

While many of these efforts targeted the general voting population, some reached out to special groups, particularly women and youth. After decades marginalized under Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraqi women demonstrated a clear commitment to democracy and political activism. The Rafedene Women's Coalition implemented a campaign to promote voter registration and educate and mobilize women voters. The Iraqi Women's Network organized conferences and printed posters, banners and flyers to promote women's participation. The Student for Student Coalition launched a media campaign to energize youth participation in elections and representation in politics. Students Against War held a series of workshops to promote youth voter education and GOTV initiatives. The Basrah Theater Troup staged an innovative production to promote student participation in the southern and mid-Euphrates area.

Through a series of town hall meetings and seminars, the United States supported efforts to reach out to tribal elders and provided critical information on the electoral system, voter registration and the importance of elections. Televised debates between candidates for the Transitional National Assembly brought political issues into the homes of Iraqi voters. The National Union Confederation of Iraqi Tribes organized a national conference for tribal leaders from predominately Sunni areas. The Iraqi Organization for Free Elections promoted voter registration. The Civic Coalition for Free Elections (CCFE), a non-partisan movement of 76 civic organizations from across Iraq, held conferences emphasizing the importance of the political process and denouncing violence that more than 300 religious, tribal and political leaders attended. The CCFE produced and aired 15 television messages, some featuring Sunni and Shi'a clerics. The Arab Gulf Center launched a special campaign to reach rural voters through workshops and political discussion groups.

Algeria

Algeria has emerged from more than a decade of civil strife between proponents and opponents of an Islamic state. Daily violence has declined and the situation in the country has improved since the 1990s when persons regularly disappeared and were brutally killed. The Government's human rights record remained poor overall and worsened in the area of press freedom; however, there were significant improvements in some areas. Arbitrary arrests, prolonged incommunicado detentions, excessive use of force, official impunity and a continuation of the State of Emergency remained problems. The Government continued to restrict freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association and movement during the year. The use of defamation laws and government harassment of the press significantly increased. The Family Code continued to limit women's civil rights, although liberalizing amendments were adopted by the Council of Government and are awaiting adoption by the Council of Ministers and National Assembly.

Over the last year, Algeria made significant improvements in some areas. In April, the President was reelected in a contested election of unprecedented transparency for the country, although the election and the electoral system were not without flaws. The military remained neutral as election reforms passed that, among other things, ended security forces' voting in the barracks, which was rightly thought to have been a major source of election irregularities in the past. There were no reports of extrajudicial killings. Reports of torture declined and the Government passed new legislation prohibiting all forms of torture. Improved police training, including human rights training, significantly increased disciplinary actions and reduced abuses and complaints. A new penal code was adopted and the International Red Cross has given Algeria good marks for improved prison conditions. A new law enacted in Algeria criminalizes sexual harassment.

Algeria did not make much progress on the issue of the "Disappeared." The ad hoc mechanism the



Algiers, Algeria

Volunteers count presidential election ballots at polling station in Algiers.

AP Photo

Government established to investigate the issue and make recommendations does not have sufficient investigatory authority and is not as effective as it could be. However, the Government issued a statement accepting responsibility but not guilt for the actions of government security officials, whether authorized or not. The Council of Ministers also approved, and President Bouteflika strongly and publicly endorsed, significant liberalizing steps to the Family Code, which will be submitted to the Council of Ministers and then to the National Assembly for approval. The Government's treatment of minorities improved greatly with a breakthrough political accord with the Berber Arouch political movement. This accord addresses many long-standing Berber grievances and human rights concerns.

Supporting human rights and democracy was a key objective for the Embassy. Throughout 2004, the Embassy encouraged the Government of Algeria and civil society organizations to make more progress in human rights and democracy issues. The Embassy continued to work with the Government on increasing legislative reforms. Middle East Partnership Initiative funds were awarded to democracy building projects, which began legislative training and electoral capacity building. In addition, IFES completed a week-long visit to Algeria to aid in the electoral process. The Embassy was very outspoken about the need for the Government to decriminalize defamation. The Ambassador repeatedly, both publicly and privately, underscored the importance of freedom of the press in discussions with high government officials and non-governmental leaders. He cautioned that limits on press freedom harm Algeria in terms of its image abroad, its democratic development and its ability to modernize the administration and the functioning of state institutions.

With U.S. funding, the National Democratic Institute sponsored several programs including political party and civil society strengthening. These programs included organized roundtables, workshops and study missions to encourage groups from different sectors to work together on issues of mutual concern and facilitate greater cooperation between political parties and civil society. Other training included staff training and

technical assistance for legislatures in francophone Arab countries and strategy for election support.

The United States continued to encourage improved human rights practices and enforcement throughout Algerian society and governing institutions. Embassy officials increased contacts with Algerian civil society non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and increased funding for human rights projects. The United States funded a grant to an Algerian NGO that will enable leading secular and moderate Muslim activists to have the opportunity to develop strategies for advancing political reform in Algeria.

In an effort to encourage press freedom, the Embassy sponsored training for journalists designed to promote responsible journalism, including conferences on human rights and the media. The United States also sponsored training for ministry spokespeople to promote greater government transparency and press responsibility. The Ambassador raised the issue of press freedom and responsibility with the Algerian Minister of Communication.

The United States aided the Government of Algeria in integrating human rights training into the security forces. One positive outcome of that training is the Code of Conduct recently delivered to security forces, which outlines the punishments for torture and extra-judicial killing. Embassy officials continued to meet with the president of the Ad Hoc Commission on the "Disappeared" to encourage the Commission to work closely with human rights organizations to open a civic discourse on human rights issues. The United States was in regular contact with the Commission to urge public release of the definitive report on the disappeared and the progress toward a general amnesty, a key element of President Bouteflika's policy of national reconciliation. The United States supported the creation of an independent coalition to monitor the ad hoc mechanism and to fund training to build the capacity of human rights groups to investigate, document and advocate on behalf of the missing.

Because many of the human rights abuses of the past occurred within the justice system, the United

States continued to focus its efforts to promote progress in that sector. Embassy officials used the Department of Commerce's Commercial Law Development Program as a means to encourage judicial reform against corruption and to strengthen adherence to the rule of law. In efforts to promote the independence of the judiciary, the American Bar Association (ABA) held a fact-finding mission in 2004. As part of ABA's North Africa program, the United States undertook capacity building for Algerian judges and the Bar Association and supported the expansion of existing training for magistrates at the National Institute for Magistrates. The United States laid the groundwork for future U.S.-Algerian exchanges by sending three high ranking Algerian police officials to U.S. law enforcement offices. Embassy officials worked with security forces to encourage reforms by providing training videos and books and giving police academy lectures.

Over 48 military officers received training in the rule of law and human rights while participating in International Military Education and Training in the United States. As the interaction between U.S. and Algerian militaries increased, so did the Algerian military's awareness of international norms of military conduct, including internationally recognized human rights practices. The Embassy reviewed all training candidates for compliance with the Leahy Amendment to ensure that none were implicated in human rights violations.

A broadly representative national commission appointed by the Government also prepared liberalizing amendments to the Family Code, which the Council of Government adopted for subsequent submission to the Council of Ministers and the National Assembly. The United States continued to urge the Council of Ministers and the National Assembly to adopt these reforms, included in which is removing the classification of women as minors. The United States also funded the NGO Global Rights to Run a Maghreb Regional Project, including Algeria, on human rights advocacy for women. The project includes capacity building and networking for rural women.

Additionally the Embassy was very active in student exchange programs and the International Visitors Program. In 2004, two English Language Fellows went to Algeria and 30 Algerians traveled to the United States on the International Visitors Program.

The United States, including a U.S. Senator, established a dialogue on religious freedom with the High Islamic Council. The Ambassador used programming to underscore the need for religious tolerance by giving several speeches and funding two cultural restoration projects with religious significance for both Christians and Muslims.

United States officials raised concerns about trafficking in persons with the Government of Algeria. In 2004, U.S. officials visited Algeria to assess the trafficking situation in the country and explore possible ways for future cooperation. The United States provided training to the Algerian Coast Guard on the use of internationally recognized rules for human rights when boarding ships for inspection in order to help prevent trafficking in persons.



Bahrain

In 2002, Bahrain became a monarchy, adopting a Constitution which reinstated a bicameral legislature with an upper house of parliament (Shura Council) appointed by the King and an elected lower house (Council of Representatives). Parliament has the authority to present and review legislation, but the King, as head of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, holds most of the legislative authority. All citizens over 21 have the right to vote, and the 2002 legislative elections, the first in nearly three decades, were perceived as generally free and fair despite a boycott by several political groups. Both Shi'a and Sunnis are well represented in the Government, although the minority Sunni population plays a dominant role in both politics and the economy. Women ran unsuccessfully for office in 2002; however, 16 percent of the appointed Shura Council members, as well as two of the 20 Government Ministers, are women.

The Government took initial steps to improve the judiciary process, increase human rights training for police and fight corruption. Problems, however, remained in the Government's respect for human rights. The Government dissolved the country's leading human rights organization; impunity of government officials continued; the judiciary lacked full independence; and discrimination continued against the Shi'a population, women and third-country nationals. The Government also infringed on citizens' privacy rights and in some cases restricted freedom of speech, the press, assembly and association.

Advancing human rights and democracy in Bahrain is a priority of the United States. United States policy supported the rule of law, political participation, freedom of the press, judicial reform, civil society development, labor rights and the protection of foreign workers. President Bush met with King Hamad in November 2004 and reiterated U.S. support for Bahrain's political and economic reforms. This policy was advanced through diplomatic engagement and practical programming. United States officials regularly met with the Government, advocating respect for human rights and a proactive approach to democratization, and frequently engaged civil society activists and encouraged their participation in the political process.

One of the Embassy's main priorities was to strengthen Bahrain's democratic movement and increase civil society's confidence in the system with the approach of the 2006 municipal and parliamentary elections. Working through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the United States sponsored efforts to help Bahrain's political societies (in the absence of political parties) strengthen their institutional capacity and transparency and better respond to citizens' needs. This program frequently hosted workshops to increase the participation of youth and women in the political process and facilitated discussions between civil society and Members of Parliament on legislation and other matters of national interest.

The Embassy focused on civic education as a key to the democratic process in Bahrain. In 2004, the

MEPI Civic Education Program provided several opportunities for Ministry of Education officials and teachers to participate in teacher training and curriculum development programs. A project to translate American children's books into Arabic for the purpose of promoting critical thinking skills was also approved by the Ministry of Education during the year, for 2005 implementation. The Microscholarships Program enabled 50 Bahraini high school students to attend classes to improve their English language abilities; this program emphasized skills that students need in a democracy, such as critical thinking, and encouraged targeted discussions about American Studies topics such as the U.S. Constitution. During 2004, the Embassy also sent two senior specialists from the Ministry of Education on International Visitors Programs (IVP) on civic education and curriculum reform.

Freedom of expression and press liberties were priorities for the United States. Using MEPI-sponsored programs, the United States trained dozens of Bahraini journalists during the year and helped launch the University of Bahrain's first student-run radio station. During the past two years, the Embassy sent several journalists on IVPs on the role of the media in a democracy and responsibilities of an investigative journalist.

Judicial reform, another priority for the United States, was supported through an American Bar Association project to assist reform efforts within the Bahraini Ministry of Justice. The project facilitated training for judges and prosecutors; the establishment of an alternative dispute resolution system; improved case management to speed up the court process through software installation and training; and more transparent recruitment and selection of new judges. In a welcome development, the Minister of Justice dismissed five Shari'a court judges in March, suspending a sixth for corruption and disreputable behavior. In addition to the improvements to the judiciary process noted above, the Government also provided increased human rights training to law enforcement officers.

Also supported by U.S. funding, the Commercial Law Development Program worked with the Bahraini Government to develop sound commer-

cial law practices. The Embassy facilitated the visit of a delegation of parliamentarians, government officials and business leaders to a rule of law forum organized by the Southern Methodist University.

There was both progress and new concern in human rights. The King publicly called for the creation of a personal status law to ensure greater protection of women's legal rights, and the Government approved the registration of several new human rights groups and an organization to protect foreign workers in crisis. An active member of Bahrain's civil society went to the United States on an IVP to study human rights advocacy and awareness. The Government dissolved a leading human rights organization in September and arrested a member who had publicly criticized the royal family and government policies. The State Department expressed concern that these actions could represent a step backwards, both publicly and in meetings with the Government. On November 21, the detained activist was sentenced to one year in prison, but the King ordered his release the same day.

The U.S. Government monitored religious freedom, regularly met with representatives of different religious groups and facilitated meetings to address the concerns of members of minority faiths.

More than half of Bahrain's work force is foreign, and there were cases of expatriate workers being subject to trafficking and abuse. The State Department's 2004 Trafficking in Persons Report states that the Government of Bahrain does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it made significant efforts to do so. It developed a national plan of action to combat trafficking and shut down several employment agencies that exploited workers. Foreign workers were not protected under Bahrain's domestic labor laws, and no anti-trafficking legislation was introduced. United States officials consistently underscored the importance of combating worker exploitation and trafficking in persons during meetings with the Government. A U.S.-sponsored non-governmental organization trained government officials in responding to the

needs of abuse victims. The United States also funded an International Organization for Migration project to mitigate Bahrain's trafficking problem, scheduled to begin implementation in 2005.

Egypt

In 1999, President Hosni Mubarak was reelected to a fourth six-year term in a national referendum. Mubarak ran unopposed. The National Democratic Party, which has governed since its establishment in 1978, continues to dominate national politics and has maintained an overriding majority in the popularly elected People's Assembly and the partially elected Shura (Consultative) Council. Without significant constitutional and legislative amendments prior to the next round of elections scheduled for late 2005, this political dynamic is not likely to change substantially in the short term despite demands from opposition parties.

While the Government introduced some potentially significant reforms in 2003 and 2004, including the development of a National Council for Human Rights, the overall human rights record was poor, and in many areas serious problems remained. The principal human rights problems were the continuation of the 1981 Emergency Law, trials of non-security cases in emergency and military courts, persistent reports of torture by police and state security forces, arbitrary arrests, the use of administrative detention for indefinite periods, significant restrictions on assembly and association and restrictions on religious freedom.

The United States persistently raised with the Government of Egypt and non-governmental contacts U.S. support for political and economic reform in Egypt. The Ambassador and other U.S. officials met with various opposition figures, including Ayman Nour prior to his arrest.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy addressed these problems and supported efforts to build a more robust civil society, promote the rule of law and encourage the growth of democratic institutions, including an independent press. As a result of a comprehensive assessment of bilateral

assistance to Egypt, U.S. democracy and governance programs in 2004 focused particularly on justice sector reform, citizen participation with a special emphasis on gender equality, media independence and professionalism, and responsive local governance.

In his 2005 State of the Union address, President Bush recognized how important it is for democratic reform to take hold in Egypt when he said, "The great and proud nation of Egypt, which showed the way toward peace in the Middle East, can now show the way toward democracy in the Middle East." Throughout 2004, senior U.S. officials urged Egypt to democratize and to strengthen respect for human rights.

In March 2004, President Mubarak asserted a general commitment to political reform at a conference at the Bibliotheca Alexandria, but has yet to follow up with concrete actions. At its annual conference in September, the ruling National Democratic Party stated its commitment to a platform of reform, including constitutional and electoral reform. Also during the year, the National Council for Human Rights demonstrated a growing willingness to speak out on human rights issues, including publicly supporting the abolition of the Emergency Law. In January 2005, the Government of Egypt arrested Ayman Nour, one of Egypt's most prominent opposition leaders on allegations of forging signatures on party application documents. The United States raised concerns publicly and at the highest levels with Egyptian officials in Cairo and Washington about Nour's arrest and reports of mistreatment. The United States raised concerns that Nour's arrest was politically motivated and that it portended poorly for democracy in Egypt, coming at the beginning of an election year and on the eve of a long-planned dialogue between opposition parties and the ruling party. On February 26, with Nour still in jail, President Mubarak proposed a constitutional amendment that would establish a direct public vote and allow multiple candidates to participate in Egypt's presidential elections. The People's National Assembly and Shura Council began initial discussion on this amendment, which will require passage by a two-thirds majority in the People's Assembly and will be subject to a national referendum.

Senior U.S. officials raised concerns about civil society development, political participation and basic political rights in official meetings. United States officials met with Egyptian civil society leaders and activists to solicit their views on how the United States might use the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and other initiatives to support the reform process. The United States continued to implement an experimental program to promote responsive local government by fostering new relationships between the Government and citizen groups in four target communities.

A seven-year grant aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through assistance in the areas of internal governance, financial management, advocacy for citizens' interests and participation in civic action continued. This grant focused on helping women, particularly in rural areas, obtain the basic civil records necessary to access government services, protect their legal rights and register to vote. The United States helped establish the Egyptian NGO Support Center, an institution working to strengthen civil society organizations in Egypt, which is committed to providing assistance to civil society in advocacy, improved internal governance and effective management.

Several efforts promoted greater independence and professionalism in the media. A project with international partners and Egyptian journalists placed 15 young Egyptian journalists in internships and training programs in the United States. Another program provided training to hundreds of journalists on international professional standards for news reporting and assistance in publishing fact-based, dispassionate news stories. Through MEPI, the United States supported the travel of 15 Egyptian journalists to the United States to cover the U.S. elections in November. United States officials raised issues of media freedom and responsibility with the Government of Egypt.

Senior U.S. officials lobbied their Egyptian counterparts to lift the Emergency Law. At the same time, U.S. officials sought to limit its application only to extraordinary cases involving dangerous individuals and violent, extremist organizations. In addition to specific discussions with the

Government regarding the annual Human Rights Report, which detailed concerns about torture, mass detentions and political prisoners, Embassy officials also raised human rights concerns with the Government on a case-by-case basis.

The Ambassador and other U.S. officials urged the Government to grant due process of law to all citizens. An eight-year Administration of Justice Support program, which focused on promoting increased transparency and public confidence in the courts by strengthening efficiency, ended in June. The program used two pilot commercial courts to introduce automated, streamlined administrative processes and training for judges and court staff. A follow-on, five-year project began in August 2004 and will assist the Ministry of Justice in replicating the reformed and modernized court systems nationwide. Beyond its operating efficiency, the judiciary's lack of independence remained a problem.

A five-year criminal justice project with the Egyptian prosecutor general's office continued. Under this same program, Egyptian participants visited the United States and interacted with U.S. federal judges. Using a U.S. grant, the American University in Cairo expanded the impact of its formal degree program in international human rights law by developing professional and community outreach programs.

The Embassy continually monitored the human rights situation to ensure that Egyptian military personnel selected for International Military Education and Training programs were in compliance with the Leahy Amendment.

In other efforts to strengthen civil society, the United States provided a series of small grants to Egyptian organizations working on human rights, religious tolerance and women's and children's issues. Other initiatives included a model U.S. Congress at Cairo University and civic education summer camps. The Embassy administered this program using an interagency mechanism that awarded numerous small grants to support local, grassroots initiatives, as well as human rights awareness. These included training for youth activists, support for model parliamentary work-

shops, legal systems training for lawyers and judges and programs focused on women's and children's rights. The 2004 International Visitors Program included exchanges on subjects relating to human rights, civil society, good governance and women's issues.

The Embassy supported MEPI programming in Egypt and hosted a follow-up conference in January 2004 for the MEPI Young Ambassadors Program. Using MEPI the United States supported a local NGO during the year to expand the Arab Women's Forum, established in 2003, through a series of regional meetings and the establishment of a website over the course of the year. Also, in 2004 some Egyptian women participated in the Young Arab Businesswomen's Internship program. With USAID support, a local NGO assisted over 5,000 women in Qena to obtain identity documents, the first step necessary for them to gain formal and legal government recognition and access to rights and opportunities that are otherwise not accessible to them. They also obtained voting cards necessary for their participation in local and national elections. At a widely attended conference in Qena, women petitioned local party officials to nominate more women for positions on local councils and national assemblies. They formed a committee to promote women's awareness of their legal rights and services available to them from government agencies and the National Council for Women. A petition submitted by citizens, especially women, was a remarkable development, particularly in a governorate in conservative Upper Egypt where women's social and political participation has been historically limited.

The Ambassador and other U.S. officials raised specific concerns about the Government requiring notation of religious affiliation on national identity cards, a practice that adversely affected citizens who wished to convert away from Islam as well as members of religions that are not recognized or whose organizations have been banned by the Government. United States officials also raised concerns about the status of Egypt's Christians and other religious minorities, and the Embassy maintained excellent relations with representatives of Egypt's various religious communities.

Egypt was included for the first time in the Trafficking in Persons Report in 2004. United States officials exchanged views with government officials, NGOs and international organizations on ways to strengthen Egypt's ability to combat trafficking.

Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a theocratic, constitutional republic dominated by Shi'a religious leaders. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei dominates the legislative, executive and judicial branches, directly controls the armed forces and indirectly controls internal security forces. President Mohammed Khatami, who won a second four-year term in multiparty elections in 2001, heads the executive branch. Presidential elections are scheduled for June 17, 2005. In parliamentary elections on February 20, 2004, the conservative cleric-dominated Guardian Council excluded virtually all reformist candidates, including 85 incumbent members of parliament. In recent years, the conservative backlash against reformist trends and parties has increased in momentum.



In 2004, the Government's poor human rights record worsened, and it continued to commit numerous, serious abuses. Summary executions, disappearances, extremist vigilantism, widespread use of torture and other degrading treatment remained problems. Despite the Government's reassertion that torture was illegal, there was no evidence that authorities had discontinued the practice. The investigation into the death of a dual national Canadian/Iranian photographer, who suffered a brain hemorrhage after sustaining injuries while in prison, stagnated. Authorities gradually suppressed almost all independent domestic media outlets, arresting or effectively silencing their journalists. The last forum for free debate, weblogs, started to come under pressure when the Government began arresting their creators and forcing them to sign false confessions. The Government continued to discriminate against and harass the Baha'i community and other religious and ethnic minority groups, including Jews, Christians and Sunni and Sufi Muslims. Authorities bulldozed two sacred Baha'i sites. The Government continued to severely restrict worker rights, including freedom of association and the right to organize and bargain collectively. On May Day 2004, authorities arrested and detained for several weeks several workers who attempted to commemorate the holiday. Reports of death sentences by stoning of women in rural Iran were persistent but could not be confirmed.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Iran centers on urging friends and allies to condition improvements in their bilateral and trade relations with Iran on positive changes in Iran's human rights policies and other areas of concern. The United States also supports the continuing efforts of the Iranian people to institute greater freedoms and increase political participation in Iran; pushes for resolutions criticizing Iran's human rights policies at the UN and in other international fora; and publicly highlights the Iranian Government's abuse of its citizens' human rights.

Although the United States does not maintain diplomatic relations with Iran, the United States continues its multi-faceted effort to support the Iranian people's aspirations to live in a democratic country where human rights are respected.

In fall 2004, for a second year in a row, the United States co-sponsored and actively supported a Canadian resolution at the UN General Assembly condemning the human rights situation in Iran. The Iran human rights resolution passed in the UN General Assembly's 59th Plenary, sending an important signal to the Iranian people that the international community recognized their suffering and to the Iranian Government that dialogue on human rights was no substitute for concrete action to improve its record, and that the serious concern about Iran's overall international behavior would not blunt the international community's focus on the internal human rights situation.

The United States regularly raised concerns about Iran's poor human rights record during consultations with allies and followed existing formal human rights dialogues between U.S. allies and the Government of Iran.

Calling for Iran to start respecting its citizens' human rights was central to the United States overall policy approach and was reflected in all public statements. President Bush and senior-level U.S. officials repeatedly expressed their support for the Iranian people in their quest for freedom, democracy and a more transparent and accountable government. United States representatives regularly met with members of various groups suffering human rights abuses in Iran. Their complaints were documented for dissemination to other governments and for inclusion in the State Department's annual Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Iran and the Report on International Religious Freedom. In September 2004, Secretary of State Powell again designated Iran as a "Country of Particular Concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Under current law, Iran is ineligible for most assistance from the United States Government. However, in 2004 the Department of State awarded a grant to document abuses inside Iran, taking advantage of limited special authority recently granted by Congress to provide grants to educational institutions, humanitarian groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals inside Iran to support the advancement of democracy and human rights. The project seeks to raise

public awareness of accountability and rule of law as an important aspect of the democratization process in Iran. The United States actively explored possibilities for further grants and prepared to solicit proposals in 2005 to support democracy and human rights inside Iran. In addition, with U.S. funds, the National Endowment for Democracy supported the advancement of democracy and human rights standards inside Iran. The United States also supported Voice of America broadcasts into Iran, a website in Persian to speak directly to the Iranian people about U.S. policy and Persian-language Radio Farda, which operates 24 hours a day. In response to the December 26, 2003 earthquake in Bam, in which more than 40,000 were killed, the United States quickly assembled and deployed a response team to the scene through the USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. The United States issued licenses authorizing donations from U.S. citizens and permitting several U.S. NGOs to provide humanitarian assistance for a period of a year.

Iraq

Following the U.S.-led Coalition's removal of the Ba'athist regime in April 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the Iraqi Governing Council administered the country pursuant to UN Security Council Resolutions 1483, 1500 and 1511 until the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) was appointed. The Law for the Administration of the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period (TAL) was adopted on March 8, 2004, and accords fundamental rights to all Iraqis, regardless of gender, sect, political opinion or ethnicity. The TAL also guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religious belief and practice for the people of Iraq. The IIG assumed full governmental authority on June 28, 2004. Elections for the Transitional National Assembly, the first transparent and democratic elections in generations and the first step in the formation of the Iraqi Transitional Government, took place on January 30, 2005. Government in this text refers to the Governing Council, which administered the country with CPA prior to sovereignty, and to the IIG, which assumed sovereignty on June 28, 2004.



Baghdad, Iraq

Students walk past an election campaign poster.

AP Photo

The Interim Government, reversing a long legacy of serious human rights abuses under the previous regime, generally respected human rights, but serious problems remained. The Government's human rights performance was handicapped by a serious insurgency in which a terrorist campaign of violence affected every aspect of life. With the ongoing insurgency limiting access to information, a number of alleged abuses have been difficult to verify, including reports of arbitrary deprivation of life, torture, impunity, poor prison conditions, and arbitrary arrest and detention. In addition, the judicial system was largely dysfunctional, and corruption remained a key problem. However, unlike in the previous regime, none of these abuses were systemic or government-directed, and the Government took important steps to address human rights concerns. While human rights violations remained a serious issue for the Iraqi Government to resolve, there continued to be greater focus on bringing former regime elements to justice than on addressing abuses by the current Government.

The United States worked in collaboration with Iraqis, foreign governments and international organizations to support Iraq's evolution into a unified nation that is federal in nature and has strong democratic institutions, respects human

rights and enjoys the rule of law, a vibrant civil society, an independent media and legitimate and transparent national elections. The U.S. democracy and human rights strategy has promoted Iraqi initiatives and institutions aimed at achieving a successful transition to full democracy, accounting for past atrocities and preventing future human rights abuses.

Senior U.S. officials, including the President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary of State, Congressional delegations, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, and Embassy officers, routinely met with Iraqi Government officials, political parties, religious minorities and human rights activists regarding Iraq's historic transition to democracy and the furthering of human rights norms.

In response to the new opportunities for all Iraqis to participate in building their new nation, the United States expanded its democracy and governance programs in 2004 to include support for Iraq's national government and political processes. The United States also provided technical assistance, logistical support and capacity building to the IIG and Iraq's governing bodies.

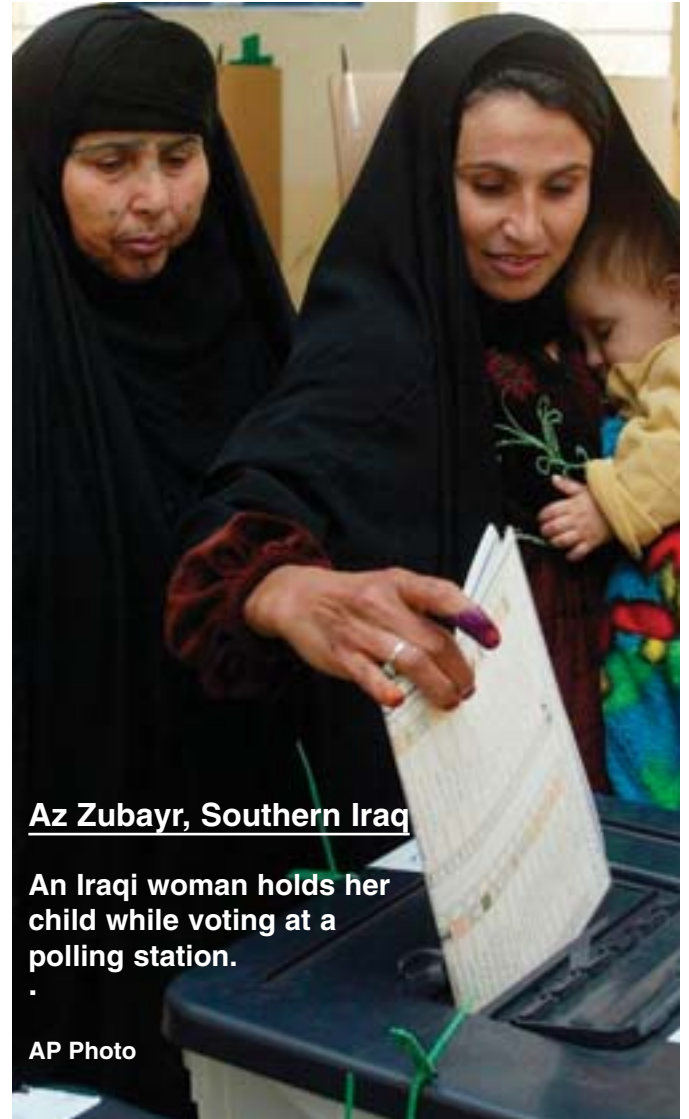
The U.S. Government implemented an expansive civic dialogue program that sponsored 30,000 democracy dialogue activities, which attracted a total of 750,000 participants. The program played an important role in laying the foundation for democracy by fostering confidence and initiating community dialogues among its hundreds of thousands of participants.

Through a grant to the National Endowment for Democracy, and in partnership with the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute, the United States supported political party training and development in preparation for the 2005 elections. Such assistance was dedicated to providing facilities and technical assistance on organizational management, platform development, electoral campaigns, media training and resource centers, election monitoring, polling, citizen outreach and governance.

Through IFES, the United States also provided technical and material support to the Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI) - at its request and in coordination with the UN - as it prepared for Iraq's first democratic and transparent nationwide elections. U.S. support helped the UN increase the staff, skills and capacity of the recently-established IECI, create a nationwide structure, administer voter registration efforts, develop a regulatory and administrative framework, train staff and conduct balloting. The United States continued its support for civil society involvement in the political process; for example, it successfully marshaled the resources of tens of thousands of Iraqi civil society participants to train and deploy approximately 12,000 accredited domestic observers throughout all governorates before and during the January 2005 elections. The United States also funded an Iraqi-led comprehensive, country-wide voter education and get-out-the vote campaign to facilitate voters' awareness of their right to participate in the election process. This campaign included special programming for under-represented areas and provided training for one half of the 30,000 party agent observers mobilized on election day.

The United States also fostered the development of democracy and human rights through its

investment in the reconstruction of Iraq after decades of deliberate neglect and brutalization. Infrastructure development projects that encouraged the recovery of the Iraqi economy contributed to human rights by promoting stability, and by promoting equity in hiring and awarding of competitively-procured contracts. Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Funds supported key activities in the democracy, governance, justice, human rights, civil society, education, refugees and public safety sectors. In addition, U.S. support for the re-establishment of security and law enforcement indisputably became part of the enabling environment, not only for Iraq's ability to expand its economy, but also for the elections and the promotion of human rights.



Az Zubayr, Southern Iraq

An Iraqi woman holds her child while voting at a polling station.

AP Photo



Sadr City, Iraq

An elderly woman enters a polling place in Baghdad's Shiite enclave

AP Photo/ Hadi Mizban

The United States played a leading role in supporting Iraqi efforts to institute justice and the rule of law. The U.S. Department of Justice trained 216 judges on judicial independence, rule of law, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, current European law on human rights and anti-corruption initiatives. The United States provided guidance and support to Iraq's Ministry of Justice and is assisting in the establishment of an independent judiciary system. United States rule of law support includes assistance in the development of an integrated criminal justice system that builds the capacity of the police, correction processes and the judiciary; promotes a culture of lawfulness; and trains legal professionals.

The United States promoted participatory, representative and accountable government at the local level, as well as the development of Iraq's nascent civil society. United States programs worked at

the grassroots level in rural and urban communities nationwide to promote democracy and prevent and mitigate conflict across gender, ethnic and religious lines. The United States also supported local government capacity-building projects in Iraq's major cities and all 18 governorates. United States programs facilitated the establishment and refreshment of 15 provincial councils, the Kurdish Regional Council for the three northern governorates, 90 district councils, 194 district and sub-district councils and 445 neighborhood councils.

Civic education programs also promoted democratization and civil society development. Activities facilitated citizen participation in public dialogues addressing political and social issues of national importance; promoted interaction between citizens and public officials aimed at encouraging responsive and accountable local government; and provided start-up resources and training to strengthen the institutional capacity of local organizations. The United States also awarded more than 1,060 rapid response grants to increase Iraqi participation in local government decision-making.

The United States supported Iraqi media development, training journalists to fulfill the functions of information, education and oversight that characterize a professional, independent press. Activities included regular events at the Embassy-run International Press Center, as well as training programs for Iraqi print journalists in Dubai in July and Iraqi broadcasters in December. The United States also supported the development of fair media outlets, by supporting both unbiased media coverage of the election and the development of the Iraqi Media Network, a Public-Broadcasting-System-like entity comprised of Al-Iraqiya television and radio and Al Sabah newspaper.

The U.S. Government is committed to assisting the Iraqi people as they determine the best ways to address the crimes of the Saddam regime, protect vulnerable populations from retribution and create a climate for the promotion of fundamental human rights and dignity in Iraq. The United States supports the efforts of the Iraqi Human Rights Ministry to establish a center for missing and disappeared persons, including the exhumation

tion of mass graves. United States' grants to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) enabled treatment for reintegration of victims of torture, the collection and documentation of human rights abuses committed by the former regime, awareness of human rights standards among a broad segment of Iraqi society and the development of human rights organizations in Iraq. The United States provided expertise and other assistance to the Iraq Property Claims Commission, as it worked on the very difficult issue of compensation for those affected by Saddam's ethnic cleansing policies. In addition, the United States supported the establishment of the Iraqi Special Tribunal, which will investigate and prosecute senior regime officials and document crimes against humanity.

The United States placed high priority on promoting equality for women in Iraq and supported this goal through policy and programming initiatives. The U.S. Government helped send delegations of Iraqi women to the 48th and 49th sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York. In March 2004, Secretary of State Powell announced two new initiatives to support women in Iraq; the Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative provides women with training and education in

the skills and practices of democratic public life, and the U.S.-Iraqi Women's Network, a public-private partnership, links Iraqi NGO representatives and business leaders with American counterparts to empower them to participate in the political and economic life of their country.

United States officials regularly engaged with Iraqi religious leaders and government officials to ensure that legal protections for minority rights and freedom of religion are respected. At the request of leading Shi'a and Sunni clerics, the U.S. Institute of Peace funded the establishment of an interfaith dialogue center to help unite religious groups against violence and foster an environment of tolerance, particularly between the Sunnis and Shi'a, as well as towards Christians and others.

United States agencies acted to prevent human trafficking in Iraq, distributing information and working with government officials to increase awareness of trafficking issues. A component on trafficking in persons has been developed for inclusion in basic police training, and, in consultation with U.S. experts, Iraqi officials are reviewing options for extending the training period to include this and a more extensive human rights component.



Jordan

Although the Government of Jordan respected human rights in some areas many problems remained. A human rights commission established by King Abdullah in 2003 continued to expand its activities and retained an active role in public discussions. The King charged the new Government appointed in October 2004 to focus on administrative reforms in order to provide a bureaucratic environment better equipped to advance human rights. While the Government continued to publicly promote social and political reform, there was still a lack of progress in some areas. Official restrictions on the rights of women and social discrimination against women remained problems. Members of the security forces continued to act with impunity, and there were still restrictions on freedom of speech, press, assembly and association. While citizens participated in the political process through their elected

representatives to parliament, they did not have the right to change their government.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy strives to promote rule of law and legal reform, civil society development, civic participation in the political process and women's rights. The United States did this through direct dialogue with the Jordanian Government at all levels, as well as programs, training and the publication of reports on human rights, labor and religious freedom.

The United States advanced its strategy by building on Jordanian Government initiatives to strengthen human rights. The U.S. Government continued to work with the quasi-independent National Center for Human Rights as well as the Human Rights Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A grant from the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor provided training on international human rights law and practice to Directorate officials as well as to members of the Ministries of Education, Justice and Interior. Members of the police, military and the National Center for Human Rights were also included. The United States also included a human rights component in most of the professional military education provided to Jordanian personnel.

In addition to supporting political reform in Jordan, the United States sought to promote media independence and professionalism through a conference on press freedom held in April. The objective of the conference was to inform Members of Parliament and government officials about the concerns of journalists regarding their rights and responsibilities. In June the Embassy held a conference on women in the media that promoted public awareness of women's rights.

The United States also funded a Freedom House campaign against family violence through the Middle East Partnership Initiative. The campaign included awareness-raising workshops held in universities and local communities throughout Jordan. In December, the U.S. Government commemorated the anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by hosting a panel discussion of women activists on the issue of gender violence in Jordan.

The United States promoted broader participation in rule of law and legal reforms, particularly among women. In July, 11 Members of Parliament and two parliamentary staffers visited the United States on a program focusing on the role of legislators in the democratic process. Exchange programs for judges and judicial personnel focused on helping Jordan reform its trial and pretrial procedures for a more prompt and fair delivery of justice. The exchange programs included bringing Jordanian judges to the United States, where they observed U.S. courts and were provided with training. Additionally, the United States funded a regional conference of women lawyers and judges to promote women's rights through more effective representation in the judiciary.

The U.S. Government continued to support public sector reform efforts in Jordan. In the area of rule of law, two new programs were launched in 2004 to assist the Ministry of Justice to implement its reform strategy, which was developed with U.S. support. Programming included the development of a judicial code of conduct, complete with implementation mechanisms; support for alternative dispute resolution, in order to reduce the courts' workload; automation of the country's case management system, which has greatly improved efficiency and transparency; human resources and capacity building at the Ministry and courts; and a comprehensive program to establish the Judicial Institute of Jordan as a regional leader in judicial education. The overall goal of the programs was to assist Jordan to achieve its stated desire for greater social and political reform through increased citizen participation.

The United States tracked and reported on religious freedom cases, and U.S. officials discussed individual cases with Jordanian counterparts at the highest levels. The United States hosted four members of the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center to participate in an International Visitors Program on religious tolerance.

The United States maintained a dialogue with key actors in the labor sector, including union leaders, International Labor Organization officials, industrial park managers, factory owners and government representatives. On several occasions U.S.

officials discussed with the Government implementation of Jordan's international commitments to fight child labor and trafficking.

All assistance under the USAID's diverse program portfolio integrated the crosscutting themes of gender equality, youth, anti-corruption and support for the protection of disenfranchised segments of the population.

Kuwait

Kuwait is a constitutional, hereditary emirate. The Constitution provides for an elected National Assembly, but permits the Amir to suspend its provisions by decree. Elections are generally considered free and fair despite some credible reports of government and opposition vote buying. Although the Government's respect for human rights improved during the last decade, significant problems remained.

Citizens did not have the right to change their government. The Government placed some limits on freedoms of speech, assembly, association, religion and movement. Violence and discrimination against women, especially non-citizens, persisted. Women, who comprised slightly more than half the citizen population, did not have the right to vote or seek election to the National Assembly. In May 2004, however, the Government reintroduced legislation that would extend voting rights to women, although it is still under consideration. Judicial authorities remained subject to government influence and discriminated against non-citizens, especially foreign laborers. Some police and members of the security forces reportedly abused detainees during interrogation.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Kuwait targets a wide range of critical issues. These include strengthening Kuwait's democratic and civil society institutions through the formation of full-fledged political parties, supporting women's efforts to secure the right to vote and hold public office, and combating trafficking in persons while improving the working conditions of domestic servants and foreign laborers. The United States worked through a variety of public diplomacy tools and through the Middle East

Partnership Initiative (MEPI) to strengthen democracy and respect for human rights in Kuwait. These efforts resulted in some positive changes to Kuwait's overall human rights situation during the year.

The United States actively engaged government officials, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other civil society groups at all levels to advance a robust dialogue and debate on key human rights concerns, particularly female suffrage and equal protection under law. A high number of congressional and cabinet-level delegations transiting Kuwait en route to Iraq also contributed to and strengthened this dialogue. In addition to ongoing discussions with government officials, Embassy officials participated in influential evening meetings (diwanias) held in the homes of private Kuwaitis to discuss current events. This enabled Embassy officials to promote a better awareness and understanding of U.S. values on human rights and democracy.

Parliamentary institutional capacity building was a key component of the Embassy's strategy to strengthen democracy and promote the rule of law in Kuwait. The Ambassador reinforced the importance of democratic values during an election day speech in November 2004 that received wide media coverage and highlighted how greater electoral inclusion has strengthened democracy in the United States. The Embassy worked with the National Assembly to encourage broader understanding of international standards for human rights and democratic values.

The United States continued longstanding efforts to strengthen Kuwait's media and promote more responsible journalism. The International Visitors Program (IVP) sponsored a television journalist's participation in the March 2004 "Role of the Media" conference in the United States, a program designed to bolster understanding of media responsibilities in covering politics. United States officials also worked with Kuwait University to establish a permanent American Corner in January 2005. This will serve as the university's American Studies unit and provide Kuwaiti students with greater access to books, the Internet and journals on the United States.

The Embassy actively encouraged positive debate on the role and status of women in Kuwaiti society and the negative impact of women's disenfranchisement of their basic rights and protections. The Embassy also assisted women's rights activists in developing effective advocacy and political action strategies. In July 2004, as a part of these efforts, the Embassy hosted former Lieutenant Governor of South Dakota Carole Hillard who spoke to a group of female journalists and activists on the role of women in Kuwait and their political and social rights. A Kuwaiti judge participated in the "Administration of Courts" seminar in the United States in September 2004, which provided a practical in-depth look at how the U.S. judicial system works.

Women's rights activists reported that apathy and disinterest among many Kuwaiti women may inhibit a more vibrant suffrage movement. They hope to galvanize broader societal support for political reform by highlighting ways in which women are economically and legally disadvantaged because of their disenfranchisement. The United States supported these grassroots civil society efforts through various programs and exchanges during the year. Among other programs, the United States approved a MEPI small

grant to the Kuwait Economic Society, led by a female Kuwaiti intellectual, for a study on gender budgeting that will examine patterns of government spending aimed at female-led businesses or earmarked for hiring female employees. Another MEPI-funded program supports the National Democratic Institute's work with politically active Kuwaiti women, teaching them how to campaign within the political system once they have gained the right to pursue elected office.

The United States raised religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy of promoting human rights, actively encouraging the Government to address concerns of Muslim minority and non-Muslim religious leaders, including lack of worship space, access to religious materials and inequities in staff funding. United States officials met regularly with recognized Sunni, Shi'a and Christian groups and with representatives of faiths that are not officially recognized to hear their concerns and monitor progress on religious freedom issues.

The United States also focused on labor rights and working conditions for foreign workers in Kuwait, encouraging the Government to reform its labor code to conform more closely to internationally



Lebanon



recognized labor standards. United States officials met regularly with government officials at all levels to promote awareness of labor problems and to urge improvements in the status and treatment of foreign workers, especially domestic servants. Embassy officials maintained a close working relationship with NGOs and with domestic and international labor groups such as the International Labor Organization, working to monitor labor conditions and investigate reported incidents of abuse.

In January 2004, Embassy officials attended the first public seminar ever held in Kuwait to address the treatment of foreign workers including domestics. Hosted by a local NGO, this seminar brought members of the Government, National Assembly, labor unions and NGOs together for the first time on this issue. During the same month, the Embassy organized a roundtable discussion on domestic workers' rights with embassy labor officials from major source countries, encouraging regular meetings to share information and coordinate a labor-related dialogue with the Government.

The Embassy and senior State Department officials regularly urged the Government to strengthen legal and regulatory measures to combat human trafficking. As part of this effort, the United States sponsored three Kuwaiti officials on IVPs related to combating international crimes, including human trafficking, in May and June 2004 and January 2005. To combat sex-related trafficking, the Government barred the employment of non-citizen women in billiard clubs. The Government also established regulations to increase protections for foreign domestic workers, requiring employment through official recruitment agencies rather than direct private sponsorship. Despite these efforts, trafficking in children for exploitation as camel jockeys and trafficking for labor exploitation remained significant problems.

The Government of Lebanon's overall human rights record remained poor. The problems facing democracy and human rights in Lebanon came into sharp relief in 2004 when Syria successfully pressured Lebanese parliamentarians to extend the term of President Emile Lahoud, but a number of obstacles impeded the advancement of human rights. For instance, the Government continued to harass and intimidate anti-Syrian activists and to compel journalists to practice self-censorship. The Government was also responsible for closing a media outlet. The security services exercised undue influence over political decision-making, and the judiciary lacked independence. Corruption and a lack of transparency were obstacles to effective government and economic reform. Trafficking in persons also remained a concern.

Underpinning the U.S. Government's human rights strategy in Lebanon was recognition that Syrian interference has been a corrupting, controlling and self-serving influence. In order to combat Syrian influence in Lebanon, the United States passed the "Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act" in December 2003, and co-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1559 in September 2004. UNSCR 1559 called for all remaining foreign forces to withdraw and for the strict respect of the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon. The United States also called for the 2005 parliamentary elections to be free from Syrian influence or interference. Furthermore, U.S. diplomatic initiatives and assistance focused on abuses by the security services, lack of independence of the judiciary and restrictions on freedom of the press. The U.S. Government initiated programs to empower women and to deal with educational issues that have led in the past to child labor. The U.S. Embassy worked with source-country representatives and Lebanese Government and private agencies to address trafficking in persons.

Lebanese sovereignty was the central issue in the U.S. Government's efforts to promote democracy, rule of law and civil society in 2004. Since the passing of UNSCR 1559 in September, the

United States pressed the Government of Lebanon to implement the resolution and made numerous public statements supporting the goals outlined in UNSCR 1559. The U.S. Embassy also worked to garner the support of other diplomatic missions for the goals of UNSCR 1559.

In 2004, the United States and Lebanon addressed human rights issues by promoting a transparent, efficient and responsive public sector through good governance and improvement of civic institutions. Programs focused on enhancing administrative and financial capabilities, expanding social services, encouraging public participation and increasing accountability, transparency and effectiveness of local municipalities. As a result, the United States assisted an additional 237 municipalities in 2004, bringing the total number of assisted municipalities to over 800.

The United States also worked with local advocacy groups to promote transparent and democratic practices at the grassroots, civil society and public sector levels. The Transparency and Accountability Grant Project empowered local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civic associations to play a constructive role in advocating for change and enhancing transparency, accountability and good governance in Lebanon. Lebanon is one of four countries participating in a Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) program training local and regional government officials in public administration.

In addition to promoting democratic practices at the grassroots, the United States conducted programs to promote women's political participation in advance of municipal elections in 2004 and parliamentary elections in 2005. The United States also funded a counseling program to combat violence against women in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Lebanese women and youth participated in the Arab Businesswomen Internship Program and the Young Student Leaders Program. Through the MEPI small grants, the United States also supported programs that improved women's literacy and computer skills.

The United States continued its support for a regional program to strengthen the management



and commercial base of independent media throughout the region. As part of a MEPI regional grant, a U.S. NGO, Internews, trained Lebanese journalists and opened an office in Beirut to support the training of journalists.

The United States supported programs to protect the rights of people with disabilities by providing a grant to a Lebanese NGO working with the disabled. The U.S. Government also provided funding to help establish a project to benefit 800 landmine survivors and their families who participate in small-scale economic activities in the district of Jezzine. These activities aimed to help landmine survivors reclaim their sense of being productive members of society.

The United States advocated on behalf of the rights of refugees in Lebanon. The Ambassador's Fund supported a refugee skills training center in the Sabra-Chatila refugee camp and a library and youth center in the Bourj el Barajneh refugee camp.

To underscore U.S. support for religious freedom, U.S. officials met regularly with religious leaders and members of the Council on Religious Understanding. The Embassy's International Visitors Leadership Program in 2004 included an interfaith dialogue theme.

Trafficking in persons remained a problem in Lebanon, and the U.S. Government protested the inaction of the Lebanese Government in connection with the deaths of several foreign migrant workers. The United States pressed the Government at all levels to acknowledge that trafficking in persons was a serious issue and to take immediate steps to stop it. By year's end, Lebanon's immigration service signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with an international and a local NGO to cooperate on protection of victims of trafficking, a first for the region. The MOU allowed a U.S.-funded safe house to operate with the protection of the Lebanese Government. At the U.S. Government's urging, the Lebanese Government published two booklets outlining the rights and obligations of foreign migrant workers in Lebanon. By keeping foreign workers better informed of their rights, these booklets helped

combat trafficking in persons. The United States approved a grant to provide training for student judges and continuing education for sitting judges at the Judicial Institute on identification and successful prosecution of traffickers in persons.

Libya

Libya has a history of summary executions, disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, widespread use of torture, impunity and restricted freedoms of speech, assembly, press and expression. The Government controlled the judiciary, citizens did not have the right to a fair public trial or to be represented by legal counsel, and the establishment of independent human rights organizations was prohibited. Women and religious and ethnic minorities also continued to face violence and discrimination. Libya remained among the world's worst violators of human rights and continued to ignore calls by other governments and international non-governmental organizations for reform. Libya's human rights record remained poor, and the Government continued to commit numerous serious abuses.

Following Libya's historic announcement that it would eliminate its weapons of mass destruction, the United States lifted most sanctions against Libya in 2004, except those stemming from Libya's continued placement on the list of state sponsors of terrorism. On June 28, 2004, the United States formally reestablished direct bilateral ties with Libya by opening a Liaison Office in Tripoli. Despite recent statements by high-level Libyan officials, including Moammar Qadhafi, that indicated Libya realizes it needs to improve its respect for human rights, in reality there has been little change.

Promoting improved respect for human rights and the implementation of political reforms was integral to the process of normalizing relations between the United States and Libya. Currently, the U.S. ability to consider expanding potential programming is limited, since full diplomatic relations have not been established. However, the United States explored options for initiating professional and student exchanges between the two countries that would expose many Libyans to a

free and democratic society. Additionally, the United States prepared to offer democracy, educational, cultural and professional programs in Libya itself.

The United States regularly raised human rights issues at senior levels with Libyan officials, urged its adherence to international human rights conventions and protocols and publicly condemned Libya's human rights abuses. United States diplomats in Tripoli worked with EU counterparts on behalf of five Bulgarian medics and a Palestinian doctor, sentenced to death by a Libyan regional court in 2004 for allegedly infecting over 400 Libyan children with HIV-tainted blood in a Benghazi hospital. United States officials repeatedly raised the case of Fathi al-Jahmi, whom the Libyan Government released and then re-detained in 2004 after he continued to call for democratic reform. Al-Jahmi's whereabouts remained unknown, and the United States continued to raise this issue at every possible opportunity with the Libyan Government.

United States officials also advocated for the abolition of the so-called People's Courts. The General People's Congress adopted a measure in January 2005 to abolish them.

Morocco

Although there was important progress in some areas, Morocco's human rights record remained poor. Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission made progress in airing the history of disappearances and arbitrary arrests during the period lasting from the early 1970s until the mid 1990s. The Government began implementing landmark reforms to the family code, aimed at strengthening the legal rights of women and children. Morocco has ratified a Free Trade Agreement with the United States, which is establishing an open market and bolstering adherence to labor codes. In 2004, Morocco qualified for the U.S. Millennium Challenge Account development program based on its progress in governing justly, investing in its citizens and ensuring economic freedom, as measured against criteria established and monitored by independent organizations. It

was the only country in the broader Middle East and North Africa to become eligible.

Nevertheless, problems such as arbitrary arrest and detention and abuse of detainees continued. Security agencies detained several thousand people in 2003-04 for possible involvement with terrorist groups and convicted and sentenced more than 400. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch documented abuse and torture of those detained by the Government and persons sentenced to prison. While journalists tested boundaries, two journalists were jailed for defamation and two newspapers were ordered temporarily closed.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Morocco and Western Sahara addressed a wide range of critical issues, including support for the rule of law and women's issues and preparation for the 2007 municipal elections. Outreach efforts continued to target workers' rights, and child trafficking.

In December 2004 in Rabat, the Governments of Morocco and the United States co-hosted the first Forum for the Future. This brought together Foreign and Finance Ministers representing nations of the Broader Middle East and North Africa and their G-8 partners to discuss democratic, economic and social reforms in the region. Representatives of civil society and international human rights groups also participated in the Forum.

President Bush and Secretary Powell discussed political reforms with King Mohammed VI in 2004. Senior U.S. Government officials and Members of Congress continued to meet with Moroccan parliamentarians and other government officials to encourage further political reform.

Under the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the United States provided funding to a consortium of American non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with Moroccan political parties to strengthen party structures, and parliamentary systems (primarily through the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute). The United States, through

MEPI, also provided funds to the National Conference of State Legislatures to provide training for Moroccan and other parliamentarians in the region and their staffs. The United States funded IFES to assist the Government of Morocco, political parties and other states in the region to prepare for upcoming legislative elections in 2007. The United States began a four-year democracy program in Morocco to support parliamentary processes and promote more effective and transparent local governance and women's literacy.

United States officials regularly met with a range of human rights activists, NGOs, members of civil society and Jewish and Berber community leaders to gauge the human rights environment in general, including the level of religious tolerance. The United States also funded a project with Catholic Relief Services to promote civil society capacity building for local development associations to address municipal infrastructure problems.

United States officials raised the issue of Morocco's detention of journalists in meetings with government officials. United States-funded MEPI continued its support for several regional reform programs, including a regional program to strengthen the management and commercial base of independent media. Internews, an NGO funded by the U.S. Government, began a MEPI program for training journalists in Morocco and four other countries in the region.

Embassy officials raised civil liberties issues in discussions with Moroccan officials about Morocco's candidacy for the Millennium Challenge Account. The United States funded a regional judicial project with the American Bar Association (ABA) to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and to work with the judiciary to implement important reforms to the personal status code. The United States also funded ABA to establish legal education clinics in Morocco.

The International Visitors Program (IVP) brought to the United States several members of Moroccan NGOs, as well as government officials and activists in the fields of children's rights and child trafficking, labor rights, prison reform and women's rights. Sixteen Moroccans, including six

women, representing media, parliament and civil society, participated in IVP designed to introduce U.S. democratic institutions and values including federalism, labor unions and religious tolerance.

Over 90 Moroccan military officers received training in the rule of law and human rights while participating in International Military and Education Training (IMET) in the United States. The Embassy reviewed all candidates for compliance with the Leahy Amendment to ensure that none were implicated in human rights violations.

Four female political activists participated in the MEPI-funded Women's Regional Campaign School in Tunis. The United States funded three Moroccan NGOs working on women's and job skills training, youth education and reforms to the family code. The United States also funded the international NGO Global Rights to promote women's legal literacy and to help implement reforms to the family status code (Moudawana) as well as providing assistance to Human Rights Education Associates to help implement Moudawana reforms.

Senior U.S. officials maintained a dialogue with Moroccan officials on religious tolerance. Embassy officers facilitated meetings between visiting Christian and Jewish leaders and the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs.

For a second year, the U.S. Department of Labor provided funding to a consortium of Moroccan NGOs to end child labor, including developing appropriate laws against child labor and, in the interim, providing alternative educational programs for working children. In 2004, the United States also funded the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor of the International Labor Organization (ILO) to combat rural child labor in Morocco and to promote children's rights. The U.S. Government provided funding to the ILO to be the implementing agency for a second program to promote workers' rights through collective bargaining, conflict resolution and arbitration and to improve the ability of Moroccan labor inspectors to enforce the new Labor Code.

The Embassy and Consulate General also promoted awareness of the issues of child labor and trafficking in persons through regular meetings with NGOs and government officials. In December 2004, the United States approved new funds to support Morocco's new Department of Border Control and Surveillance and its efforts to combat trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy without elected representative institutions or political parties. In preparation for winter 2005 municipal elections, however, the Government began voter and candidate registration in November. The Government's human rights record remained poor; although there were improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained. Security forces continued to abuse detainees and prisoners, arbitrarily arrest and detain persons, and detain them incommunicado. Mutawwa'in (religious police) continued to intimidate, abuse and detain citizens and foreigners with impunity. Most trials were closed, and defendants usually had no legal counsel.

Increased press freedom continued, with open discussion of previously taboo subjects such as women's rights, political and economic reform, Mutawwa'in abuses, government corruption and some religious issues. The Government continued to hold meetings of the National Dialogue to address issues of political reform, religious tolerance and the role of women and youth in the country. Despite these developments, the Government routinely infringed upon privacy rights and continued to place some restrictions on freedom of speech and press. The Government restricted freedom of assembly, association, religion and movement. Violence against women and children, discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities and strict limitations on workers rights continued.

A newly registered human rights non-governmental organization (NGO) began to address human rights violations, such as prison conditions. Numerous foreign journalists were issued visas and permitted to travel and report freely within

the country. Journalists, however, were limited in their ability to criticize the religious police and question certain religious dogma. In October, the Government issued a law permitting long-term residents to apply for citizenship; as many as one million persons may be eligible for this program.

The United States continued to address democracy and human rights concerns in Saudi Arabia by urging the Government to increase political participation, transparency and accountability in government, rights for women, religious freedom and workers rights.

The United States continued to raise concerns about human rights at all levels of government, including in the Ambassador's meetings with senior government officials. United States officials highlight the need to improve human rights conditions, urging the Government to promote greater religious tolerance and support ongoing reform efforts. The Embassy raised these concerns directly with the Government whenever human rights violations occurred and met with representatives from the National Human Rights Association.

The United States encouraged and promoted press freedom in a number of ways. During 2004, two Saudi reporters were invited to the United States on Foreign Press Center programs on elections and on Arab-American and other minority communities. The Embassy facilitated contacts with American officials for several other Saudi reporters traveling privately, including a respected social affairs columnist who comments regularly on human rights issues.

Due to security concerns in Saudi Arabia, the Embassy was unable to conduct any formal training in journalism and again had to suspend or postpone a number of other planned programs. Through the International Visitors Program (IVP) and related programs, however, the United States sponsored individuals to go to U.S. seminars on key topics including multi-culturalism in a democratic society; women as leaders in the private and public sectors; the role of youth effecting social, political and economic change; and student leaders and civic responsibility. In Riyadh and Jeddah, a series of roundtable discussions, film showings

and telephone press conferences about the 2004 general election in the United States provided opportunities to discuss political freedoms with Saudi community leaders as well as journalists. In the third year of an important Saudi-specific initiative, ten educators participated in a special program on religious education in the United States, designed, among other things, to illustrate America's religious tolerance and diversity. American recipients of Fulbright scholarships were unable to come to Saudi Arabia because of security concerns, but Fulbright and IVP scholars from Saudi Arabia continued programs in the United States.

Representatives from the Government and private sector in Saudi Arabia participated in several Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) regional programs, including a workshop on media policy held in Abu Dhabi in October. A half-dozen young Saudi students attended MEPI-funded American studies programs that featured discussions of human rights. The United States provided International Military Education and Training Assistance for the Saudi military, which increased awareness of international norms of human rights and fostered greater respect for the principle of civilian control of the military and the rule of law. In compliance with the Leahy amendment, the Defense Attaché's Office worked closely with the Minister of Defense to vet military units for U.S. training and checked candidates with other embassy officers.

The Secretary of State added Saudi Arabia to its list of Countries of Particular Concern for severe violations of religious freedom. The United States encouraged Saudi officials to honor the Government's public commitment to permit and protect private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against religious minorities, and promote tolerance towards non-Muslims and Muslims who do not adhere to the official Salafist tradition of Islam. United States officials also continued to press the connection between religious intolerance and terrorism, with the Ambassador and Embassy officials continuing their call for increased respect for freedom of religion and tolerance of people of all faiths. The Ambassador protested raids on private homes and

the detention of Christian worshippers, calling on the Government to respect its publicly stated guarantee to protect non-Muslims' right to practice their faith in private. In addition, the United States sponsored the participation of Saudi Islamic educators and scholars in U.S. programs on religious life in America.

As noted in the 2004 Trafficking in Persons Report, the Government does not have an anti-trafficking law per se despite criminalization of most forms of trafficking under existing statutes. Domestic laborers were not protected under the country's labor law. The majority of cases involving trafficking were settled out of court by mediation and settlements.

To address U.S. concerns about such abuses, the Saudi Government began informational outreach to foreign workers this year, providing guidance on basic rights and legal resources against abuse both when the employee receives a visa to travel to Saudi Arabia and upon his/her arrival. The United States also urged the Government to promote public awareness regarding the treatment of domestic servants and continues to take steps to do so. The United States also encouraged NGO and private involvement and increasing public affairs efforts by the Government to highlight the dangers and vulnerabilities of trafficking in persons. Finally, the United States discussed long-term improvements in the status and legal rights of foreign laborers under Saudi labor law. Through engagement with Saudi officials, the Embassy has advocated better protection for foreign workers under the law and encouraged the investigation and prosecution of traffickers.

During the year, the Government acknowledged trafficking problems related to abuse of domestic servants, especially female expatriate workers. The press carried a number of stories on the abuse of maids and other domestic workers, including the prosecution and punishment of citizen employers who abused domestic employees.

The Government operated shelters in the three largest cities for abused female workers, including some trafficking victims, and in Dammam established a Social Welfare office to take complaints

from foreign workers. Trafficking victims, however, faced disincentives to seek the prosecution of their employer for trafficking and were required first to file a police report before going to a government shelter if they were party to a criminal complaint. The Government worked with several Islamic charities to provide long term care for abandoned children, including those who were trafficked and forced into begging. During the year, the authorities disrupted a cross-border (Yemen-Saudi Arabia) child smuggling ring; and the Governments of Saudi Arabia and Yemen have formed a joint committee to address the problem. Authorities also arrested a man on charges of smuggling maids into Jeddah to work for a brothel, the first documented case of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the country.

Syria

Syria's human rights record remained poor. The Government used its vast unchecked powers to prevent any organized political opposition, severely limiting civil society activities and anti-government manifestations. Hopes for a more open political life were stymied by the Government's continued repression of civil society groups, including the suppression of the stateless Kurdish minority and the arrest and detention for several months of human rights activist Aktham Naissa.

As a state sponsor of terrorism, Syria was ineligible for any economic assistance from the United States. The United States, however, encouraged the development of democracy and respect for human rights through bilateral discussions, regular contact with Syrian and international human rights and civil society advocates and public diplomacy programs designed to strengthen civil society and stimulate dialogue.

In an ongoing dialogue with Syria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on civil society and human rights issues, U.S. officials emphasized the importance of respecting human rights, including the freedoms of assembly, association, speech and press. United States officials also participated actively in an inter-embassy monitoring group that exchanged information on the human rights situation in Syria and coordinated responses and related programs.

The United States managed the majority of its democracy and human rights activities through public diplomacy channels, with programs including the distribution of paper and electronic copies of human rights reports in both English and Arabic. Annual reports posted on the Internet included the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, the International Religious Freedom Report, the Trafficking in Persons Report and the Supporting Human Rights and Democracy Report (the last only in English).

In March 2004, Najat Khalil, head of an American non-governmental organization (NGO), was invited to Syria to run a women's leadership training seminar. The United States gave 80 underprivileged secondary-school students in Aleppo and Damascus the opportunity to learn English and gain exposure to American social and political values through micro-scholarships provided by the U.S.-based NGO, America-Mideast Educational and Training Services. In addition, the Embassy regularly hosted lectures and seminars about human rights and democracy, including a February 2004 seminar on e-government and Internet resources attended by over 20 civil society activists.

The United States also maintained an active exchange program designed to expose Syrians to alternative viewpoints and encourage broader participation in civic society. Through the International Visitors Program, young Syrian journalists, academics, civil society leaders and others traveled to the United States to gain exposure to American colleagues and hone the skills needed to implement new ideas and reform in Syria. One of the 2004 program's highlights was a Damascus University professor's month-long investigation into the American political process, learning from the experiences and governance challenges of the cities of New Orleans, Charlotte, Washington D.C., San Diego, Kansas City and Rapid City, South Dakota. Additional exchange programs in 2004 ranged from teaching student leaders about civic responsibility to teaching them about the American political process.

The United States also explored ways, within the framework of existing restrictions on U.S. assistance and in light of the Syrian Accountability Act, to further Middle East Partnership Initiative program goals of encouraging political participation and the development of a dynamic and flourishing civil society in the country.

Tunisia

Tunisia's human rights record remained poor, and the Government continued to commit serious abuses; however, the Government continued to respect human rights in certain other areas. Paradoxically, Tunisia stood ahead of its regional neighbors on basic issues such as universal education, health care and the rights of women. However, its impressive gains in these fields were undercut by an authoritarian system of government, which exercised significant control over political participation and freedoms of expression, association, assembly and the press. The Government remained intolerant of public criticism and used a number of coercive methods to discourage criticism by human rights and opposition activists. Security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained individuals and tortured prisoners and detainees.

The U.S. Government's goal was to work with the Tunisian Government and civil society to increase the pace and substance of political, economic and human rights reforms. Toward this end, the Embassy maintained a regular and specific dialogue on human rights with all levels of the Government, monitored and reported factually on important events, stayed in contact with all elements of Tunisian civil society and media, and developed and tailored elements from the four pillars of the U.S. primary assistance program to Tunisia, the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) which has its regional office for North Africa in Tunis. In addition, the United States produces annual reports on human rights and international religious freedom that describe both the overall situation in the country and notable events from the previous year.

United States diplomatic initiatives in support of democracy and human rights had mixed results in 2004. Tunisia took the lead in passing the "Tunis Declaration," a resolution that called for regional reform at the Arab League Summit it hosted in May, and the Tunisian Government stopped blocking several international websites, including Amnesty International, Al Jazeera and Hotmail. However, the Tunisian Government invoked a variety of laws and regulations to selectively obstruct U.S. initiatives within the country. For example, it used a law on non-governmental organization (NGO) financing (originally aimed at preventing foreign Islamist groups from funding Tunisian NGOs) to block several programs that the U.S. Government funded indirectly, including an attempt by a U.S. NGO to train Tunisian election monitors prior to the Tunisian election. However, some U.S. NGOs conducted other programs successfully. Several MEPI programs were significantly delayed because of restrictions that the Tunisian Government imposed.

The United States pressed the Tunisian Government to match its notable social and economic progress with similarly bold steps toward human rights and political process reform. These initiatives built on a record of activities throughout the year that conveyed U.S. concerns regarding human rights, including demarches, opinion pieces in the local press, inquiries regarding specific cases and a bilateral human rights dialogue that the Embassy initiated with Tunisian officials. The Embassy continued to conduct a dialogue on human rights issues with representatives of several ministries of the Tunisian Government.

The Embassy took advantage of the proximity of the U.S. election to the October 24 Tunisian national elections to conduct a number of programs, including roundtables, films, speakers and an 800-person event on the U.S. election night, all of which enabled more than one thousand Tunisians to expand their perspectives on democracy. The United States also supported a July 2004 regional campaign school in Tunisia to train North African women to run for office.

The U.S. strategy included projects to strengthen civil society and its ability to influence and communicate with the Government. United States officials urged the Tunisian Government to liberalize registration and funding mechanisms for NGOs. The MEPI regional office in Tunis organized a conference on Leadership and Civic engagement for 42 Arab student leaders that included students from 11 countries, including six Tunisians.

The United States made use of exchange, cultural and professional programs. Under the International Visitors Program, 35 Tunisian rising stars in government, human rights, judicial reform, education and media visited the United States to meet their counterparts and gain exposure to U.S. perspectives. The Embassy brought high profile speakers to Tunisia to discuss issues related to human rights and democracy with Tunisian think tanks and university classes.

The United States sought to promote media independence and professionalism through weekly programs for Tunisian journalists and regular interaction with media professionals. The Embassy reserved its Information Resource Center (IRC) one morning per week for the exclusive use of journalists, granting them free access to a variety of research tools, including the Internet. One IRC official conducted outreach to journalists full-time, vastly increasing the numbers of journalists with direct access to International Information Programs and other U.S. sources of information. Embassy officials held regular meetings with their counterparts in the Tunisian Government, as well as representatives of the full range of Tunisian media. Nineteen Tunisian journalists attended programs to the United States, all of whom returned with greater insight into American culture and renewed appreciation of the value of a free press and freedom of expression.

As part of a regional grant, Internews a U.S. NGO agreed to provide three training sessions for Tunisian journalists during 2004. Internews succeeded in holding one such session in July 2004, at which it provided training on basic reporting skills for 16 young Tunisian journalists. Due to resistance on the part of the Tunisian Government and

difficulty in finding local partners willing to work with an American organization, Internews had to postpone the last two of the sessions until 2005.

To promote the rule of law and human rights awareness, the Embassy continued to provide support for the Common Law program at a Tunisian law school by identifying and sponsoring American professors to teach there as part of the curriculum. The United States continued to raise rule of law with Tunisian officials.

The United States obtained frequent placement of Embassy press releases, letters to the editor and op-eds written by the Ambassador and other State Department officials, many of which were related to the issues of human rights and reform.

In 2004, 87 Tunisian military personnel took part in U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET), which included course components encouraging respect for human rights and rule of law. The Embassy vetted Tunisian military participants in U.S. training programs to ensure that known human rights violators did not benefit from U.S. training.

Consistent with MEPI's mission to increase opportunities for women excluded by social, cultural and legal practices, MEPI's U.S. Business Internship Program provided 42 talented young Arab women (including two Tunisians) unique opportunities to learn management and business skills while working in the U.S. business environment beginning in August 2004. Another program called Project FAARE (Femmes du monde Arabe et d'Amérique Réunies pour Entreprendre) also brought together Tunisian and other Maghreb businesswomen with their American counterparts in 2004. The United States ensured active participation of Tunisian women in all MEPI programs, including the "Women and the Law" regional network.

Embassy officials maintained close contact with Muslim, Christian and Jewish religious groups and promoted exchanges designed to include exposure to U.S. traditions of religious tolerance and pluralism and helped organize a conference on religious tolerance.

Although trafficking in persons is not a significant problem in Tunisia, the Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation maintained links with and provided training and equipment to Tunisian border security forces to increase their ability to protect the country's borders. United States officials raised the issue with the Tunisian Government, local NGOs and international organizations working on the issue.

West Bank and Gaza

The violence and terrorism sparked by the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the Palestinian uprising that began in September 2000, continued to claim the lives of hundreds of Palestinians and Israelis residing in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Israel during 2004. Palestinian terrorist attacks within Israel continued, including bombings that claimed scores of Israeli civilians. Israeli security forces killed at least 800 Palestinians, including armed militants engaged in violence as well as some unarmed civilians. Israel launched several large-scale military operations into the Gaza Strip during 2004 in response to terrorist activities including the firing of rockets and mortars against settlements in Gaza and towns in Israel. These operations resulted in the deaths of unarmed civilians and the destruction of hundreds of housing units that left several thousand Palestinians homeless. Members of the Israeli security forces committed numerous, serious abuses.

The overall human rights record of the Palestinian Authority (PA) remained poor, and it continued to commit numerous, serious abuses. Many members of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, associated with the Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), conducted violent attacks against Israeli civilians, soldiers and foreign nationals. Palestinian militants targeted Israeli settlers in drive-by shootings and ambushes, suicide and other bombings, mortar and rocket attacks and armed attacks on settlements and military bases. The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) continued to fire rockets and mortars at Israelis living in the Gaza Strip and in Israel, resulting in numerous casualties. Palestinians killed at least 47 Israelis (Israeli Defense Forces soldiers and civilian settlers) and three foreign workers in the



Jericho, West Bank

An elderly Palestinian woman looks for her name on a voter list during municipal elections.

occupied territories during the year. Palestinian militants also killed 67 Israelis (61 civilians and six soldiers) and one foreign national within Israel. Palestinians acting individually or in association with militant groups killed at least 18 Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israel.

Despite ongoing violence, significant political developments during the final quarter of 2004 increased the prospects for de-escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2005. On November 11, PA Chairman Yasser Arafat died in a Paris hospital following a brief illness. His death was followed by an orderly transition with the Palestinian presidential election on January 9. Mahmud Abbas, who had briefly served as prime minister in 2003, won election to the presidency in an election that domestic and international observers said

was generally free and fair. Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections are scheduled for July 17, marking the first elections for the Palestinian legislature since 1996. The PA also conducted municipal elections in 26 West Bank localities on December 23, marking the first time since 1976 that local elections have taken place in the occupied territories. Additional municipal elections took place on January 27 in 10 localities in the Gaza Strip, and future rounds of municipal elections are scheduled in spring and summer 2005.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for the West Bank and Gaza centers on the realization of President Bush's vision of two states living in peace and security. This strategy rests on ending the violence, fighting terrorism, restarting a political process between the two sides to resolve the conflict, and establishing an independent, democratic Palestinian state. United States democracy and governance programs operated under difficult security conditions, including frequent closures

and curfews throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In August and September, in response to an urgent request from the Palestinian Central Elections Commission (CEC), the United States supported the deployment of a National Democratic Institute (NDI) voter registration observation mission. A team of approximately 15 seasoned election observers monitored logistical preparations and the registration process in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which helped build public and international confidence in electoral preparations. After the first round of registration in October, the team's interim report praised the CEC technical preparations and handling of the voter registration process.

United States technical support also contributed to an important draft election law, which will lay the foundation for democratic parliamentary elections in July 2005. The United States provided technical assistance to the PLC Legal Committee in its draft-



Jenin, West Bank

Palestinians wait to vote in municipal elections.

AP Photo

ing of a modern election law that will support the development of high quality legislation for parliamentary and presidential elections. A U.S.-sponsored workshop held outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip for legislation drafters, expert advisers and political actors produced a draft elections law for consideration by the PLC. The United States provided additional technical and commodity assistance to the CEC including support from expert international advisors on voter education and public relations and assistance to the CEC's Media Center prior to, and on, election day. A number of rapid response grants supported domestic observer training and voter education efforts.

The United States also provided critical support for the January 9, 2005 presidential election, funding an international election observation effort implemented by NDI in conjunction with the Carter Center. Led by former President Jimmy Carter, the delegation included approximately 80 American and international observers. With U.S. support, the International Republican Institute conducted exit polling on January 9 in coordination with the Development Studies Program at Birzeit University. United States material and technical assistance to the CEC, paired with election-related civil society programming and international observation efforts, contributed significantly to the successful Palestinian Authority presidential election.

Bolstered by U.S. technical assistance, the PLC played a key role in advancing and encouraging Palestinian institutional reform efforts during the year. After a PLC review of the 2004 PA budget, the Council commissioned a public investigation into costly Gaza electricity outlays and streamlined its own budgetary review and analysis process. Advanced training supported by the United States enhanced the analytical skills of Council budget staff, and U.S.-funded upgrades to the Council's information technology infrastructure allowed improvements to a video-conferencing system connecting PLC branches in Ramallah and Gaza city. A U.S.-funded Digital Congress Network/Hansard system captured PLC debate and deliberation for public access and review. Video-conferencing, supported by the United



Silwad near the West Bank of Ramallah

A Palestinian woman waits for her turn to vote in municipal elections. Behind her are voting instruction posters.

AP Photo

States, represented the primary means through which the PLC conducted business between the West Bank and Gaza.

Legislative and other institutional development programs worked to consolidate gains made since 1996, strengthening core Palestinian democratic institutions. Visible, although modest, results were achieved in strengthening the Palestinian judiciary, in sustaining PLC operations and oversight of the Executive Branch, and in technical support to developing key pieces of draft legislation.

The United States supported key reform-related activities in the rule of law arena through the final year of its current program. The U.S.-funded initiative completed its rehabilitation, automation and modernization efforts in a total of 13



Ramallah, West Bank

Palestinians prepare voting materials at Palestinian Election Commission.

Palestinian courts and seven offices of the PA Attorney General in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These courts and offices are now able to process cases more swiftly and efficiently, compile and store records more safely, and administer justice more effectively. United States support to the Palestinian Judicial Education Committee laid a foundation for the Judicial Training Institute, the central judicial training and education institution of the PA. The two Alternative Dispute Resolution centers established by the project forged exclusive agreements with six major Palestinian companies and professional associations to handle all arbitration and mediation business. The United States also mobilized two new programs in 2004. The first assisted legal professionals, strengthened law schools, and built public and professional support for judicial reform; the second program provided continuing judicial and prosecutorial education.

United States work with Palestinian civil society achieved demonstrable results during the year, engaging NGOs in the democratic process and supporting their efforts to represent and integrate marginalized groups such as women, children and the disabled. The Consulate General and Embassy hosted speakers and video conferences on political participation by women and youth, sponsored Palestinian participation in international conferences addressing rule of law and democratization, and provided books and other publications on human rights and democracy in Arabic and English to local schools, libraries, government officials and other contacts. Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are regular participants in the Salzburg Seminar, International Visitors Program and Fulbright Summer Institute, which focus on democracy and human rights topics. In December, the Embassy's Gaza Program Office opened a digital video conference site in Gaza City that will reach a broader audience on elections and democratic reform.

A five-year United States Civil Society and Democracy Strengthening project known as Tamkeen — “empowerment” in Arabic — supports 98 civil society organizations (CSOs) promoting human rights and the rule of law. Despite a politically-charged working environment, Tamkeen succeeded in identifying new, alternative

CSO partners, supporting key Palestinian "think tanks" that undertook important public opinion surveys, promoted policy and legislative changes, and organized grassroots forums designed to determine the needs and priorities of Palestinian citizens. In partnership with the US-based Advocacy Institute, Tamkeen also delivered high-quality advanced advocacy training for a core group of Palestinian CSO leaders, helping them form a network of advocacy practitioners from a broad cross-section of medium-sized CSOs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Civil Society Empowerment initiative supported a series of workshops that strengthened the analytical, communications, planning and management skills of approximately 70 mid-career Palestinian professionals. A second project component, "Promoting Good Governance," attracted approximately 200 participants, of whom one-third were women.

The Moderate Voices initiative, extended for an additional 18 months during 2004, promoted non-violent conflict resolution through a combination of sub-grants and technical assistance to select Palestinian NGOs. These NGOs promoted a Palestinian-Israeli policy dialogue, created new classroom tools and aids for Palestinian teachers in the field of conflict resolution, and equipped journalists with new skills for addressing conflict-related themes in their work.

Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) small grants for the West Bank included a project in Ramallah designed to increase voter-education activities among village women and conduct candidate training. A second MEPI small grant trained Palestinian NGO leaders to analyze the national and local budgeting process to advocate for increased promotion of rights.

The United States also supported special projects to promote human rights, tolerance and conflict resolution skills among Palestinian refugee children. Through a multi-year grant to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which holds responsibility for primary education for approximately 250,000 registered Palestinian refugee youths in Gaza and the West Bank, the United States is introducing supplementary educational materials and peer mediation

training. During the year, all UNRWA schools in the West Bank and Gaza started using U.S.-funded illustrated storybooks that introduced human rights and tolerance concepts in grades five-nine, as well as related worksheets that link human rights and tolerance concepts to various parts of the Palestinian curriculum.

United States officials continued to raise with the Government of Israel concerns about the effect of the security barrier on religious liberty, especially for Muslims and Christians, and urged the Government of Israel to take religious freedom into account in deciding the route of the security barrier. Of particular concern is the negative impact of the barrier on access to Muslim and Christian places of worship, holy sites and religious institutions that provide educational opportunities, health care, social services and humanitarian relief. The confiscation of religious property due to barrier construction and surrounding security zones remains a significant problem.

Yemen

Yemen is a republic with an active bicameral legislature. An elected President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, an elected 301-seat House of Representatives and an appointed 111-member Shura Council share constitutional power.

During 2004, there was a marked increase in restrictions on freedom of speech and of the press. Security forces continued to arbitrarily arrest, detain and torture persons, and in many cases the Government failed to hold members of the security forces accountable for abuses. The number of security officials tried for abuses, however, increased for a second consecutive year. Prison conditions remained poor, although the Government took some steps to alleviate the situation and is negotiating terms for prison access by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Despite constitutional prohibitions, political security officers routinely monitored citizens' activities, searched their homes, detained citizens for questioning and mistreated detainees. Prolonged pretrial detention, judicial corruption and executive interference also undermined due

process. The Government at times limited freedom of assembly, imposed some restrictions on freedom of religion and placed some limits on freedom of movement. Violence and discrimination against women remained problems, and female genital mutilation was practiced on a limited scale. There was some discrimination against persons with disabilities and against religious, racial and ethnic minorities. The Government imposed restrictions on labor unions, and child labor was a problem.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy addressed the need for the Government of Yemen to improve both its human rights record and the administration of justice, and to enact social reforms that strengthen civil society, give women a greater voice in their own government, and further the country's democratic development. The United States continued to support several long-term projects targeting these issues by strengthening Yemen's political parties, improving elections administration, increasing voter participation, strengthening civil society and improving the Government's respect for the human rights of its citizens. The United States supported Yemen's efforts, as one of the three organizing countries in the regional Democracy Assistance Dialogue fostered by the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative, to mobilize regional governments and civil society to implement core democratic principles and reforms.

In 2003, USAID re-opened its offices in Yemen, with a focus on strengthening democratic institutions. In 2004, the United States increased its support to projects to strengthen democratic institutions, decentralize authority and resource management in government, and expand opportunities for civil society in decision-making. The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which works to support a forward strategy for freedom throughout the Middle East, provided a variety of programs in Yemen for legislative strengthening, elections assistance and civic education, including a program to reduce the current 67 percent illiteracy rate among women and girls. In addition, both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from Yemen have participated in numerous MEPI regional programs.

In 2004, MEPI and USAID began two key programs to support democracy and human rights in Yemen. The Strengthening Parliamentary Institutions program worked to strengthen core skills of parliamentarians, including constituent outreach and executive oversight functions, as well as establish a new parliamentary resource center to provide information needed for more responsive legislation. The United States also supported the UN Development Program to Support Decentralization and Local Development in Yemen, providing funding over a two-year period to improve the capacity of local councils and promote decentralization and efficiency in government. In February 2004, nine Yemeni women participated in the MEPI Regional Women's Campaign Initiative to encourage women's political party participation. As part of a MEPI "Democratic Strengthening" grant, National Democratic Institute Yemen is also working with women to encourage appropriate legal reforms and ensure women's full participation in government. The United States continued its support to several long-term projects aimed at strengthening Yemen's political parties, improving election administration, increasing voter participation, fostering civil society and improving the Government's human rights performance.

In Yemen, the judicial system coexists with traditional means of dispute resolution, such as tribal mediation. Significant problems with the formal court system remained, including corruption and tampering by the executive branch, inefficiency in administration, a lack of access for women, and a failure by authorities to enforce court rulings. The Government took some preliminary steps to improve the situation, announcing in December 2004 an overhaul of the judiciary designed to counter judicial corruption in conjunction with a ten-year reform project promoting a more efficient judiciary.

The United States increased its engagement with NGOs and religious groups in 2004, encouraging civil society organizations in Yemen to take a leading role in reform of their country's political and social institutions. One 2004 NGO project taught children about participation in government, and has proven very successful in raising democratic

awareness. Another project, with a focus on basic economic development, aimed to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs and community groups in a rural, underdeveloped governorate. Several projects worked to improve rights for Yemeni women, who remained politically and socially marginalized, with limited local and national political representation despite high rates of voter participation. Of particular concern was the restricted access of women to healthcare and education, as well as widespread reports of domestic abuse and some incidents of female genital mutilation. As part of an initiative between USAID and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the United States established a project to build and furnish new primary schools for girls in isolated, rural areas to broaden female access to modern education and to facilitate their inclusion within society. Concentrating on underserved women and girls, literacy and school renovation programs helped alleviate poverty and promote equality and democracy. Embassy officers, including the Ambassador, also met periodically with representatives of minority religious communities.

The United States urged the Government to enact social reforms, encourage respect for human rights and foster democratic development at the highest levels. For example, in February 2004, National Security Council officials raised democracy and human rights concerns directly with the Foreign Minister. The Ambassador and other senior-level officials engaged frequently with the Ministry of Human Rights to improve the Government's ability and willingness to redress specific human rights abuses. United States officials raised the issue of corruption at the highest levels, noting the importance of transparency and good governance in relation to Millennium Challenge Account eligibility.

United States International Military Education and Training assistance for the Yemeni military, with 25 participants in 2004, addressed awareness of international norms of human rights and fostered greater respect for the principle of civilian control of the military and the rule of law. In compliance with the Leahy Amendment, U.S. officials worked closely with the Ministries of Defense and Interior to vet units for U.S. training. The Defense

Department Counter-Terrorism Fellowship funded a training program for Yemeni military officers on the importance of respecting human rights. The ongoing project, which offers training to Ministry of Interior and Defense civilians and security forces alike, has been highly successful.

Reports of children trafficked within Yemen for child labor and to Saudi Arabia for begging continued. Reports also indicated that an increasing number of Iraqi women and girls were trafficked into Yemen for prostitution. Because trafficking was relatively new in Yemen, no surveys or reports were available on the scope and magnitude of the problem. The Ministry of Human Rights issued a public statement and dedicated resources to fight trafficking, and the Governments of Yemen and Saudi Arabia formed a joint committee to combat the practice.

In 2004, International Visitors Programs brought 22 NGO activists, government officials and other leaders to the United States to gain skills and knowledge in such areas as NGO management, youth leadership, women's leadership in the political process, rule of law, judicial reform and accountability in government.

