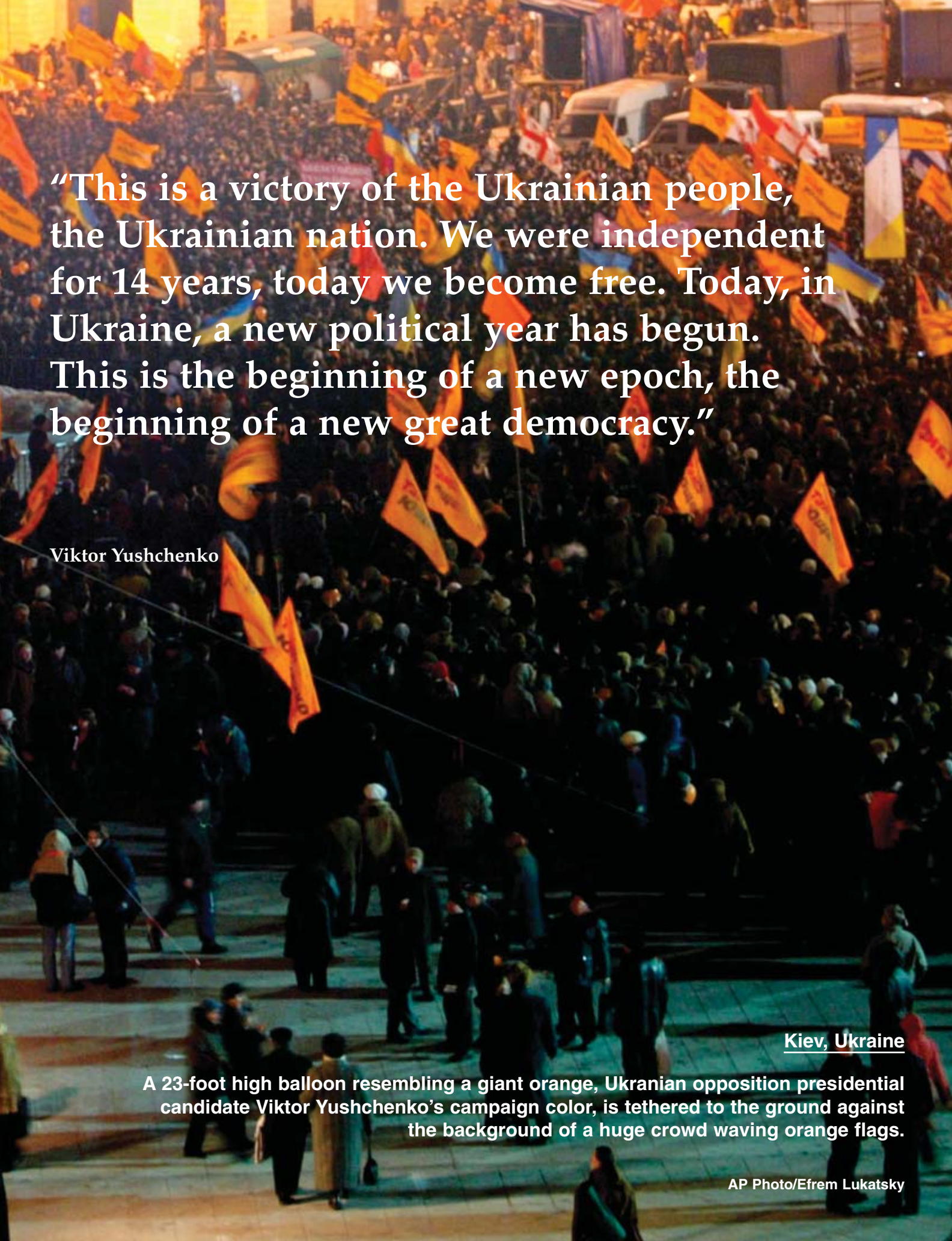


Europe and Eurasia





“This is a victory of the Ukrainian people, the Ukrainian nation. We were independent for 14 years, today we become free. Today, in Ukraine, a new political year has begun. This is the beginning of a new epoch, the beginning of a new great democracy.”

Viktor Yushchenko

Kiev, Ukraine

A 23-foot high balloon resembling a giant orange, Ukrainian opposition presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko’s campaign color, is tethered to the ground against the background of a huge crowd waving orange flags.

AP Photo/Efrem Lukatsky

Through diplomacy and targeted assistance, the United States showed its commitment to promoting democratic reform and respect for human rights in Europe and Eurasia in 2004. The United States encouraged dialogue between governments, independent and opposition political parties, and civil society and provided non-partisan capacity-building support to create an environment conducive to the development of democratic institutions. In keeping with the President's policy of helping others attain their own freedom, the U.S. strategy in the region was based on identifying and supporting local reform initiatives.

United States programs to foster elections that meet international standards relied on local initiatives to educate voters, increase voter participation and monitor the electoral process. These programs laid the groundwork for transparent and credible elections by providing non-partisan technical assistance in support of electoral processes. The United States also promoted the development of election laws and accountability for electoral fraud. Strengthening democratic institutions, including legislatures, courts and municipal governments, was central to the U.S. strategy. The United States advocated for government transparency and supported efforts to combat corruption. When the presidential election in Ukraine was marred by widespread fraud and abuse, hundreds of thousands of peaceful demonstrators took to the streets. While Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" was a positive development, several governments in the region continued to ignore their obligations to comply with international democracy and human rights norms.

Civil society development in some countries made great strides, though governments in Central Asia and Belarus increasingly restricted the activities of international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The United States urged the repeal of onerous laws and regulations restricting the freedom of NGOs, repeatedly raising concerns about the treatment of NGOs with host governments. The U.S. Congress' passage of the Belarus Democracy Act, which calls for an immediate end to the Government of Belarus' persistent assault on democracy and human rights and continued U.S. support for local defenders of liberty, demonstrated the depth of U.S. concern for freedom in Belarus. Throughout the region, U.S. support to local organizations encouraged civic leadership and citizens' participation. By focusing special attention on working with youth, U.S. programs provided the next generation of leaders with important tools to promote democracy and human rights at home.

Fostering independent media and free access to information were priorities for U.S. policy across the region. The United States advocated for repeal of flawed laws or restrictive regulations that hinder independent media. The United States engaged representatives of the independent media, supported journalists willing to report the truth, and exposed promising professionals to modern best practices. Focusing on training, production assistance, equipment grants and media management, U.S. assistance helped improve the quality and objectivity of reporting and media business practices. Facilitating access to the Internet and nonofficial sources of information in several societies where most media is state-controlled was also a priority.

In countries where the human rights records remained poor, U.S. policy emphasized the importance of bringing legislation and practice into line with international standards and ensuring respect for rule of law and human rights. Combating torture remained a top concern. The United States worked with victims' families, local human rights workers and defense attorney, and international NGOs to investigate allegations of torture and raise them with senior host government officials. Uzbekistan took some notable steps to combat torture, and U.S. support for efforts to investigate suspicious deaths in custody bolstered the principle of accountability. The United States urged Russia to ensure accountability for human rights abuses in Chechnya. In cooperation with the EU, the United States imposed travel restrictions on Belarusian officials responsible for human rights abuses.

In this religiously diverse region, the United States monitored and advocated on behalf of religious freedom and emphasized the importance of tolerance as essential to security and stability. United States programs supported interfaith dialogues and the development of curricula to foster religious tolerance. International Visitors Programs exposed local leaders to the diversity of religious practice in the United States.

Support for legislation and public education was an essential component of the U.S. strategy to combat trafficking in persons in the region. The United States supported training for law enforcement, immigration and consular officials and prosecutors to prevent trafficking and strengthen the capacity to prosecute traffickers. Regional projects were also important in addressing trafficking. The United States supported training and trans-border activities for Moldovan law enforcement agencies. In Ukraine, U.S. funding assisted trafficking victims and supported information hotlines.

Ukrainian Election Observers

In late 2004, the Ukrainian people's courage and determination spearheaded the peaceful "Orange Revolution" that significantly advanced liberty in Ukraine and buoyed pro-democracy supporters worldwide. In order to promote a free and fair presidential election scheduled for the fall of 2004, the United States funded an unprecedented number of international observers through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO) - an association of election monitoring non-governmental organizations from Europe and Eurasia - and domestic observers, including the Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU), who were deployed in all regions of Ukraine for each electoral round. In total, the OSCE deployed some 2,500 monitors, ENEMO approximately 2,000, and CVU about 30,000 for the three rounds of the presidential election. Their actions, reports and statements helped inspire thousands of Ukrainians to stand up for democracy despite substantial government intimidation and severe winter weather.

The first round of balloting on October 31 was plagued by numerous problems and irregularities and was considered a step backwards, as detailed in the reports by the OSCE, ENEMO and CVU. The second round on November 21, a run-off between Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich and opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko, featured even greater and more widespread fraud, intimidation and abuse of administrative resources. International and domestic observer teams immediately publicized thorough, credible reports indicating the extent to which the election was manipulated. The Ukrainian people and the international community drew from these reports to form their opinions of the election. For example, presidential envoy Senator Richard Lugar's statement on the election noted that there was "a concerted and forceful program of election day fraud and abuse...with either the leadership or cooperation of the governmental authorities." Similarly, ENEMO's statement observed that there was "a coordinated, systematic pattern of major violations leading to an outcome that does not reflect the will of the Ukrainian people."

These reports contrasted sharply with the November 22 announcement of the preliminary results by the Ukrainian Central Election Commission (CEC), which claimed Yanukovich was in the lead. Fueled by credible domestic and international observers' reports of abuse and fraud, Yushchenko supporters began pouring into the streets of Kiev and other cities wearing orange ribbons and scarves, the campaign color of the opposition, to peacefully protest the fraud. These reports also prompted the United States and other members of the international community to refuse to accept the results of the November 21 vote as legitimate. This further buoyed demonstrators in the streets, particularly in Kiev where they eventually numbered in the hundreds of thousands, despite sub-zero wind chill temperatures and heavy snowfall. A number of municipal and regional councils in western Ukraine declared Yushchenko the rightful president. Many government officials from various institutions declared their allegiance to the opposition. The documented reports of election fraud and abuse prompted the Ukrainian Supreme Court to invalidate the results of the November 21 vote and order a repeat run-off to be held on December 26. Tens of thousands of demonstrators remained in Kiev.

Despite some irregularities, the December 26 re-vote of the second round was a great improvement. According to the OSCE, the election "brought Ukraine substantially closer to meeting OSCE election commitments and Council of Europe and other European standards." Ukraine's reformed CEC recognized the elections as valid, as did ENEMO. The final results showed Yushchenko winning with approximately 52 percent of the vote to Yanukovich's 44 percent and gave the Ukrainian people a president selected by their own free will.

Albania

Albania is a republic with a multiparty parliament that elected Prime Minister Fatos Nano and President Alfred Moisiu. International observers judged the October 2003 local elections to be an improvement over previous elections, despite isolated irregularities, violence and problems with voter lists. Political interference in the media occurred less frequently than in previous years. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, corruption and political pressure limited the judiciary's ability to function efficiently. Albania's progress on promoting the rule of law and respect for human rights was hindered to varying degrees by corruption, weak institutional capacity and the lack of a democratic tradition.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were serious problems. There were a number of documented cases in which police beat and abused suspects, detainees and prisoners. Prison conditions remained poor. The police occasionally arbitrarily arrested and detained persons. Prolonged pretrial detention and official impunity were problems. The Government occasionally infringed on citizens' privacy rights. Police reportedly used excessive force against protestors. Individual vigilante action, mostly related to traditional blood feuds, resulted in some killings and an atmosphere of fear in some regions. Societal discrimination against Roma, the Egyptian community and homosexuals persisted; violence and discrimination against women and children were serious problems. Child labor was a problem. Trafficking in persons (TIP) remained a problem, which the Government took some steps to address.

The U.S. strategy for promoting democracy and human rights focused on encouraging Albania to implement the necessary reforms to join Euro-Atlantic institutions and supporting Albania's contribution to fighting terrorism worldwide. In particular, the United States focused on improving election administration and transparency, expanding citizen involvement in public affairs, strengthening legislative and civil institutions, including

independent media, and improving the Government's capacity to fight crime (especially organized crime), corruption and TIP. The United States sent various government officials and non-governmental representatives on International Visitors Programs in 2004 to learn more about combating trafficking, grassroots democracy, religious tolerance/mutual understanding, financial crime and money laundering, court administration, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), election administration and monitoring, and state and local government. The United States funded local organizations' initiatives on anti-trafficking, anti-corruption, independent media, civic education and participation in governance processes.

Some key successes included passage of landmark laws - all with strong U.S. support - addressing organized crime, terrorism financing, witness protection, investigative techniques and technical assistance to new government offices aimed at implementing 2003 laws requiring the disclosure of assets by public officials and establishing a modern anti-money-laundering system. The Albanian Government also had some success in convicting officials and police on charges of abuse of office and in holding traffickers accountable. Citizens' advocacy groups supported by the United States played a greater role in speaking out against government corruption and mismanagement.

The United States actively engaged in promoting democratic elections in Albania. The United States consistently urged the Albanian Government to create the conditions for democratic parliamentary elections in 2005. The United States also provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization, the Central Election Commission and municipal governments in many aspects of election processes, such as voter registration, preparation of accurate voter lists, spatial mapping of polling districts and updating civil registries. Officials from the U.S. Government coordinated election assistance with other donors, including the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, and many bilateral and multilateral donor organizations. The United States established framework agree-

ments for the deployment of a large-scale, domestic election monitoring effort for the 2005 parliamentary elections. Officials from the U.S. Government encouraged political party leaders and members of parliament to endorse the agreements and implement fully the country's new election law.

Peace Corps volunteers from the United States worked with municipal governments and local communities throughout Albania to make government more transparent and accountable. Peace Corps efforts contributed to increased civic participation and enhanced government capacity. The Peace Corps also encouraged local governments, NGOs and businesses to work together to improve their communities.

The United States opened two American Corners to make information available to Albanians about human rights, democracy and other topics. In public and private, the United States consistently stressed to Albanian officials the importance of media freedom. The United States funded local and U.S.-based training and exchange programs to help increase professionalism in the media and enhance its watchdog role. Programs also sought to help media increase financial independence and transparency. Albanian media expanded coverage of "Hapur," an exposé-style investigative news show produced with U.S. support.

Corruption and weak rule of law remained among the greatest obstacles to promoting human rights and democracy in Albania. Officials from the U.S. Government used every opportunity to emphasize to the Albanian authorities and people the need to strengthen the rule of law. The United States funded anti-corruption initiatives, including the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption, an umbrella organization representing 210 NGOs and individuals involved in the fight against corruption. The United States also supported the Citizens' Advocacy Office, an NGO offering legal assistance to private citizens who were victims of corruption. The result was an unprecedented level of cooperation between the Government and civil society on corruption resulting in improved transparency and accountability for central and local government activities.

The United States supported the creation and training of the Organized Crime Task Force (OCTF), launched in March 2004, which brings together an elite group of police and prosecutors to fight organized crime and corruption. The OCTF is an important component of the Court of Serious Crimes Prosecution Office. As a result of U.S. training programs for judges and prosecutors, the climate for successful prosecutions of previously "untouchable" criminals improved. Four judges, as well as over 200 judicial and penal system officials, were dismissed for abuse of office or failure to perform their duties. Anti-crime and corruption efforts were bolstered by the ongoing implementation of a large and comprehensive Total Information Management System, a sophisticated tool to better control border activity, manage and investigate criminal cases, and utilize police information more effectively and efficiently.

In the area of law enforcement, the U.S. International Criminal Investigative Training and Assistance Program (ICITAP) continued development, training and equipment support for the Office of Internal Control (OIC) in the Ministry of Public Order. The OIC investigates internal corruption and aims to build a more professional police force. In 2004, ICITAP also provided support to the Albania State Police to develop merit-based human resource management, improved administrative regulations and training initiatives to enhance staff capabilities and professionalism.

The United States is a member of the steering committee of the International Consortium (IC), an informal coordinating mechanism for the many international donors who are supporting legal reform efforts in Albania. The United States funds the IC secretariat. Advisors from ICITAP and the U.S. Department of Justice's resident legal advisor chaired several of the IC's working groups which focus on legal and justice reform, law enforcement training and information technology. The United States also participated in working groups that addressed community policing, crime prevention, integrated border management and organized crime.

Through the Expanded International Military Education and Training (E-IMET) program and

Counter Terrorism Fellowship Programs, the United States sent 52 regular and non-commissioned officers and 13 students to the United States to receive military as well as human rights, democracy and civics training. Through the U.S.-funded E-IMET program, the U.S. Defense Institute for International Legal Studies conducted in-country seminars to help prepare the Albanian Government to combat terrorism and promote legal policies and standards that uphold democratic values in governmental and civic institutions. Both seminars had strong human rights and democracy building in public agencies components. The seminars trained 90 Albanian civilian and military professionals from a broad range of agencies. In total, U.S security assistance programs trained 142 Albanians in democracy, civilian control over the military and human rights in 2004. All training and exchange program participants were vetted, consistent with Leahy Amendment requirements, to ensure that they were not responsible for human rights violations.

As part of the U.S. effort to promote religious freedom in Albania, U.S. officials urged the Government to resolve outstanding religious property claims and return church property to the denominations that lost them under communist rule. Officials from the United States, including the Chief of Mission, met frequently with the heads of the major religious communities in the country. A U.S.-supported civic and faith-based education project was launched to develop ways to introduce civics into religious school curricula. The United States provided grants to local organizations to promote interfaith tolerance and understanding and to support the teaching of civic affairs and religious tolerance in secondary schools, including schools operated by faith-based organizations. During 2004, faith-based organizations received U.S.-funded community development training, and small grants were designed to facilitate the design and implementation of development projects that benefit the entire community, regardless of faith orientation.

The United States also supported a series of roundtable discussions on religious tolerance in local communities. A follow-on U.S. grant entitled "Tolerance Days in Religious Schools" helped secu-

lar and religious community leaders, government officials and others explore how to strengthen mutual understanding among faiths.

In May 2004, the United States launched a two and a half year project on fostering religious tolerance entitled "Fostering Religious Harmony in Albania." Through training workshops, religious leaders became equipped with the tools and skills they need to manage conflict among their own members and interact more constructively with other religious groups. Public forums and innovative techniques, such as community drama, helped citizens articulate the problems they are facing and work towards common solutions. Journalists, academics, and other voices in society played a critical role in this project.

Officials from the United States continued to engage actively with the Albanian Government to fight TIP bilaterally as well as regionally, via the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative Center and the Stability Pact. The United States helped Albanian authorities in the implementation of their National Strategy Against Trafficking and in meeting the standards stipulated in the Trafficking Victims' Protection Act. The United States funded the Albanian Citizens' Advocacy Office, which provided legal services to victims of trafficking as well as legal education to citizens and local governments. Programs supported by the U.S. Government promoted the strengthening of women's legal rights as they relate to trafficking, domestic violence and the new Albanian family code.

The United States funded programs designed to prevent trafficking by providing legitimate employment and economic opportunities to trafficking victims and women and girls at risk. These projects trained 330 women from rural and economically disadvantaged areas in job skills and business development. The United States funded the launch and implementation of a program to strengthen the capacity of civil society to provide services to trafficking victims with a focus on prevention, reintegration, coordination and NGO capacity building. A U.S.-funded program, the Transnational Action Against Child Trafficking (TACT) strengthened its partnerships with Greek

and Italian anti-trafficking NGOs and more than doubled its nationwide efforts to decrease the trafficking of children along five axes of intervention: prevention, protection, assisted voluntary return, reintegration and coordination. Responding to the threat of increased trafficking of children due to the large tourist market expected to attend the Athens 2004 Olympic Games, the United States provided additional resources to help TACT monitor and take preventive action to reduce the trafficking of children prior to, during and immediately following the Games. The U.S. Government's efforts to improve security and control at ports of entry in turn helped combat trafficking in persons. Complementary efforts included U.S. assistance to Albania's organized crime directorate and the specialized OCTF to fight organized crime, which is responsible for the majority of trafficking enterprises.

Armenia

The Government's human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained. The president, who is directly elected, has extensive powers that are not checked by the legislature or judiciary. Recent elections – including the controversial 2003 presidential election – have not met international standards. There were some limits on freedom of assembly, the media and religious freedom. However, in a positive step toward religious freedom, the Government registered the Jehovah's Witnesses. Judges remained subject to pressure from the executive branch and corruption was a problem. Some members of the security forces committed a number of human rights abuses. Security forces beat pretrial detainees, and impunity remained a problem. There were instances of arbitrary arrests and detentions. In April, police used excessive force to disperse an opposition rally, detained opposition politicians and raided opposition party offices. The Government's assistance with the creation of a civilian prison monitoring board and decision to permit independent monitoring of prison conditions were positive developments. While the Government took steps to limit trafficking in persons, violence against women and trafficking of

women and children remained problems. The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy focused on the promotion of democratic institutions and processes, the development of a vibrant civil society, fundamental freedoms, rule of law, human rights and anti-trafficking measures. United States officials regularly met with Armenian government officials, parliamentary opposition leaders, religious minorities and human rights activists regarding these issues. In 2004, the United States sent two high-level State Department officials to Armenia who engaged leaders on a variety of human rights issues. United States officials raised human rights concerns during all high-level encounters with Armenian officials, including during the meetings of the U.S.-Armenia Task Force in May and October. The Embassy hosted numerous representational events and roundtables during the year to raise awareness and encourage dialogue in support of these objectives.

To promote democratic institutions and processes, the United States supported programs designed to strengthen the separation of powers. Toward that end, the United States funded programs in Armenia to augment the national legislative abilities to respond to citizen concerns. The Armenian National Assembly provided its members with information they previously lacked, such as drafts of past legislation and non-governmental organization (NGO) literature. The United States helped the National Assembly's Control Chamber to improve legislative oversight of the national budget and helped the Government improve the published budget. The United States helped Armenian citizens access information on pending legislation. With U.S. support and encouragement, the National Assembly improved its transparency by holding committee hearings, publishing draft laws in newspaper inserts and developing a tracking system for citizen inquiries and communications. The program also provided citizens with information about the National Assembly through the creation of a website and publication and dissemination of draft legislation.

The United States targeted its assistance to expand civic participation, strengthen institutions of governance, and empower citizens to hold govern-

ment accountable by encouraging laws and policies needed to create a democratic governance framework in Armenia. United States-funded programs helped local governments improve internal management systems, implement transition reforms, strengthen oversight and fiscal responsibilities and increase public accessibility and accountability.

With U.S. help, more than 13,000 people participated in 240 town hall meetings to discuss citizen concerns with community leaders. In more than 660 dialogue groups held around the country, citizens discussed the law on the legal status of property, community schools, privatization, community development and apartment building administration, among other issues. The impact of these programs was reflected in the concrete actions taken by initiative groups that formed as a result of the dialogues. Successful efforts included renovation of a local state college and establishment of a library fund for the college, legalization of supplementary constructions by building residents and improvements in the sanitary situation in communities. Through these programs, citizens created tangible improvements in their communities by engaging in democratic processes at the local level.

To promote the development of a vibrant civil society, the United States gave grants and technical assistance to advocacy NGOs and continued to foster citizen participation at the grassroots level. The United States supported public awareness campaigns, including campaigns to address the societal costs of corruption and the shared responsibility for combating it. The United States also launched a program to strengthen Armenian NGOs through 82 grants in various sectors. This program has demonstrated success as citizen advocacy programs deepen and broaden, and according to USAID's NGO Sustainability Index, NGOs in Armenia have significantly increased their self-sustainable capacity.

The United States also provided 38 small grants in 2004 to NGOs and independent media outlets that work to strengthen democratic institutions and promote civil society in Armenia. These embassy-based "Democracy Commission Small Grants" addressed issues such as citizens' use of the newly

passed Law on Freedom of Information, patients' rights, environmental education, the promotion of volunteerism, media literacy and the integration of disabled youth into society.

Following the Government's excessive reaction to peaceful opposition protests, the Department of State issued a Statement in April which observed that "Physical assaults, raids on political party offices and widespread arrests and detentions of opposition activists by the police do not contribute to creating an atmosphere conducive to political dialogue." The United States also sponsored international visitors to observe political parties in action during the U.S. elections.

To promote freedom of the media, the United States provided equipment and technical assistance to increase journalists' level of professionalism and objectivity. A U.S.-funded International Visitors Program on media ethics introduced Armenian journalists to democratic media practices in the United States.

To promote the rule of law, the United States continued to engage with the Armenian Ministry of Justice and legal institutions. With the assistance of a U.S.-funded NGO, the Government enacted legislation creating a bar association for defense lawyers. Human rights advocates believe that the new association will increase the legal defense of human rights by improving the training and organization of defense lawyers.

Senior U.S. officials consistently engaged government officials on the rights of women, children, minorities and the disabled. In 2004, the United States began a Children's Tolerance Education Program in elementary schools and closely monitored and engaged the Government on issues of intolerance.

United States officials urged greater respect for religious freedom. As a direct result of international engagement, the Government of Armenia legally registered Armenia's Jehovah's Witnesses and enacted new laws to allow conscientious objectors an alternative to mandatory military service.

The United States increased its assistance to anti-trafficking efforts in Armenia, aiding the Government, local NGOs and international organizations in their efforts. With U.S. assistance, the Government began training consular officers to recognize and assist potential victims of trafficking, and the United States invested in informational and child-protective prevention efforts. The United States established programs to research trends in trafficking and assisted in the creation of anti-trafficking legislation. The United States continued to engage the Government diplomatically on trafficking issues. The United States also significantly assisted NGOs in creating, maintaining and publicizing victim assistance programs nationwide.

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan's human rights record remained poor. Recent elections, including the controversial October 2003 presidential election, have been marred by numerous serious irregularities and therefore have not met international standards. Many of the trials of those in the opposition convicted of post-presidential election violence did not meet international standards. Prison conditions continued to be harsh and life threatening, and pretrial detention remained lengthy. The judiciary was corrupt, inefficient and dominated by the executive branch. Members of the security forces continued to commit serious abuses, including beating and torturing persons in custody. The president pardoned many but not all individuals considered to be political prisoners. The Government restricted freedom of assembly by denying permission for any opposition political party demonstrations during the year, at times detaining those who protested without permission. Freedom of speech and of the press were also at times subject to attack, as journalists faced disproportionately high libel judgments for slander committed against government officials. However, this did not silence loud and critical attacks on the Government and its policies. The Government restricted some religious freedom rights of Muslims and Christians, citing its right to protect society from radical Islam and social instability. The Government initiated a national action plan to combat trafficking in persons (TIP), but has only begun implementation.



The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Azerbaijan addressed a wide range of critical issues, including respect for democratic processes, civil society, fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, human rights and anti-trafficking efforts.

In support of the U.S. strategy, U.S. officials regularly met with a range of human rights and democracy activists, representatives of pro-reform political parties and religious minorities, as well as with government officials. Then-Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage, Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary Laura Kennedy, and Members of Congress and Congressional staff traveled to Azerbaijan in 2004 to reinforce support for U.S. objectives.

The United States sustained efforts to address electoral processes that do not meet international standards through high-level government intervention and training programs. For the December municipal elections, U.S. efforts focused on the need to correct the irregularities of the past, in preparation for the November 2005 parliamentary elections. In the wake of the controversial 2003 presidential election, U.S. officials emphasized the need for the Government to demonstrate that the people could

trust the electoral system. The Ambassador engaged high-level officials on the need to conduct credible and transparent elections. He also stressed the need for practical steps, such as proper training for election officials and accurate voter lists. In October, the Ambassador and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) resident Ambassadors met with the Chairman of the Central Election Commission (CEC) to stress the need for a transparent election process. The United States funded a visit by an expert on election systems and political parties, both to generate debate on the U.S. election process and to engage in dialogue with activists and political leaders on ways forward. Local officials appointed by the executive branch played a crucial role in the conduct of elections in Azerbaijan. In the past, some of these officials have been obstacles to a fair election process. Recognizing the central role they played, a U.S.-funded program trained local officials and chairs of Constituency Election Commissions on how to conduct elections in accordance with international democratic standards. More than 200 government representatives and election officials throughout the country participated in the training.

With U.S. funding, non-partisan international observers were trained and deployed for the October parliamentary by-elections and the December municipal elections. In preparation for the election, the Embassy reconstituted an Election Strategy Team, a coordination body originally deployed in advance of the 2003 presidential election. The team included Embassy and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives who coordinated efforts to promote an election that would meet OSCE standards. This team also ensured that the United States sent a unified, and therefore more powerful, message to the Government on its expectations.

The Embassy fielded ten observer teams to monitor parliamentary by-elections in October and 25 observer teams to monitor the December municipal elections. When serious irregularities marred the conduct of both elections, the Embassy immediately informed the CEC of its observations and concerns. The United States also raised its concerns with senior government officials. With the

urging of U.S. officials, the CEC invalidated results and fired election officials in some of the polling stations where observers witnessed serious fraud. Before and after the elections, the United States urged the CEC to forward complaints of election code violations to the Prosecutor General's office for investigation. In January, for the first time in history, the CEC forwarded 95 cases to the Prosecutor's office. The United States used the media to encourage citizens' participation in the democratic process. As part of an effort to encourage political dialogue and issue-based elections, the United States supported the organization and broadcast of debates between candidates for the municipal elections in eight regions of Azerbaijan. The United States funded public service announcements instructing voters on their rights. In addition, the United States funded print and broadcast advertisements encouraging citizens to vote. The objective of this information campaign was increased citizen activism, by encouraging those who were frustrated with the lack of basic infrastructure to vote for their municipal council officials, and then to hold the councils accountable for their actions. Finally, the United States funded a pilot exit poll project during the municipal elections.

The United States continued to support the development of civil society in Azerbaijan by using technical assistance, grants and exchanges to support activities of specific NGOs, encourage dialogue between the Government and civil society and educate the Government about democratic practices in the United States. Embassy officers traveled throughout Azerbaijan to support NGO activities. Grants from the U.S. Government supported a variety of projects, including helping NGO centers establish regional networks and facilitating dialogue between NGOs and government officials. These projects were critical to addressing the mistrust between the Government and NGOs, and the lack of national linkages for most NGOs. Officials from the U.S. Government also engaged with the Government of Azerbaijan to help improve cooperation between the Government and NGOs. The United States sent six Azerbaijanis representing different parts of society to the United States to strengthen their skills and understanding of grassroots democracy. In

November, the United States funded an educational training exchange for senior-level officials from the parliament and key ministries to learn more about the democratic process in the United States. While in the United States, policymakers were able to assess in depth the role the U.S. executive and legislative branches play as separate powers and as effective checks on each other's actions. The group also examined the need for transparent governance and civil society's role in promoting positive change. This program helped to strengthen the foundation for future U.S.-funded assistance programs and for cooperation between the Government and NGOs.

After a rough start, intense U.S. advocacy with the Government paved the way for a U.S.-funded, innovative series of town hall meetings held across Azerbaijan during the summer. These meetings successfully brought together representatives of various government bodies, local authorities and local party members to discuss the role of elected municipal councils.

In support of freedom of assembly, U.S. officials repeatedly encouraged Azerbaijani officials to authorize peaceful demonstrations by opposition

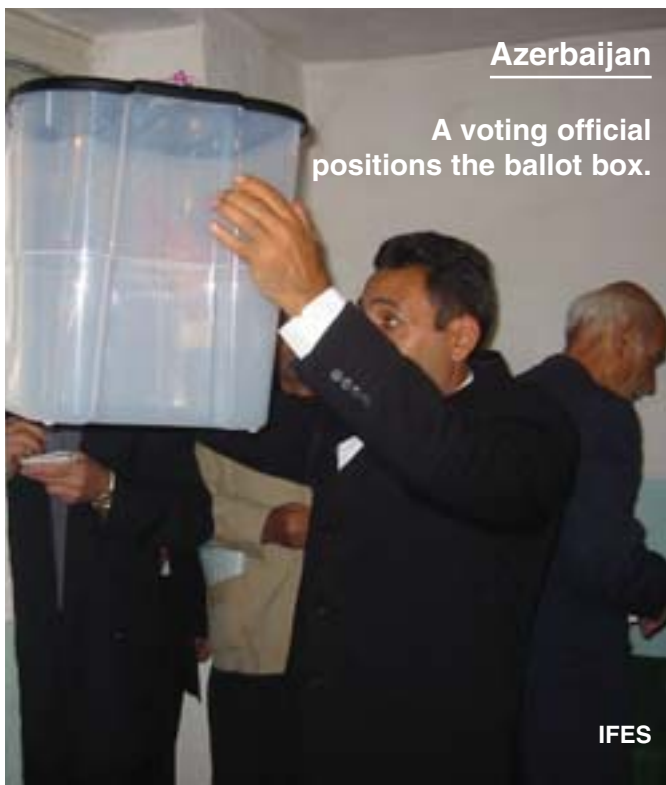
parties. The United States voiced its concerns to all levels of the Government about the basic right of political parties to organize and demonstrate against government policies.

Another focus of U.S. efforts was the development of a free and responsible media. Officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect media freedom and to enact legislation to establish an independent public television station. Funding from the U.S. Government supported the professional development of journalists and advocacy for media rights. Programs supported by the U.S. Government provided extensive ongoing technical and programming support to several independent television stations and newspapers.

Embassy officers closely monitored the trials of those accused of participating in and organizing the post-election violence in October 2003, including the high-profile trial of seven opposition leaders accused of organizing the violence. Then-Deputy Secretary, Deputy Assistant Secretary Kennedy and the Ambassador raised concerns about these trials with senior government officials. Both privately and publicly, the United States urged the Government to conduct the trials in accordance with international standards and urged both the Government and opposition parties to pursue national reconciliation.

To promote the rule of law, U.S.-funded programs worked to strengthen the professional development of judges and lawyers and to assist them in developing codes of ethics, reconstituting the bar association and the administration of a bar exam, expanding programs for law students, helping women to gain better access to justice and conducting a legal literacy program for the general public. The United States also continued work with law schools on curriculum development and new teaching methodologies.

For the first time, the United States provided funds to establish a Legal Database Project, which will provide easy access and use of legal framework documents for the legal profession as well as the general populace. This database will provide an innovative resource for the general population and the legal community, and it will expand the



resources available to promote rule of law. The United States funded programs to increase the professionalism and skills of the judiciary, procuracy and the defense bar, to improve legislation and to implement the new anti-corruption legislation. A U.S. program implementer and the Resident Legal Advisor continued to work with the Government and private lawyers to implement the Law on Advocates and to develop an independent bar association. Programs funded by the United States also worked with prosecutors to develop evidence-based investigations, which could help to decrease forced confessions.

In compliance with the Leahy Amendment, the Embassy coordinated interagency human rights vetting of military units proposed for U.S. training and/or support, and human rights training was integrated into all U.S.-supported military exercises and operational training conducted in the country. The United States helped design a program to integrate human rights training for security forces guarding the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

Azerbaijan has a long history of religious tolerance, especially towards its Jewish population. Despite Azerbaijan's history of tolerance, some groups, such as Protestants, have faced difficulties working with the state religious structures. The United States worked actively to encourage respect for religious freedom, including the right of such groups to operate without unnecessary interference. Officials from the United States frequently met with government officials to stress the importance of respecting religious freedom. The Embassy and officials in Washington maintained close connections with local religious communities and made contact with some communities outside Baku. Officials sustained a high-level dialogue with the Government when the independent Juma Mosque Community was first threatened with eviction and later evicted from an historic mosque in the Baku city center. Officials from the U.S. Government observed Friday afternoon prayer services at the mosque during the dispute and after the closure of the mosque. The Embassy actively spread the message about religious tolerance and Islam in America throughout the year, for example with two Iftaar dinners hosted by the Ambassador in November.

While the Government began to combat TIP, it remained a problem. The United States promoted anti-trafficking measures and effective preventive mechanisms in meetings with government officials and through programs that included an anti-trafficking awareness campaign conducted by NGOs. The United States funded two experts to help government officials develop the policies and procedures for a police anti-trafficking unit. Further, the United States coordinated a review of draft anti-TIP legislation among international organizations to ensure the legislation met international standards.

Belarus

Belarus is a republic with a directly elected president and a bicameral parliament. President Aleksandr Lukashenko, first elected in 1994, has waged a systematic assault on all elements of democracy and human rights. Through a series of flawed referenda, manipulated and fraudulent elections, and repressive laws and regulations, he has amended the Constitution, concentrated all power in the executive, extended presidential tenure and eliminated presidential term limits. The October 2004 parliamentary elections and referendum both failed to meet international democratic standards and were characterized by widespread fraud. The judiciary is not independent.

The Government's human rights record remained very poor and worsened in some areas. The Government continued to commit numerous serious abuses and to deny citizens the right to change their government. The Government manipulated and abused the legal system to prevent several hundred independent and opposition candidates from registering in the October 2004 elections. State-controlled media, representing 85 percent of all media, denied access to independent and opposition candidates. By the end of the year, the Government was preventing the opposition from legally holding meetings. Security forces continued to harass and detain political opponents, journalists, human rights activists and independent trade unionists. Police severely beat several opposition leaders, peaceful protesters and journalists. The authorities continued to refuse to

Minsk, Belarus

Belarusian student holding a ballot exits the voting booth at the Belarusian Agricultural University after participating in early voting.

AP Photo

undertake serious efforts to account for the disappearances of well-known opposition political figures and a journalist in previous years or to address credible reports regarding the regime's role in these disappearances. The appointment of Viktor Sheyman, linked by credible evidence to the disappearances, as head of the Presidential Administration was yet another factor perpetuating a climate of abuse and impunity. Others suspected of involvement in the disappearances include the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Sports and Tourism. Police abuse and occasional torture of prisoners and detainees continued to be a problem. Prison overcrowding remained a problem. Security forces arbitrarily arrested and detained citizens for political reasons. In addition, individuals were sentenced to jail terms for such political crimes as defamation of state officials.

The Government continued to restrict freedom of speech, press, assembly and association. The Government continued an apparently calculated campaign to intimidate, harass and close virtually all independent media outlets and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Journalists critical of the Government were administratively punished (usually fined) on libel charges. Twenty-five independent newspapers and 38 NGOs were closed or had their operations suspended during

the year. The Government imposed restrictions on religious freedom. The Government intensified its already severe restrictions on workers' rights, prompting an International Labor Organization (ILO) Commission of Inquiry (CoI). The CoI found that the Government committed serious violations of workers' rights and interfered significantly in the trade union movement. Government intimidation of opposition parties and civil society groups severely hindered the development of a thriving civil society and democratic political process. Trafficking in persons (TIP) remained a problem, although the Government made serious efforts to combat this problem.

The U.S. strategy to promote democracy and human rights in Belarus consisted of applying political and economic restrictions, maintaining bilateral and multilateral diplomatic pressure, limiting engagement with Belarusian officials (U.S. officials above the assistant secretary level do not meet with Belarusian authorities), monitoring and reporting on abuses, and supporting democracy and human rights programs. The United States funded programs to bolster independent media, political parties, civil society and trade unions; promote free and fair elections and the rule of law; protect human rights; and combat TIP. The United States provides little bilateral assistance to

the Government except humanitarian assistance and exchange programs with educational institutions. The United States closely cooperated with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and EU missions in Belarus to promote democracy and human rights. In concert with the EU, the United States instituted visa restrictions on senior Belarusian officials responsible for electoral fraud and human rights abuses including the disappearance and presumed murder of opposition figures and a journalist. Officials from the United States actively monitored the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus and regularly met with local and international organizations active in promoting human rights and democracy.

Democracy and human rights issues were key themes in virtually all U.S. officials' speeches, press interviews and public events concerning Belarus. The United States organized a digital video press conference with Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky and Belarusian media to demonstrate U.S. concern over persistent democracy and human rights violations in Belarus, show U.S. support for the Belarusian people and discuss passage of the Belarus Democracy Act. The Embassy also maintained and updated its website on democracy and human rights issues, and the United States issued frequent press releases and other statements on human rights and democracy violations.

The United States consistently urged the Government to hold free and fair elections and to invite the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to Belarus to conduct an election-monitoring mission. Throughout the year, U.S. officials met with Belarusian election and other government officials to encourage adherence to democratic principles. Funding from the U.S. Government supported political process training, technical assistance and cross-border exchanges for pro-democracy groups and parties, focusing on internal governance, non-partisan election observation, voter education, independent exit polling, strategic planning, membership recruitment and retention, message formulation and outreach.

The United States closely monitored the Government's persistent, calculated attacks on civil society and opposition political parties, and issued a number of press statements, including at the OSCE Permanent Council condemning and calling for an immediate end to these actions and urging the Government of Belarus to uphold its OSCE commitments to democracy and human rights. To reinforce this message, a joint delegation of U.S. and EU officials met with the Foreign Minister of Belarus in March 2004 to demand an immediate end to government efforts to control civil society and to urge the Government to take the necessary steps to ensure a free and fair electoral process for the October parliamentary elections. The delegation also reaffirmed its willingness to initiate serious discussions with the Government on how to improve bilateral relations. In addition, the joint delegation met with a number of representatives of independent political parties, media and NGOs.

Embassy staff regularly observed the trials of NGOs, media outlets and political parties throughout Belarus that were targeted by the Government for closure on politically motivated pretexts. Embassy staff also attended trials for opposition figures, such as Mikhail Marinich, targeted for their political activities. The United States supported the OSCE's efforts to assist Belarus in meeting its OSCE commitments.

The United States took a highly visible step to call attention to the Government's repressive actions when Congress passed and the President signed the Belarus Democracy Act in October 2004. The Act criticizes the Government's human rights record, authorizes support for democracy programs and expresses the sense of Congress that certain sanctions be applied to the Government of Belarus. The passage of this Act demonstrated bipartisan support for the U.S. Government's policy of emphasizing democracy and human rights in U.S. relations with Belarus.

Bolstering civil society and independent media and promoting the rule of law remained key U.S. goals. The United States awarded grants to NGOs as well as human rights, women's and youth groups to strengthen independent mass media and

civil society. The United States also supported journalism and management training, legal defense and business consultations to strengthen independent print and broadcast media outlets and increase their capacity to provide objective, fact-based information. This program was constrained, however, after the Government denied re-registration to the International Research and Exchanges board. Public clubs supported by U.S. funding offered local forums to share information and resolve local issues. In 2004, the number of clubs rose to 18 throughout the country, and they were active in 29 communities. These clubs worked with local governments to initiate over 100 projects, including improving playgrounds, providing clean water, improving kindergarten nutrition and fighting HIV/AIDS, TIP and substance abuse. Perhaps because of its success in grassroots mobilization, Counterpart International, the U.S. NGO providing assistance to these public clubs, was denied legal registration in August and forced to cease its activities. To promote the rule of law, the United States provided legal and advocacy training for lawyers, activists and NGOs and supported a network of 19 Legal Advice Centers.

The United States continued to press the Belarusian Government to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the disappearances of several opposition activists and a journalist. Officials from the U.S. Government, including then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, National Security Council officials, Assistant Secretary and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and Members of Congress met with family members of the disappeared who actively seek justice for their family members. The United States and the EU jointly sponsored a resolution passed at the 2004 UN Commission on Human Rights calling for an independent, credible investigation into the disappearances and for the perpetrators to be held accountable. The resolution also mandated a Special Rapporteur to report on the human rights situation in Belarus. Officials from the U.S. Government met with the UN Rapporteur and supported his efforts. The Government of Belarus refused to cooperate with or grant an entry visa to the UN Special Rapporteur. The United States and the EU also jointly sponsored an ultimately unsuccessful

resolution condemning Belarus' poor and deteriorating human rights record at the 2004 UN General Assembly.

Training, exchange and educational reform programs continued to be an important component of the U.S. democracy and human rights promotion strategy in Belarus. In 2004, more than 170 Belarusian citizens participated in U.S.-sponsored professional and academic training programs. Traveling to the United States, Belarusian participants received short-term training in business, public health, recreation and tourism and secondary school administration programs. Other Belarusians took part in International Visitors Programs (IVP) focusing on a range of topics including intellectual property rights, producing news features and documentaries, the role of think tanks in policy-making, regional and community theater in the United States, on line journalism, the role of women in small enterprise development, TIP, infectious diseases and HIV/AIDS. Fifty Belarusian students also participated in the Future Leaders Exchange program, attending U.S. high schools and living with American families for one academic year.

The United States monitored and denounced the Government's hostile actions against those promoting academic freedom. Officials from the U.S. Government facilitated contact between Belarusian diaspora groups in the United States and the rector of a Belarusian language lyceum that was closed by the Government; other U.S. officials and European Governments sought support for the school. In early 2004, the Ambassador joined an 11-country diplomatic protest over the Minister of Education's efforts to close the European Humanities University (EHU). The United States later protested bilaterally and multilaterally the Government's closure of EHU and supported scholarships to help former EHU students study in the United States, Europe and at other universities in Belarus. The United States also protested in several forums the Government's closure of two academic think tanks and pressure against independent public opinion and polling organizations.

As the Government implemented a new restrictive law on religion, the United States monitored violations of international norms and urged government officials to respect religious freedom. Officials from the U.S. Government met with representatives of a wide spectrum of religious groups and with the Government's Committee of Religious and Nationalities Affairs to advocate freedom of religion. The United States arranged for representatives of several traditional and non-traditional faiths to participate in an IVP to the United States in March 2004.

The Embassy closely monitored incidents of anti-Semitism that occurred throughout Belarus. Officials from the U.S. Government, including the Ambassador, regularly raised with the Government of Belarus the concerns of international Jewish groups over the expansion of a sports stadium built on a Jewish cemetery in Grodno. Embassy officers, again including the Ambassador, visited the cemetery several times throughout the year. These actions helped lead to an agreement between the Government and the local Jewish community on the appropriate treatment of unearthened remains.

In response to workers' rights violations, the United States ended Belarus' trade benefits in 2000 under the Generalized System of Preferences, supported the ILO CoI in 2003 and continued to press the Government to heed the CoI's recommendations. Officials from the U.S. Government maintained close contact with local independent labor leaders and the ILO. The United States continued to support ILO efforts to promote workers' rights and independent trade unions in Belarus, despite the Government's refusal to register a U.S.-funded ILO project in 2003. Officials from the U.S. Government continued to meet with and support Belarus' independent trade unions.

The United States worked closely with the International Office for Migration's Minsk office and local organizations to monitor the Government's anti-trafficking efforts. The Chairperson of the Young Women's Christian Association, a prominent anti-trafficking advocate, participated in an IVP in the United States. The United States funded two projects to raise public

awareness and protect trafficking victims, including a women's economic empowerment project to combat trafficking in persons.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace, the Dayton Accords, created the independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Agreement also created two multi-ethnic constituent entities within the state: The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska, along with the independent District of Brcko. In 2002 and 2004 respectively, Bosnia and Herzegovina held its first self-administered national and municipal elections, which international observers judged to be free and fair.

The Government's human rights record was poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained. Police continued to abuse and physically mistreat detainees and other citizens; however, police accountability for individual abuses improved. Overcrowding and antiquated facilities continued to be a problem in prisons. Infringement of privacy rights occurred, with minority returnees targeted in particular. The judiciary in both entities remained subject to influence by dominant political parties and the executive branch. Enforcement of judicial decisions by local authorities improved during the year, although obstacles remained. Pressure and harassment of media by authorities and dominant political parties continued. Both entity Governments and private groups continued to restrict religious practice by minorities; religious discrimination remained a problem.

The rate of returns of refugees and displaced persons declined during the year. The security situation in sensitive return areas and police responsiveness to incidents targeting minority returnees did not improve. The Republika Srpska continued its de facto refusal to take action against any Serbs indicted by the U.N. International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY); the Federation generally cooperated with the ICTY, although it did not facilitate any new transfers. Non-compliance with ICTY obligations continued

to undermine the rule of law in the country. Isolated instances of political, ethnic, or religious violence continued. Discrimination against ethnic minorities continued. The political leadership at all levels continued to obstruct minority returns in certain localities. Trafficking in persons (TIP) was a serious problem, which the Government took considerable steps to address.

The U.S. strategy for promoting democracy and human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina focused on building democratic institutions, strengthening the capacity of state-level institutions (especially the criminal justice system) to operate transparently and efficiently, advocating for religious freedom and assisting the Government in combating discrimination against vulnerable groups in Bosnian society, including minority returnees.

At the municipal level, U.S. programs were aimed at making local governments more efficient and accountable. A joint civil society-Embassy lobbying effort led to a constitutional amendment allowing direct election of mayors. Through direct municipal elections in October 2004, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina were able to better express their preferences and priorities by voting for individuals rather than party lists. The United States funded the creation of five new municipal “one-stop shops” in northern Bosnia, which enabled citizens and businesses to receive municipal permits up to 70 percent faster, while simultaneously reducing corruption and discrimination against ethnic minorities. The joint U.S.-Swedish Governance Accountability Project (GAP) began operations in 2004. GAP aims to substantially improve the service and financial management profiles of 40 municipalities and to create an environment in which these municipalities have the resources and autonomy to respond effectively to citizens’ needs.

The United States continued to support the Administrative Law and Procedural Systems (ALPS) program designed to eliminate barriers that confront citizens because of the unwieldy nature of the Bosnian administrative system. The ALPS project successfully worked with four target municipalities to amend their statutes and rules of procedure, allowing for increased public participation in decision-making.

Development of civil society and increased cooperation between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Government, especially local governments, remained a U.S. priority in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Democracy Network, a U.S.-funded civil society program, improved the institutional capacity of more than 150 local NGOs, implemented 46 advocacy campaigns and increased the number of consultations between government officials and civil society on local problems and policy issues. Other U.S.-funded civil society development programs included a number of grants to local NGOs to increase the profile and influence of the NGO sector in Bosnian society, to educate the public about volunteerism and philanthropy, and to promote cooperation between NGOs, the media, the Government and the private sector. United States-funded advocacy training was also critical for assisting NGOs in presenting their concerns to local government for the first time.

The United States also promoted civil society through diverse educational initiatives. The U.S.-funded Civitas civic education project developed a democracy and human rights course that is now taught in every secondary school in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States developed a pilot program to teach democracy and human rights in Islamic faculties and madrassas (Muslim secondary schools). The Parent-School Partnership program established a network of local associations that brings together parents, teachers and school administrators to address issues of common concern. The U.S.-funded Parliamentary Internship Program gave talented young Bosnians the opportunity to serve as interns in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s state and entity-level parliaments, gaining valuable leadership skills and work experience.

The United States continued to promote the development of an independent and professional media. Through two separate media projects, the United States provided training and technical assistance in newsroom management, business development, independent domestic production, and legal, regulatory and policy issues. These projects funded the creation of a permanent local organization dedicated to promoting high-quality investigative journalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States funded a U.S. media advi-

sor to help strengthen the fledgling Communications Regulatory Agency. The Embassy also sponsored a series of media events designed to promote public awareness of the Government's new Law on Freedom of Access to Information and a new law on defamation.

To promote judicial reform and the rule of law, the United States supported programs by the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Overseas Prosecution Development and Training (OPDAT), in close collaboration with the International Criminal Investigative Training and Assistance Program (ICITAP). These organizations implemented programs on legislative court system and police reform, procedures for reappointing and vetting judges and prosecutors, and criminal justice system personnel training. These programs invigorated the investigation and prosecution of serious crimes, helped reduce human rights abuses by security forces and ensured respect for individual constitutional rights within the criminal justice system. United States-funded OPDAT provided training for more than 1,500 judges and prosecutors on the new Criminal Procedure Code, which was adopted in 2003. In addition, ICITAP conducted similar training for police, while OPDAT began training Bosnian prosecutors, judges and defense attorneys who will be respon-

sible for trying war crimes cases in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Officials for ICITAP worked extensively to improve the police Professional Standards Units, whose investigations of allegations of police misconduct and abuse increase police accountability for human rights violations.

In order to better target financial crime, ICITAP and OPDAT trained prosecutors, judges, investigators, and police, and advised the relevant authorities on establishing the Financial Intelligence Unit of the State Investigation and Protection Agency and on creating asset seizure and management units within the State Prosecutor's Office, the State Court Police and the state-level Ministry of Justice. The United States also supported the establishment of the Special Department for Organized Crime within the State Court and State Prosecutor's Office.

The United States committed funds for the creation of the Special Chamber for War Crimes and War Crimes Registry within the country's State Court and State Prosecutor's Office. This Chamber, which will operate until 2010, will help Bosnia develop the domestic capacity to try war crimes cases, including those transferred from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. After 2010, any remaining cases will

Bosnia

Young boy stands beside modern farm equipment donated by UMCOR to support civil society.



UMCOR Photo

be tried by the country's State Court. The United States continued to work closely with Bosnian and international authorities to ensure that the War Crimes Chamber is capable of fulfilling its mandate.

The U.S.-funded Justice Sector Development Program (JSDP) began operations in 2004 to improve the efficiency, transparency, and fairness of Bosnia and Herzegovina's justice system by providing expert assistance to the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, which is charged with managing Bosnia's judicial system. The JSDP also improved Bosnia and Herzegovina's justice system by establishing and implementing improved court administration practices, reforming the current system for the defense of indigent criminal defendants and working with the State Ministry of Justice and other agencies to improve local capacity to draft legislation and promote citizen participation in legislative development. The United States also supported rule of law training programs for lawyers on alternative dispute resolution in accordance with the recently adopted Mediation Law. Proper use of mediation as an alternative to litigation should significantly ease the backlog within the country's court system.

In addition, under the U.S.-funded Expanded International Military Education and Training program, a mobile training team held a seminar for government officials at the Ministry of Defense. The seminar covered civilian control of the military and human rights considerations for personnel systems. Bosnian military and civilian officials also traveled to the United States to attend training courses on civilian control and oversight of the military. These programs underscored the military's democratic role in Western societies and are guiding defense reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United States remained resolute in supporting efforts leading to truth, reconciliation and social justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), financed in part by the United States, generated 2,588 DNA matches during 2004, which may lead to the identification of 1,754 individuals who were reported missing during the 1992-1995

conflict. ICMP also conducted a drive to collect blood samples from surviving relatives of missing persons in order to assist with future identification efforts. The ICMP assisted Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities in performing 454 exhumations leading to the recovery of the remains of 997 individuals and partial remains of 767 individuals in 2004. Despite these efforts, an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 persons remain unaccounted for in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States continued to support the development of the Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial and Cemetery, where 1,304 of the estimated 7,800 victims of the Srebrenica massacre have been interred.

Other U.S.-backed projects have aided minorities, women, children, and persons with disabilities. The United States donated approximately 350,000 tons of agricultural commodities to local implementing partners, who used the proceeds from the sale of these commodities to finance civil society development initiatives that promoted respect for the rights of women, children, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. Minority returnees availed themselves of U.S.-funded income generation grants, micro-credit loans and agriculture development technical assistance. The United States provided additional funds to residents of collective centers to help facilitate their permanent return to their prewar communities. In 2004, the United States also completed 18 infrastructure reconstruction projects that benefited 1,380 returnee families and 500 public school students.

In 2004, U.S. officials raised human rights issues during their trips to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In August 2004, Secretary of State Powell visited Bosnia and reiterated that Bosnia's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions and further development as an independent, democratic state hinges on Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts to promote human rights and democracy. Other high-level U.S. visitors included Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Lincoln Bloomfield, who emphasized the need for respect for human rights in the defense reform process. The Ambassador traveled extensively within Bosnia and Herzegovina and continued to raise key human rights issues such as trafficking and minor-

ity returns with senior Bosnian officials. Presidency member Sulejman Tihic, Council of Ministers Chairman Adnan Terzic, Minister of Defense Nikola Radovanovic and Republika Srpska Prime Minister Dragan Mikerevic also visited Washington D.C., where senior U.S. officials stressed the importance of human rights and democracy.

Other U.S. initiatives focused on assisting the Bosnia and Herzegovina Government in reducing discrimination based on gender, race/ethnicity, disability, and religion. For example, three local NGOs received grants to promote awareness about the rights of people with disabilities and to campaign for increased access to public buildings and the elimination of discrimination against the disabled in the provision of health care and other social benefits, including access to public education. Another program focused on empowering women in rural areas, with a particular focus on income generation, small business ownership and assistance to single mothers. The United States also supported the work of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Inter-Religious Council to promote inter-religious dialogue and tolerance and to encourage religious communities to play a constructive role in the development of Bosnian civil society.

With U.S. assistance, government authorities took important steps against trafficking in persons (TIP). U.S.-funded programs addressed victim protection, prosecution, and prevention through public awareness. The United States supported the provision of shelter and accommodation, psychological counseling and health care to foreign victims of trafficking in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also funded a nationwide anti-trafficking awareness campaign. This campaign was the first to target Bosnian men as part of its audience, addressing the negative consequences of contributing to the exploitation of trafficking victims. OPDAT and ICITAP continued to work with the state-level Anti-Trafficking Strike Force, which includes prosecutors, police investigators, border service agents, tax administration officials and finance police from around the country. The Strike Force effectively built complex cases against high-level organized crime figures involved in traffick-

ing and other criminal enterprises, and prosecutors were able to secure convictions and lengthy sentences. The United States continued to work closely with the Government's National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator and the NGO community to develop and update Bosnia and Herzegovina's National Action Plan and anti-TIP strategy for 2005 through 2007.

Georgia

The Georgian Government's human rights record remained poor despite improvements following the November 2003 Rose Revolution. Democratic institutions and processes are evolving but not yet established. Recent elections have made significant progress toward meeting international standards although there were several irregularities. There were concerns about the substance of the new Constitution and the process by which it was amended in February 2004. There were some restrictions on freedom of assembly through September 2004. While many commentators have lauded the Government's anti-corruption campaign, others have worried that at times the Government has pushed the borders of the rule of law. Specifically, during the arrest and detention of former government officials and businessman who were believed to have prospered under the previous regime, the Government has repeatedly used pretrial detention as a form of pressure and a bargaining tactic to induce suspects to settle outside of court. There were lengthy delays in trials and prolonged pretrial detention remained a problem. The judicial system continued to lack true independence and the executive branch and prosecutors' offices continued to exert undue influence on judges.

Furthermore, while reform of the traffic police was welcomed, abuses by other law enforcement agencies continued. Although the Government has taken some action against the abuse of detainees and the planting of evidence by law enforcement officers, these problems continued to be widespread, especially in regions outside Tbilisi. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) blamed some deaths in custody on physical abuse, torture, or poor prison conditions. Violence against religious minorities

significantly diminished in 2004. The Georgian Government, however, does little to promote religious tolerance. The press generally was free, however, journalists practiced increased self-censorship, particularly in reporting on issues unfavorable to the Government. Trafficking in persons (TIP) remains a problem.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy focuses on the promotion of democratic institutions and processes, the development of a vibrant civil society, fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, human rights, and anti-TIP measures.

United States officials regularly highlighted publicly and privately the need for improvements in human rights conditions. The Ambassador and other embassy officers worked privately with Georgian officials, NGOs and other domestic and international organizations to identify and highlight areas of particular concern and encourage reform. The Ambassador was especially active in encouraging the Government to curtail police abuse of Gia Jokhtaberidze, former President Shevardnadze's son-in-law, who was held in pre-trial detention for tax evasion, and of former General Gia Vashakidze, who was held on charges of kidnapping and during his arrest was severely beaten and tortured. Secretary of State Powell, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs A. Elizabeth Jones, Members of Congress and Congressional staff reinforced these and other efforts to achieve U.S. objectives in Georgia in 2004 by their visits and public and private statements.

To promote democratic institutions and processes, the United States provided assistance for the March parliamentary elections, including training for election commission members, a get-out-the-vote campaign, exit polling and voter marking. This assistance helped to produce elections that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) considered to be closer to meeting international standards than any other elections held in Georgia in the last 15 years, although irregularities were noted. The United States provided the Government with assistance to promote better governance practices and leadership skills for the Georgian Parliament. The United States also pro-

vided direct assistance to the executive branch offices of the president and prime minister. To strengthen political pluralism, the United States funded programs to promote regional and national political party development. To strengthen local governance, the United States provided assistance to advance fiscal decentralization.

To encourage a vibrant civil society, the United States funded programs to promote the financial sustainability of Georgia's non-governmental organization (NGO) community. The United States also provided assistance to women leaders throughout the country to encourage and prepare them to run for elected office and positions within their political parties, as well as provide them with general leadership skills to maximize their current leadership roles in their communities.

United States civic education programs in Georgia supported the development of innovative extra-curricular teaching in civic values and responsibilities for Georgia's youth. Students in ethnic-Armenian areas in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region were encouraged to actively participate in their communities through volunteer actions and joint initiatives with other schools. A new youth program was launched to reach out to areas populated primarily by ethnic Armenians and Azeris, providing quality academic and social activities for at-risk youth, improving their understanding of other ethnic groups and seeking to improve school attendance and overall academic accomplishment.

United States assistance was crucial in the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Expression. The United States funded several media development programs in Georgia aimed at raising the professional level of independent media. The United States sponsored a U.S. media development professional to train local independent media company managers and reporters. The United States also dedicated several International Visitors Programs (IVP) to journalism. United States Embassy Democracy Commission Grants were awarded to projects aimed at improving independent journalism. The United States sponsored the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management at the Georgian Institute for Public Affairs. Training courses and working tours fund-

ed by the United States helped journalists learn the values and principles of freedom of the press as well as standards of western journalism.

The United States supported a rule of law program that increased public awareness of legal rights and assisted in the reform of the legal system. United States Department of Justice advisors were closely involved in the ongoing rewriting of Georgia's Criminal Procedural Code to meet international human rights standards. Other U.S.-sponsored activities focused on court structure reform, judicial self-advocacy and judicial independence. The rule of law program also promoted implementation of the Administrative Code and its Freedom of Information provisions, funded legal aid clinics, and conducted public education campaigns regarding citizens' constitutional rights. In response to the new Georgian Government's willingness to tackle corruption and human rights issues within the framework of law enforcement, in 2004 the United States began several new programs with the Ministry of Interior and established a permanent representative of the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement office at the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi to administer these programs. One program funded the development of police training curriculum for entry- and advanced-level officers to meet international standards, including in areas of human rights. Another program sought to establish a national central forensic lab to improve Georgian law enforcement officers' poor forensic capabilities, one known cause of police torture of detainees.

To encourage respect for minorities and women, the U.S. Embassy Democracy Commission Grant program awarded money for the establishment of an ethnic minority NGO center in southern Georgia. This Center organized Georgian language and computer courses and civic education workshops for more than 100 young Azeri activists. The center raised civic awareness of local Azeris, especially women and youth, and encouraged them to tap into the social and political life of the region. The Embassy also organized an individual IVP on adoption issues for a representative of the Ministry of Education. This U.S.-based program focused on systems and approach-

es to promote child welfare and adoption service programs and demonstrated how children's rights are protected through health and welfare laws at local and national levels.

The United States has historically been in the forefront of efforts on religious freedom issues to bring perpetrators of religiously motivated violence in Georgia to justice. Embassy officials attended the trial of defrocked Orthodox Priest Father Basili Mkalavishvili. Although there has been a significant decline in religious violence following the arrest of Mkalavishvili, restrictions on religious freedom persist, prompting continued U.S. engagement on the issue. United States officials attended several governmental and non-governmental conferences on religious freedom and legislation concerning religion. Embassy officers continued to push for legislation allowing for the registration of religious groups.

To promote labor rights, the United States sponsored training by a labor specialist for union leaders. As a result of this training, a youth branch was established in Georgia's Trade Unions Association (GTUA), whose leader became the deputy chairperson of the GTUA.

The United States helped the Government develop a national strategy to combat TIP. The project assisted the Government: to revise and implement its National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons; to respond more effectively to institutional weaknesses and corruption, which hindered the previous Government's anti-TIP efforts; to adopt anti-TIP legislation; and, to implement measures to inform and educate the public, including potential victims. An IVP introduced three Georgian participants to U.S. strategies to combat TIP. The program examined the patterns and types of TIP and explored the social, political and economic factors that contribute to TIP. The visitors also learned about cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations in combating TIP. The United States also sponsored anti-TIP workshops for journalists from Georgia and Azerbaijan. The workshops aimed at improving the media coverage of TIP. The program brought together 24 journalists in each country for several workshops. Participants learned how to best

leverage their reporting to combat TIP and were provided an opportunity to develop contacts with local and international specialists.

The U.S. Embassy provided a training and consultation program for the General Procurator. One of the goals of this program was to assist in the development of better prosecutorial measures for combating TIP. As a result of these efforts, law enforcement officers have recently detained several suspects and trials have commenced. The Ministry of Security also used mass media to broadcast appeals to victims of TIP with a guarantee that they would be protected from prosecution if they exposed the organizers of TIP.

Kazakhstan

The Government's human rights record remained poor, and the Government continued to commit numerous abuses. The Constitution of Kazakhstan concentrates power in the presidency, permitting the president to control the legislature and judiciary, as well as regional and local governments. President Nursultan Nazarbayev was elected to a 7-year term in a 1999 election that fell far short of international standards. Parliamentary elections in September were in some respects an improvement over the previous elections; however, they continued to fall short of international standards. The Government severely limited citizens' right to change their government and democratic institutions remained weak. The Government continued to restrict freedom of the press, and there were instances of Government harassment of independent media. The Government continued to use arbitrary arrest and detention and selectively prosecute political opponents. Prolonged detention was a problem.

Throughout 2004, the U.S. human rights and democracy strategy sought to build on the positive steps made in 2003 with special emphasis on preparations for the September parliamentary elections. The United States efforts were focused on building a legal environment and supporting civil society development, which would help create an environment for elections that meet international standards.

A key diplomatic component of the U.S. strategy emphasized that bilateral cooperation on economic and security issues is a complement, not a substitute, for meaningful progress on human rights and democracy. The United States also continued to encourage the Government of Kazakhstan to live up to its Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) commitments to support human rights and promote democracy, a necessary condition for the United States to support Kazakhstan's bid for the 2009 OSCE Chair-in-Office position. The United States remains committed to non-partisan promotion of political pluralism and governance that reflects the political will of its citizens, and engaged with the Government of Kazakhstan at every level to reiterate that commitment.

Improving electoral processes was a main focus of U.S. democracy promotion efforts this year. The United States vigorously urged the Government of Kazakhstan to draft an election law that would meet international standards. Prior to the elections, Kazakhstan adopted and passed an elections law that, while not fully meeting international standards, was an improvement over existing legislation. While the OSCE ultimately determined that the elections fell short of international standards, U.S. diplomatic efforts and assistance contributed to a more open pre-election environment.

Then-Deputy Secretary Armitage, the Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, the Ambassador, and other U.S. Mission members strongly advocated for the registration of opposition political party Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), which was ultimately registered in time to participate in the elections. However, at year's end, DCK faced a legal action to "dissolve" the party based on a statement adopted at its December party congress that rejected the Government's legitimacy and called for civil disobedience. The Ambassador raised the case with a range of senior Kazakhstani officials and encouraged an approach that would permit the party to continue to function. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe and Eurasia also raised the DCK issue with Kazakhstan's Ambassador in December.

In tandem with diplomatic engagement, the United States funded a range of activities in support of human rights and democratic reform. During the run up to the September parliamentary elections, the U.S. Government provided non-partisan, capacity-building support to improve political party, civil society, and independent media participation in the electoral process. United States officials, including more than half of the Embassy's officers, volunteered for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) election observation mission. Two U.S. implementing partners, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), conducted more than 58 training sessions across Kazakhstan, covering all registered political parties. A U.S.-funded grant enabled a local non-governmental organization (NGO) to conduct a nationwide voter exit poll. Assisted by another U.S.-funded grant, a local NGO prepared a parallel vote tabulation report comparing local precincts' election night protocols to the Central Election Commission's (CEC) final vote count. The report highlighted serious irregularities in the CEC's vote tabulation, providing quantitative evidence to support qualitative concerns expressed in the OSCE/ODIHR field mission's final elections report.

In addition to supporting political party development and transparency in the electoral process, the United States promoted democratic progress by providing funding to NGOs engaged in non-partisan voter outreach and education. United States assistance funded a project focusing on youth voters run by a Kazakhstani NGO; other U.S. assistance funds underwrote a "Youth in Elections" national debate tournament. The United States managed a small grants fund in which 31 grants were awarded to 25 NGOs and six media outlets, with most grants focusing on voter information campaigns and voters' rights. United States grant programs also enabled six independent stations to produce election-focused talk shows and debate programs. Through USAID, the United States funded a contest eliciting voter education Public Service Announcements (PSAs) resulting in rebroadcast of six PSAs and seven radio spots by 16 television and 17 radio stations.

Freedom of media was also a serious concern for the United States in its effort to promote democracy in Kazakhstan. For example, the United States strongly advocated for the rejection of a flawed media law that would have impeded freedom of speech, in particular campaign reporting, and regularly raised concern over a series of legal actions aimed at independent media. After much public debate and criticism of the media law, President Nazarbayev vetoed the legislation. The American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasia Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI), a U.S. implementing partner, began a new media defense project that provided an analysis of the law's shortcomings. The project also provided training to lawyers defending journalists and media outlets in court. United States advocacy efforts were complemented by several U.S.-funded programs to expand freedom of the media. The United States funded the NGO Internews to conduct programs to strengthen independent media through training and technical assistance. A new program was started to create an on-line news agency to enable media outlets to share news across the country. With funding from the United States, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting conducted training on human rights reporting and published articles on-line.

Support for the rule of law remained a fundamental goal of U.S.-funded training programs for NGOs and Kazakhstani officials. Lawyers provided 387 consultations to civil society organizations during the year through a variety of U.S.-funded programs. Strengthening the skills of the next generation of Kazakhstani attorneys, a U.S.-funded pro-bono tax clinic at Turan University trained 20 students in practical skills and provided aid to 240 indigent clients. This year's Jessup International Moot Court Competition, which provides an opportunity for law students to practice and develop their written and oral advocacy skills and to learn about trial tactics and substantive areas of international law, drew a record-breaking 126 participants. The United States, through a grant to ABA/CEELI, also completed the first Judicial Reform Index. This index gives a comprehensive overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the current legal system, providing a roadmap for future advocacy and capacity building.

Assistance and training for NGOs to promote rule of law was complemented by U.S.-funded professional skills training for Kazakhstani law enforcement. The Embassy organized professional development seminars for the press-relations officers of local prosecutors' offices to encourage effective publicity of anti-trafficking in persons (TIP) efforts and better relations with media outlets. The Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement conducted educational seminars for policemen and local government authorities that touched on several human rights issues, most notably combating TIP, promotion of the rule of law through introduction of a jury system, and training that focused on evidence-based, versus "confession-based," crime investigation techniques. Moving away from "confession-based" criminal investigations will serve the dual purpose of sharpening law enforcement investigative accuracy while reducing reliance on a system that promotes abuse of detainees.

As part of the U.S. strategy to promote human rights, the country's premier human rights NGO, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR), was awarded one of ten grants given by the Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor for a project to support human rights and foster civil society. The KIBHR program trained 20 human rights defenders in international legal standards, enforcement mechanisms, networking, advocacy, and prison monitoring. Another U.S.-funded program enabled KIBHR to expand its network to six more regional centers, giving the NGO coverage throughout Kazakhstan.

The United States continued to encourage the Government of Kazakhstan to find a just resolution in the case of DCK leader Galymzham Zhakiyanov, convicted in 2002 on what appeared to be politically motivated charges. Zhakiyanov was ultimately moved from a "strict regime" prison to a minimum security settlement colony with greater freedom of movement and interaction. The United States also advocated for due process for independent journalist Sergey Duvanov, who was convicted on what observers considered politically-motivated charges at a trial

marked by serious procedural irregularities. On August 17, he was conditionally released from custody under parole status.

To promote civic development, numerous grants were awarded to NGO programs focused on youth, women, the elderly, and the disabled. A local NGO began a new program with U.S. funding to develop a nation-wide network of women leaders to increase participation of women in grassroots governance. A new civic advocacy component was added to USAID's civil society program, enabling more resources to be devoted to advocacy campaigns, skills, and membership-based NGOs. The Embassy's Democracy Commission supported several projects, including projects focused on professional development for NGO associations and for local government officials; improving cooperation between NGOs and the Government; and, providing education to officials and legal support to prisoners to discourage and reduce incidents of prisoner abuse. International Visitors Programs sent small groups of Kazakhstani citizens to the United States to meet with subject matter experts. Topics of 2004 programs included TIP, independent media, and religious diversity.

The Government's record on freedom of religion is exemplary, but experts fear that the proposed Law on Extremism may undercut that positive development. The Ambassador and Embassy officers remained heavily engaged in dialogue with the Government to encourage that this legislation be drafted through a transparent legislative drafting process and that it reflect Kazakhstan's international commitments to respect individuals' rights to peaceful expression of religion. A representative of the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom's office visited the country and met with Government officials to express concern over the draft Law on Extremism. During a visit to Astana in October 2004, the then-Deputy Secretary and the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs raised concerns about the Law on Extremism at the highest levels of the Government.

Kyrgyz Republic

During 2004, the Kyrgyz Government's human rights record remained poor, although there were improvements in some areas. Although the 1993 Constitution defines the Kyrgyz Republic as a democratic republic, President Askar Akayev continued to dominate the Government. The Government limited citizens' right to change their government. While irregularities marred balloting in some districts during nationwide local elections in October, they took place generally without government interference and opposition candidates and parties were allowed to participate freely in the political process. Members of the security forces at times beat and otherwise mistreated persons. Prison conditions remained very poor, but improved slightly during the year. Abuse by police remained a problem, and numerous law enforcement authorities were dismissed or prosecuted for abuses or misconduct. There were cases of arbitrary arrest or detention. Executive branch domination of the judiciary as well as corruption limited citizens' right to due process. The Government occasionally restricted freedom of speech and of the press, and individuals and companies close to the Government used financial means to control numerous media outlets. The Government used bureaucratic means to harass and pressure some independent media as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The government-appointed Ombudsmans Office actively worked to advocate individual rights.

With parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for 2005, the U.S. strategy to promote democracy and human rights, including religious freedom, was increasingly focused on creating a conducive environment for transparent, free and fair elections by strengthening democratic institutions, increasing observance of human rights, supporting civil society organizations and promoting the development of independent media. In 2004, U.S. democracy assistance programs in the Kyrgyz Republic provided technical assistance and grants in the areas of civil society, rule of law and media to strengthen democratic practices among citizens and institutions.

To promote democracy, the United States maintained close contact with independent journalists, human rights activists and opposition politicians while encouraging dialogue between the Government, the opposition and civil society. The Ambassador and visiting senior U.S. officials met frequently with reform-minded parliamentarians and human rights activists to solicit their views. During a July 2004 visit to Bishkek, then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Beth Jones and the Ambassador held discussions with local NGOs and civil society representatives. They met with Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev and other senior officials to discuss concerns about human rights issues and the 2005 elections. In May and November of 2004, high-level U.S. officials discussed with Foreign Minister Askar Aitmatov and President Akayev the need for continued progress in democratization in order to broaden U.S.-Kyrgyz bilateral relations.

After consulting closely with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NGOs, President Akayev in January signed into law a new election code. While some of the changes in the new law mark significant progress, the OSCE determined it did not meet international standards due to provisions that could be used to limit civil and political rights. However, local elections held in October 2004, the first test of the new code, were widely regarded as the most open and transparent in the history of Kyrgyzstan. The elections also revealed a real need for more training for election officials and observers. Throughout 2004, U.S. officials met extensively with legislators as well as senior government officials, including President Akayev, urging them to adhere to international standards in the coming parliamentary and presidential elections. President Akayev has given his pledge to step down from the presidency and to ensure a peaceful transition.

Throughout 2004, the United States continued to work closely with other members of the international community to promote democratic reform. In September the United States agreed to fund the entire cost of an OSCE proposal to promote free and fair elections in Kyrgyzstan in 2005. Embassy officials met frequently with representatives of

other governments and international organizations to coordinate election-related efforts and share information.

United States-funded NGOs were very active in election-related programs. The International Republican Institute (IRI) used U.S. funding to offer development assistance to all political parties in order to increase citizen participation in the political process. IRI also collaborated with IFES and the Central Election Commission (CEC) to conduct intensive polling station worker training for 400 CEC members in 50 Bishkek electoral districts. For this, IRI and IFES wrote a CEC manual based on a chronological approach, starting with procedures before election day, on election day, and post election day. These were the only CEC trainings for the local elections countrywide. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) used U.S. funding to support a local NGO to conduct a parallel vote tabulation for October's local elections. The National Democratic Institute also provided political party training and technical development assistance. During 2004, the United States also provided small grants to local NGOs in support of non-partisan election-related programs. Both the parliament and President approved in October amendments to the election code allowing for the use of indelible ink in future elections, an important tool in preventing election fraud. For 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections, the United States will pay for the cost of procuring the ink and training election officials in its use.

Freedom of media also remains a serious concern. The U.S.-funded independent printing press implemented by Freedom House, the first of its kind in the Kyrgyz Republic, continued to operate successfully and attract customers from around Kyrgyzstan as well as neighboring countries. By the end of 2004, the press was printing more than 70 independent and government-owned newspapers. Internews, a U.S. implementing partner, continued a program to support independent print and broadcast media by conducting training seminars, providing technical and legal assistance, and producing innovative news programs for exchange between independent outlets around the country and region. The Institute for War and Peace Reporting continued its program of training

journalists on expanded human rights reporting and facilitating dialogue between civil society and media outlets to address human rights and democracy issues. With U.S. funding, the International Research and Exchanges Board launched the Jalalabad Media Resource Center to provide services to the independent media sector, including legal assistance, group training, individualized consulting, and advocacy support. The Center also conducts regular community events, such as roundtables with regional journalism students, local officers, and NGO and mass media representatives.

The United States was highly engaged on rule of law issues, such as arbitrary arrest and excessive use of force. United States officials continued to raise with senior Kyrgyz officials the need for due process in the case of imprisoned opposition leader Felix Kulov. In addition, the Ambassador met with senior Kyrgyz officials and urged them to vigorously investigate the disappearance of well-known opposition figure Tursunbek Akunov in November.

To improve rule of law, the United States funded a "Judicial Watchdog Project", implemented by a local NGO. The goal of the project is to promote greater transparency and fairness throughout the judicial system by placing monitors in courtrooms. The program has already shown results; for example, complaints made about a particular judge's corruption and incompetence led to a government investigation of that judge, who was later dismissed. The United States also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan to facilitate training of judges and improve access to judicial opinions, to be implemented by U.S. grantee ARD-Checchi. The United States also continued its work with the OSCE on an OSCE-sponsored community policing project aimed at improving community-police relations and providing training to Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies on proper crowd control tactics.

A U.S.-funded program implemented by Freedom House to support human rights defenders worked closely with grassroots activists and youth leaders on training in human rights monitoring and advocacy. United States implementing partners also

trained citizens on techniques for organizing advocacy campaigns to achieve sustainable solutions to local and national problems. Local NGOs supported by U.S. programs successfully lobbied for changes to the law on public meetings, which was widely regarded as vague and too restrictive. In October of 2004, the Constitutional Court overturned three articles of the law that were not in compliance with the Constitution.

The number of high schools using a civics textbook developed by U.S. implementing partner IFES increased to 669 from 324 the year before, reaching almost 40,000 students across the country. United States implementing partners worked with reform-minded parliamentarians and promoted public hearings as a way to elicit citizens' views on new legislation. A growing network of U.S.-funded Information Centers for Democracy implemented by NDI provided citizens with access to independent media and infrastructure to host "town-hall" meetings to discuss current political issues and distributed daily "news digests". In November, the Ambassador and a senior aide to President Akayev visited one of the Information Centers, where they met with Center staff and representatives of NGOs. The Information Centers for Democracy continue to provide citizens with the knowledge and skills to design and implement responses to challenging local and national policy issues.

The United States also used public diplomacy funds to sponsor International Visitors Programs (IVP) focused on the issues of political party operations, religious tolerance, student ethics, law enforcement and security, and promoting independent media. The programs brought together individuals representing the Government, NGOs, religious communities and academia to foster cooperation between these groups.

The U.S.-sponsored Democracy Commission funded 53 grants to local NGOs in support of independent media outlets, information dissemination, combating trafficking in persons (TIP), journalism training, academic integrity, human rights, democracy, and civic and legal education. For example, one Democracy Commission grantee organized courses on multicultural tolerance, comparative

religious studies and prevention of radical Islam at the Islamic University of the Kyrgyz Republic. Other programs included a leadership summer camp for high school students from across the country. Also, 14 student groups and four teacher groups at 14 Kyrgyz universities received grants to combat corruption within the education system.

The United States maintained regular contacts with representatives of various religious communities, and several Kyrgyz religious leaders visited the United States on an IVP. The Ambassador hosted an annual Iftaar dinner for Muslim leaders and addressed a crowd of worshipers in the Bishkek main square on the occasion of Kurman Ait, marking the end of Ramadan. Religious leaders in the cities of Osh, Jalalabad, and Karakol visited numerous U.S.-funded projects as part of a new USAID outreach effort.

On numerous occasions, U.S. officials urged the Kyrgyz Republic to employ resources more effectively to combat TIP. In partial response to U.S. requests, the Kyrgyz Republic began funding for staff members of the Secretariat of the National Council to Combat Trafficking and provided space in Bishkek free of charge for the country's first shelter for trafficking victims. These efforts also contributed to an increase in the number of prosecutions for trafficking and associated crimes in 2004. Among U.S.-funded projects to combat TIP, the United States started a new two-year program to strengthen the capacity of local NGOs to conduct public information campaigns and provide assistance to victims.

Macedonia

Macedonia is a multiparty parliamentary democracy. The current multi-ethnic coalition Government, led by Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski of the ethnic Macedonian Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, came to power in September 2002 in elections deemed free and fair by international observers. After former President Boris Trajkovski died in an airplane crash in February 2004, then-Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski was elected president in April in an election generally considered free and

fair. A divisive national referendum challenging new municipal-redistricting laws failed due to low voter turnout in November, and local elections on the basis of newly formed, ethnically diverse municipalities are scheduled for March 2005.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Law enforcement officers occasionally beat suspects, particularly during initial arrest and detention. In contrast with previous years, arbitrary arrest and prolonged pretrial detention occurred infrequently. The Government showed progress on investigating allegations of human rights abuses. The judiciary, on some occasions, did not effectively investigate or prosecute state agents and civilians for alleged human rights abuses. Implementation of an amnesty law for former 2001 combatants not accused of war crimes was completed by year's end. The Government continued to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in investigating alleged war crimes cases. Violence and discrimination against women (particularly in the Roma and Albanian communities) remained problems, as did societal discrimination against minorities, including Roma, ethnic Albanians and ethnic Turks. Trafficking in persons (TIP) was a problem that the Government continued to combat aggressively. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however corruption, coercion and political influence at times limited its ability to function efficiently.

United States support for democracy and human rights in Macedonia has played a crucial role in helping the country transition from an unstable, ethnically divided society in the aftermath of the 2001 conflict to an aspiring EU NATO candidate today.

The 2004-2005 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Macedonia focused on encouraging the Government to pass the remaining legislation mandated by the Framework Agreement (FWA), the agreement that ended the 2001 conflict, ensure its efficient implementation, and address critical judicial and rule of law shortcomings.

The United States provided significant financial support in fiscal year 2004 to support FWA-mandated decentralization efforts in Macedonia, and led donor coordination efforts. The U.S.-funded Make Decentralization Work program assisted municipalities in developing the capacity to decentralize and increase citizen participation in public decision-making successfully.

The United States actively continued to monitor and encourage all levels of government to implement the FWA. Macedonia's ethnic minorities enjoyed the FWA's positive impact in 2004, when they applied for the first time for dual-language passports, studied at the state-supported, Albanian-language Tetovo University and saw mixed-ethnic police patrols ensuring the safety of Macedonia's streets and borders. Unequivocal U.S. support for the FWA process helped encourage Macedonia's multiethnic coalition Government to overcome a contentious intra-coalition debate and agree on new municipal boundaries in August. United States recognition of Macedonia's constitutional name and statements by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Defense Secretary, and the U.S. Ambassador underscoring U.S. commitment to the FWA helped reduce support for a national referendum on decentralization that could have reversed progress under the FWA.

The United States supported the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) international observer missions for the unexpected presidential election in April and for the November 7 referendum. United States Embassy staff participated as observers at polling stations throughout the country. In both cases, the presence and actions of the OSCE-led missions helped to ensure free and fair electoral processes and thereby strengthen democracy in Macedonia.

The United States funded a project to assist the Government and political parties in improving communication, strengthening and democratizing internal practices, and encouraging meaningful dialogue between party leadership and constituents. Another U.S.-funded project helped parliament and political parties become more effective and responsive to citizens by recruiting politically- and ethnically-diverse students to serve as

research assistants for members of parliament, caucuses and committees. Both projects also focused on increasing political involvement among women, youth and minority groups, including Roma.

With U.S. support, local communities fostered democratic decision-making, inter-ethnic cooperation and management skills as they planned and executed projects addressing urgent needs, including school repairs, water supply system, and other community projects. In the town of Debar, one school that benefited from the program waived fees for 32 Roma students who otherwise could not afford to attend as a show of the community's democratic commitment and project appreciation. The United States provided grants, technical assistance and training to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on conflict management, community development, youth, gender and minority rights, and expanding citizen participation in decision-making at the national and local levels.

The United States frequently and directly engaged in human rights advocacy, often in coordination with other representatives of the international community. The United States and its partners from the international community continued to stress to the Government that Macedonia's NATO and EU aspirations hinge on its ability to respect international human rights and democracy standards and the rule of law, including the obligation to bring human rights abusers to justice. The United States and other members of the international community, through joint letters and in person, collectively pressed the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) to render justice for past human rights abuses.

In direct response to U.S. demarches, the Government re-opened and investigated stalled human rights abuse cases. The MOI reviewed the shortcomings of previous investigations and has launched additional, supervised investigations to bring the cases to closure. The MOI agreed to consider several murder cases from 2001 and 2002 in which police and officials of the former Government were implicated. By the end of 2004, two of these cases were satisfactorily closed, while

a third was under investigation.

On numerous occasions, the United States pressed the Government to hold accountable the perpetrators of the 2002 Rastanski Lozja incident, in which police in the former Government murdered seven South Asian itinerant workers and then portrayed them as terrorists. Constant pressure by the United States and other members of the international community stiffened the Government's resolve to bring the perpetrators to justice. In September, former Minister of Interior Boskovski, the suspected mastermind of the crime, was arrested in Croatia based on evidence submitted by the Macedonian authorities. He remains there awaiting trial. Another six former MOI officials were arrested in April in connection with the case. Trials for four of these suspects began in November and the remaining two suspects agreed to testify against their former MOI co-workers allegedly involved in the case.

In July, the U.S. Ambassador raised concerns with senior government officials about delays in serving ICTY summonses and stressed the need for the Government to ensure cooperation with the tribunal. Within a few weeks, bureaucratic bottlenecks had been removed and all summonses had been successfully delivered.

At the insistence of the U.S. Ambassador, the Minister of Defense changed the Border Brigade's Rules of Engagement to highly circumscribe the use of deadly force. Since then, no one has been killed while illegally crossing the Macedonian border.

During 2004, the United States hosted, co-organized, or participated in events to help Macedonia's judiciary attain EU standards. Significant achievements in 2004-2005 included amendments to the criminal code, an improved juvenile justice system, longer sentences for crimes against children, and an improved witness-protection law.

The U.S.-sponsored International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICI-TAP) projects promoted a community policing model, encouraging better protection of human rights and enhanced problem-solving cooperation between police and community leaders. As a

result of ICITAP's activities, the Government has incorporated internationally-accepted community policing principles into the Code of Police Ethics of the Macedonian National Police. The success of a 2003 Community Policing pilot project in the city of Kavadarci prompted the MOI to request and the United States to launch a similar ICITAP project in the capital Skopje in 2004. The MOI has mandated that ICITAP's Community Policing Curriculum, which focuses on respect for human rights, be implemented nationwide and incorporated into police academy training.

In 2004, ICITAP also continued to provide guidance to the MOI's Professional Standards Unit (PSU), which enforces rules of conduct and conducts internal investigations. With ICITAP's assistance, the PSU continued to develop the capacity to carry out independent investigations and ensure consistent adherence to human rights principles. Based on ICITAP's recommendation, a new "criminal section" was established within the PSU to investigate cases of criminal misbehavior of law enforcement officials separately from cases of administrative/disciplinary misbehavior. Provisions for increased PSU transparency and enhanced cooperation with judicial authorities and the Ombudsman's office were also put in place.

Working together with the Macedonian police, ICITAP established the Citizens' Police Academy (CPA), the first institution of its kind in the Balkans. The Citizens' Police Academy educates citizens about the nature of police work, police practices and the new community policing model being adopted in Macedonia. By facilitating communication between police and citizens, the ICITAP-supported CPA builds trust, promotes transparency and improves government protection of human rights through increased respect for the rule of law. Collectively, U.S.-funded programs helped the Macedonian police to improve their respect for human rights significantly during 2004.

Putting previous U.S.-sponsored anti-organized crime training to use, government officials in 2004 began two trans-national TIP and money-laundering investigations involving current and former Government officials. The United States is providing expert assistance in the money-laundering

investigation at the Government's request. The Southeast European Cooperation Initiative provided with U.S. funds technical assistance in support of customs and border control reform to help Macedonia fight corruption and customs crimes.

The United States awarded numerous small grants to local NGOs in support of projects promoting human rights. The U.S.-funded American Corner in Bitola, Macedonia's second largest city, regularly hosted programs to increase public awareness of human and civil rights. A second American Corner opened in Skopje in January 2005, creating further opportunities for human rights and democracy-related outreach. The United States disseminated a wide variety of materials on human rights to key representatives of Macedonian media, NGOs, and others.

The United States promotes respect for the rights of women and minorities in several ways. The U.S. Embassy hosted its annual women's event and recognized 13 women for their contributions to Macedonian society through outstanding performance in their chosen professions. Throughout the year, U.S. officials participated in roundtable discussions organized by the Project on Ethnic Relations. This dialogue between the Government, political party leaders, international community representatives, NGOs and Roma leaders, resulted in the development of a government strategy to better address the needs of Macedonia's Roma community.

To promote religious freedom, U.S. officials regularly met with Macedonian religious groups and monitored religious freedom issues. The United States consistently encouraged the Government to protect religious freedom and to find an acceptable solution to the ongoing religious dispute between the Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Churches and their respective clergy. In October 2004, the Ambassador hosted an Iftaar dinner for leaders of Macedonia's Islamic Community (MIC). He stressed the U.S. commitment to religious freedom and tolerance and encouraged the MIC to continue playing a constructive role in the run-up to the contentious and ethnically charged referendum. Shortly afterward, the MIC issued a statement reaffirming its support for the FWA and inter-ethnic

cooperation. In November, the U.S. Ambassador pressed government officials to ensure fair treatment of a controversial Serbian Orthodox Church Bishop involved in a dispute with the Macedonian Orthodox Church. In December 2004, U.S. officials met with members of the Jewish Community of Macedonia to discuss their concerns regarding the stalled restitution of properties granted to the Jewish Holocaust Fund in Macedonia, and then highlighted these concerns in subsequent meetings with government officials. As of January 2005, sufficient property had been transferred to the Fund to enable construction of a Holocaust Memorial Center in the former Jewish quarter of Skopje.

In support of worker's rights, the United States funded a project to assist the 250,000-member Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia to improve membership services and provisions for ethnic minority members. The teachers' union - once on the verge of splitting along ethnic lines - has added over 8,000 new members as a direct result of this support and developed into a group that advocates shared professional concerns that cross ethnic lines.

The United States aggressively promoted training, education and awareness initiatives to help combat Macedonia's TIP problem. The United States also hosted an ongoing series of training programs that enhanced collaboration among prosecutors, police and investigative judges, improved anti-trafficking prosecutorial and police techniques, and worked to ensure that trafficking victims' human rights were respected during police investigations. ICITAP facilitated a U.S. donation of vehicles and office equipment to the Anti-Trafficking Unit of the Macedonian National Police.

The United States conducted exchange and training programs to demonstrate how the United States handles the issue of trafficking. The American Corners in Skopje and Bitola have special sections devoted to human trafficking for public awareness and use. The United States also disbursed small grants to NGOs to raise public awareness about TIP. A U.S.-funded interim witness facilitation program began operating in 2004.

Another U.S. grant helped a local NGO that specializes in anti-trafficking activities to begin developing a national anti-trafficking database.

Moldova

The Moldovan Constitution provides for a multi-party representative government with power divided among a president, cabinet, parliament and judiciary. In 1992, a separatist regime, supported by Russian military forces, declared a "Transnistria Moldovan Republic" in the region between the Dniester River and Ukraine. The Government of Moldova does not control this region. Unless otherwise stated, all references that follow are to the rest of the country.

Generally free and fair parliamentary elections in 2001 resulted in an overwhelming parliamentary majority for the Communist Party. Authorities in the separatist Transnistria region interfered with the ability of residents there to vote in this and other national elections. During the past four years, progress on democratic reforms has slowly deteriorated. In 2004, the Government continued to use its resources to influence the media to present pro-government views and to discredit and deny access to the political opposition. Some progress was made when the Government transformed the state broadcasting company, Teleradio Moldova (TRM), into a public institution. Journalists and opposition political parties protested this process because it was not conducted transparently. United States officials met repeatedly with authorities to urge that these problems be addressed constructively. The Ambassador and the EU issued a public statement calling on the Government to meet Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Council of Europe standards for freedom of the media.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Some law enforcement personnel reportedly tortured and beat some persons, particularly persons in police custody and Roma. Security forces were widely believed to monitor political figures, use unauthorized wiretaps, and at times conduct illegal searches. Widespread cor-

ruption persisted, and judges were reportedly subject to outside influence and corruption. There were some limits on workers' rights, and a few religious groups continued to encounter difficulties in obtaining official registration. Trafficking in persons (TIP) remained a very serious problem.

The democratization and human rights record of the separatist-controlled Transnistria region remained very poor. The Transnistrian authorities reportedly continued to use torture and arbitrary arrest and detention. Two members of the so-called "Ilascu group," convicted of killing two Transnistrian officials during the 1991-92 civil war, remained in prison despite a 2004 European Court of Human Rights ruling calling for their release. In June, an alleged witness to the mistreatment of the "Ilascu group" during their imprisonment disappeared under unclear circumstances. Transnistrian authorities harassed and intimidated opposition figures and the independent media, and restricted freedom of association and of religion. Transnistrian discrimination against Romanian-speakers culminated in a crisis in the summer and fall of 2004 when Transnistrian authorities closed several Latin-script schools. The Government responded by restricting Transnistrian trade. The situation was defused in September, when the OSCE negotiated a formula to allow the schools to register and re-open for one year; however, tensions remain high.

The United States worked through the OSCE and directly with the parties to push for a resolution to the conflict in Transnistria that is just, equitable and respects the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova. These efforts included Embassy discussions with government officials in Chisinau, a visit by the U.S. Special Negotiator for Eurasian Conflicts to Chisinau and Tiraspol in October, and extensive efforts by the U.S. Mission to the OSCE to focus European attention on the unacceptable behavior of the Transnistrian regime. In addition, the United States, in concert with the EU, extended the existing visa ban on senior Transnistrian officials to individuals involved in closing the Latin-script schools.

The U.S. strategy for promoting human rights and democracy in Moldova focuses on strengthening the rule of law, good governance, independent media and civil society, promoting free and fair elections and combating TIP. The United States consistently stressed in meetings and demarches that the Government needs to take concrete steps to promote democracy and human rights if it is to enjoy deeper bilateral relations and improve membership prospects in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

In 2004, the United States placed a special emphasis on promoting free and fair 2005 parliamentary elections. The Ambassador and other U.S. representatives frequently engaged high-level government officials and the Central Election Commission (CEC), emphasizing the importance of ensuring free and fair elections and pressing for electoral reforms that would minimize the shortcomings that marred the 2003 local elections. The United States supported the formation and activities of an association of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), "Coalition for Free and Fair Elections," to implement electoral monitoring and voter education programs. The United States funded training for lawyers, judges and advocates on election law and procedures for adjudication of election disputes. The United States supported seminars for political parties and representatives of both independent and state-controlled media organizations to discuss election-related issues and the role of the news media in free and fair elections. Along these lines, the United States provided support for a program to monitor the objectivity and content of news from all major Moldovan TV, radio stations and newspapers during the campaign period.

The International Visitors Program (IVP) sponsored two elections-related study trips to the U.S.: one for members of the CEC to study the electoral process, and another for members of the media and NGOs to study the role of civil society in elections. The United States also provided grants to NGOs for projects focused on promoting open and balanced public discussion and debate and for local Get-Out-the-Vote activities.

Several initiatives were undertaken to strengthen civil society. United States-sponsored programs helped to train Moldovan political parties to organize effective party structures, build successful coalitions, recruit and mobilize new members at the local party level and reach out to citizens. The United States supported programs to increase citizens' knowledge of transparent government processes and to promote constructive dialogue between citizens and their local government. These efforts fostered participation and leadership skills at the grassroots level.

The IVP arranged a trip to the United States for representatives of government information and public relations offices to enhance their understanding of freedom of information and transparency in government. To improve local governance, another IVP was arranged for mayors to study how local public administration functions in the United States and how to better collaborate with different levels of government, state institutions and NGOs in the area of public administration. The United States continued a local government reform program in 2004, working with more than 50 communities to improve fiscal management, increase transparency and citizen participation in community decision-making, and improve strategic planning.

Working with EU representatives, the United States promoted freedom of assembly when they successfully urged the Government to end efforts to lift the parliamentary immunity of opposition lawmakers in connection with their organization of peaceful protests. Government influence on the media was of particular concern, and the United States promoted media freedom in several ways. In 2004, the United States supported a media-monitoring project implemented by a respected consortium of independent NGOs to systematically assess the content of news reports of Moldova's sole nationwide public TV and radio broadcaster TRM. The United States consistently raised the issue of media freedom with high-level Moldovan officials and used the monitoring results to press them to take immediate steps to improve the objectivity, quality, and opposition's access to public media. United States officials also met with Moldovan authorities to raise concerns about licensing procedures hindering independent

media and the non-transparent transformation of TRM into a public institution. The United States provided many media outlets and media-related NGOs with financial support to implement projects that promote freedom of speech and access to a full range of opinions. The United States supported the publishing of an independent newspaper in Gagauzia, the expansion of Vocea Basarabiei radio station's signal to Edinet, Soroca and Balti, and the implementation of locally-sponsored trainings for journalists covering social issues. The United States assisted two radio stations in buying the necessary equipment to broadcast in the separatist region of Transnistria, where independent media is restricted. These two stations now cover the entire Transnistrian region.

The United States brought media experts to Moldova to participate in conferences and seminars designed to improve the skills of Moldovan media professionals and students. The United States also continued to support a three-year partnership between Moldova State University's Department of Communications, the Independent Journalism Center and Missouri School of Journalism to improve journalism education in Moldova.

The United States supported several efforts to promote the rule of law and combat corruption in Moldova. The United States engaged the Government, including the Moldovan President, on the need to address the problem of corruption seriously and to halt politically motivated corruption investigations of opposition political figures. The Resident Legal Advisor (RLA) worked with the Government to combat corruption and to increase the effectiveness of law enforcement assistance programs. The RLA's anti-corruption initiatives included a series of training seminars and roundtables designed to improve criminal procedure and prosecutor-investigator teamwork, and collaboration with the Government and Council of Europe experts in drafting the new National Anti-Corruption Strategy and Plan. The RLA also provided technical assistance to the Center for Combating Economic Crime and Corruption to help design internal reforms that would reduce inefficiency and minimize opportunities for corruption.

The RLA successfully pushed for amendments to the law on operative investigations that permit investigators to work undercover and expands their investigative authority in other ways. Similarly, the RLA sponsored a legislative round-table that resulted in a high-level working group to re-examine the country's weak plea-bargaining law in order to give prosecutors new tools to combat corruption.

Other rule of law programs assisted Moldovan legal institutions, judges, bar associations, students and lawyers to strengthen the quality and awareness of legal education and legal reforms. The U.S.-funded Criminal Law program conducted training for judges on human rights and for the defense bar on advocacy skills.

The United States funded an Expanded International Military Education and Training program for the Moldovan military designed to improve respect for human rights and civilian control over the armed forces. This included the hosting of two seminars on "Planning for Peacekeeping Operations" at the ministerial and inter-ministerial levels and a number of Moldovan officers at various training courses in the United States, entitled "Military and Peacekeeping Operations in Accordance with Rule of Law," "Judge Advocate General," "Defense Restructuring" and "Civil-Military Relations." The United States also supported the participation of 17 mid-to-senior level military, civilian and law enforcement officials in Marshall Center courses focusing on democracy, civil-military relations, and national and trans-national security issues.

In July, during a visit to Moldova, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld stressed to President Voronin the importance of continued military education and training as well as participation in Partnership for Peace activities in enhancing respect for human rights, peace and security throughout the region. The United States uses a vetting procedure in accordance with the Leahy Amendment to ensure that it does not train individuals who committed or were responsible for human rights violations.

In an effort to highlight U.S. concern for religious freedom, U.S. Embassy officials met with the local leaders of several religious groups in 2004. The United States raised concerns and delivered the Government a diplomatic note about some religious groups' persistent registration difficulties with the State Service on Religions. The U.S. Embassy also raised concerns about some religious groups being impeded from constructing houses of worship.

The Ambassador and other U.S. officials repeatedly emphasized the importance of combating TIP. At the U.S.-Moldova Joint Economic Task Force meeting in June, the RLA made a presentation to several Moldovan Government ministers and high-level officials on trafficking efforts, in which she pressed for continued cooperation and increased efforts by the Government to combat trafficking. The RLA provided technical assistance for judges, prosecutors and investigators to address TIP, including training that emphasized education, sensitivity and skills development, and provided legislative drafting assistance. The RLA instituted and maintained an ongoing monitoring plan of all aspects of criminal investigation and prosecution in order to pinpoint areas where assistance could best be provided and to assess Moldova's record in obtaining convictions and appropriate sentences.

In 2004, the United States began a number of programs through President Bush's \$50 million Anti-Trafficking Initiative to deal comprehensively with all aspects of trafficking. The United States assisted Moldovan law enforcement with training and facilitated trans-border anti-trafficking cooperation with neighboring countries. It began implementing programs to address the economic roots of trafficking by improving access for young women and girls to legitimate employment opportunities. These programs offered career counseling, skills training and job placement as well as other forms of assistance to potential and actual victims of trafficking. The United States continued to support the work of the Center for the Prevention of Trafficking in Women in providing legal assistance and counseling, legal representation, and help in replacing identity papers and other lost documents for victims. The United States supported

the International Labor Organization's International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor to prevent the trafficking of children for sexual and labor exploitation. The United States also provided funding for a nationwide trafficking information campaign implemented by the International Organization for Migration and targeted at potential trafficking victims. One key product was the film "*Lilya 4-ever*," which documented the recruitment and abuse of victims and was shown in cinemas and schools throughout the country free of charge.

Russia

Although the Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens in 2004 in some areas, it was poor in some areas and worsened in others. A move from election to nomination by the President of regional governors further strengthened the power of the executive branch. This, coupled with media restrictions, a compliant State Duma, shortcomings in recent national elections, law enforcement corruption, and political pressure on the judiciary raised concerns about the erosion of government leaders' accountability to the people. Government pressure further weakened freedom of expression and undermined the effectiveness of independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Government's record remained poor in Chechnya, where there were credible reports of serious violations, including numerous reports of unlawful killings and abuses of civilians by both federal security forces and Chechen government security forces. Rebel fighters also committed acts of terrorism and human rights abuses in the North Caucasus region. Law enforcement personnel reportedly engaged in torture, violence, and other brutal or humiliating behavior, often with impunity. A series of cases involving alleged espionage caused continued concerns regarding due process and the influence of the Federal Security Service in the judicial system. Authorities imposed restrictions on some minority religious groups. Minorities experienced widespread discrimination, and, increasingly, racially-motivated attacks. Limits on workers' rights increased, as did reports of forced and child labor. Trafficking in persons (TIP) remained a serious problem despite steps to combat trafficking.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy in Russia promotes democratic institutions and processes, a vibrant civil society, fundamental freedoms, rule of law, human rights and anti-trafficking measures.

Senior U.S. officials including the President, the Secretary of State and Ambassador raised human rights and democracy concerns with their Russian counterparts. For example, in his February 2005 and November 2004 meetings with President Putin in Bratislava, Slovakia and Santiago, Chile, President Bush raised a broad range of bilateral issues including democracy and human rights concerns.

Senior U.S. officials made human rights and democracy a major public diplomacy theme. Secretary of State Powell wrote in a January op-ed in the newspaper *Izvestiya* that Russia had not yet found the "essential balance among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government" and that political power was not yet "fully tethered to law." His op-ed was quoted in Russian, U.S. and European media for months afterward. Secretary Powell published an op-ed in May in the newspaper *Kommersant* under the headline, "Colin Powell: Those Guilty of Violations in Iraq Will Not Escape Punishment." The Ambassador and other Embassy staff also communicated U.S. concerns privately to Russian national and regional officials and worked with NGOs to support a more favorable climate.

To celebrate International Human Rights Day, Ambassador Vershbow addressed and took questions from 150 Moscow State University students on the subject of human rights and democracy. The Embassy sponsored a year-long course on American Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, given by U.S. diplomats, at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, perhaps Russia's most prominent university for diplomats, where human rights and democracy were pervasive themes.

Ambassador Vershbow's June interview with the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, published under the headline "We Have Concerns that Russia Is Moving Towards a New Self-Isolation," voiced concern about President Putin's criticism of

Western NGOs working in Russia, rule of law problems in the Yukos case and human rights abuses in Chechnya. The Ambassador conveyed U.S. concerns about the erosion of democratic institutions and the rule of law in several other interviews with Russian newspapers and websites, and in speeches and seminars.

Numerous Embassy-sponsored speakers from the United States addressed Russian audiences on topics ranging from U.S. state government interaction with media and NGOs to the 2004 U.S. presidential election and the future of U.S.-Russian relations. The Embassy distributed 29 sets of over 100 books on democracy, freedom of expression, tolerance, and human rights.

Despite U.S. efforts during 2004, negative developments raised serious questions over the strength and depth of Russian commitment to human rights, democratic reform and the rule of law. As a result of these adverse developments, the Secretary of State was unable for the first time to certify the Russian Government's commitment to observe internationally recognized human rights under the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Act. In order to allow the United States to continue to work with the Russian Government on essential weapons reduction and nonproliferation projects, the president waived the requirement to certify Russia for CTR assistance.

Like the December 2003 Duma elections, the March presidential election did not meet international standards in a number of areas, although the outcome was generally understood to have represented the will of the people. The United States promoted democratic institutions and processes diplomatically and programmatically. Diplomatically, U.S. officials raised concerns with Russian officials before and after the national presidential, and Chechen presidential elections.

Programmatically, the United States supported the monitoring of the March presidential election by a Russian election watchdog organization and the training of mass media representatives in political and election reporting. With U.S. funding, NGO partners trained independent observers to monitor the work of deputies in regional legislatures. The

United States supported training and development activities for Russian political parties. In April, the United States began a program to expand citizen monitoring of regional legislators' actions, encouraging interaction and accountability between constituents and their elected officials. The United States contributes to the promotion of elections that meet international standards through development of regional-level media expertise, facilitation of advocacy and public dialogue about the role of free media and promotion of more professional media in the regions.

Russian government efforts "to manage" civil society, including increased scrutiny of many foreign-funded – as well as domestic – NGOs, continued. To promote a vibrant civil society, U.S. programs support NGOs, resource centers, advocacy and watchdog groups, policy think tanks, business associations and labor unions. Using U.S. funding, NGO partners promoted volunteerism and community service, and advocated for citizens' rights and against corruption. United States assistance supported more than 1,000 environmental protection, public advocacy, and other events throughout Russia, with participation of at least 120,000 activists.

As further backsliding occurred in media freedom, the United States worked to strengthen regional broadcast media activities and improve access to sources of non-state information. Over 200 smaller TV stations sent more than 1,600 professionals to seminars at Regional Training Centers. This represented the first professional training for a number of them. By 2004, a total of 502 regional TV outlets took part in at least one public awareness campaign. The United States also organized International Visitors Programs (IVPs) on television station management and the functions of press secretaries.

To promote the rule of law, the United States supports exchange and technical assistance programs aimed at bolstering judicial independence, ethical conduct, transparency and professionalism. The court system enjoyed a larger budget than ever before, and further professionalized its operations with increasing use of computerization, professional court administrators, justices of the peace,

judicial assistants (law clerks) and court press officers. Programs supported by the United States inspired many of these improvements. Innovations adopted in U.S.-funded pilot courts have improved customer service, efficiency and transparency of operations. Russian officials are considering expanding them throughout the court system. The judiciary adopted a new Code of Judicial Ethics, to which U.S. experts contributed. Russia's practicing lawyers took first steps toward a continuing legal education program, funded in part by the United States. Other U.S. programs continue to support legal clinics, work on gender-related issues (such as domestic violence and trafficking), labor and migrant rights, and NGO advocacy skills. The Open World program expanded ties between Russian legal professionals and U.S. counterparts.

The United States has supported the successful use of the legal system by NGOs, which have won the majority of over 1,600 cases taken to court since 2002. Most cases were on behalf of refugees and labor union activists. Hits on a U.S.-supported human rights website jumped from 1,400 in 2003 to 67,000 in 2004. United States-supported law school legal clinics have spread to approximately 80 law schools, many of which provide representation to indigent persons, with some now beginning to specialize in subjects such as the rights of women, children and prisoners.

The gravest threat to human rights in Russia continued to be the conflict in Chechnya and its expansion to other areas of the North Caucasus. Senior U.S. officials, including Secretary Powell and the Ambassador, regularly expressed concern to Russian political and military leaders about the conduct of the Russian military and Chechen allies in Chechnya. United States officials used Congressional testimony, meetings with Russian officials, media interviews and public speeches to highlight shortcomings. They stressed that the United States supports a political, not military, solution, that Russian forces in Chechnya should end their abuses and that the Russian Government should prosecute those found responsible when violations occurred. The United States also called on Chechen fighters to end terrorist acts and violence against civilians, repudiate terrorism, and

cut all ties to Chechen and international terrorists. The United States recognizes the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.

The United States voted for the EU's resolution on Chechnya before the 2004 UN Commission on Human Rights and used Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) fora to convey its concerns about Chechnya. United States funding supported efforts to promote accountability for abuses in Chechnya. United States officials repeatedly stressed to Russian officials that all returns of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to Chechnya should be purely voluntary and that alternative shelter be provided to those IDPs who wish to remain in Ingushetiya. The United States supported legal assistance to indigent people, including through an NGO that assisted 6,373 IDPs in the North Caucasus in FY 2004. The United States funded international humanitarian assistance programs addressing a wide range of IDP needs in the North Caucasus. The United States also provided humanitarian assistance in response to the terrorist attack on the school in Beslan, North Ossetia.

To ensure that the United States trains individuals who have not violated human rights, it uses a vetting procedure in accordance with the Leahy Amendment.

Gender issues remained a central element of U.S. human rights strategy. An Embassy working group coordinated Embassy efforts on women's issues. A U.S. program trained 22 legal specialists and 100 social advocates in 2003 and 2004 to handle domestic violence cases and other gender-related issues. The program also worked to change how law enforcement bodies respond to domestic violence complaints. In his extensive travels to Russia's regions, the Ambassador hosted roundtable discussions and meetings with civil society activists including those working on such women's issues as the role of women in the private sector.

The United States also continued working to promote the rights of the disabled and children. A U.S.-assisted NGO project promoted the use of legal advocacy to secure access to education for

disabled students and conducted public campaigns on disabled and inclusive education. The United States supported seminars on the rights of the disabled for thousands of government and educational officials, community leaders, media representatives and lawyers, and supported development of a university course on disability law. While traveling in Russia's regions, the Ambassador hosted a number of roundtable discussions for civil society activists that included advocates for the rights of the disabled and children. The Ambassador's wife spoke at a conference on the rights of orphans.

Senior U.S. officials, including the Ambassador, maintained an active dialogue on freedom of religion and religious, racial and ethnic tolerance with government officials, religious denominations and NGOs. The Ambassador led a roundtable discussion on human rights and religious freedom in Bryansk, which has been the scene of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents.

The United States continued to monitor crucial court cases and visa issues affecting religious workers. The United States helped two of the country's major police academies institute tolerance courses as part of their curriculum. The Embassy continued the Tolerance Grants Initiative under the Democracy Commission and provided grants to 14 NGOs working to improve inter-ethnic and inter-religious tolerance. Building on previous projects, the United States supported the creation of tolerance councils in two additional regions – for a total of five – that brought together the general public, law enforcement officials, local NGOs and local governments to combat intolerant attitudes toward ethnic and religious groups.

International Visitors Leadership and speaker programs focused on Islam in America and on Tolerance and Diversity for Russian Muslim leaders. In several regions, the United States supported the introduction of tolerance-related training curriculum for future Ministry of Internal Affairs officials and for public schools. An Embassy Democracy Commission grant helped an organization conduct interviews with victims of hate crimes and political prosecutions.

Support from the United States to the Russian labor movement – for years provided through a U.S. implementer – in 2004 for the first time went directly to a Russian partner organization. This grant supports a nation-wide association of lawyers and other labor advocates who operate centers in seven cities. The organization provides individual trade unions and their members with expert legal advice on a wide range of labor contract issues. In 2004 alone, the organization represented in court the interests of its clients in a total of 272 hearings. Those hearings resulted in 87 decisions (56 positive and 31 negative for their clients). It appealed one of these cases to the European Court of Human Rights, which is expected to hear the case in 2005.

To promote anti-trafficking efforts, the United States worked successfully with supportive Russian authorities on the creation of legislation that establishes and funds a Russian witness protection program. This program will protect human trafficking victims as witnesses, and their families. The United States supported the efforts of the Russian Government in implementing last year's new trafficking legislation specifically criminalizing TIP. Additionally, Embassy legal experts testified before the Russian Duma in support of strengthening a draft law on trafficking that would cover the broader issues of prevention and protection. The United States conducted a "train-the-trainer" seminar on trafficking for representatives from all 23 Interior Ministry training institutes. The Embassy coordinated with anti-trafficking organizations engaged in public outreach, service provision and promotion of legislation. Its support of NGO partners throughout Russia raised awareness about trafficking, increased Russia's capacity for research on trafficking issues and enabled scholars to play a greater role in advising Russian policymakers on trafficking-related laws, policies and enforcement mechanisms. The United States continued to support efforts of a Russian coalition of organizations to address issues of domestic violence and TIP. With the support of U.S. funding, NGOs in three regions conducted informational seminars for 1,865 students to raise awareness about trafficking issues, and a crisis center network of 13 centers continued to provide legal and psychological counseling to more than 2,000 women.

Serbia and Montenegro

The state union of Serbia and Montenegro is a constitutional republic consisting of the relatively large Republic of Serbia and the much smaller Republic of Montenegro.* The two republics hold most of the authority, while the state union Government's responsibilities are essentially limited to the Foreign Ministry, the military, human and minority rights, and foreign and domestic economic and commercial relations.

The U.S. strategy to promote democracy and human rights in Serbia and Montenegro focuses on fostering a system of democratic, multi-ethnic governance that respects human rights. To this end, the United States supported the development of more effective, responsive and accountable democratic institutions in Serbia and Montenegro and funded programs designed to cultivate informed, tolerant and politically active citizens.

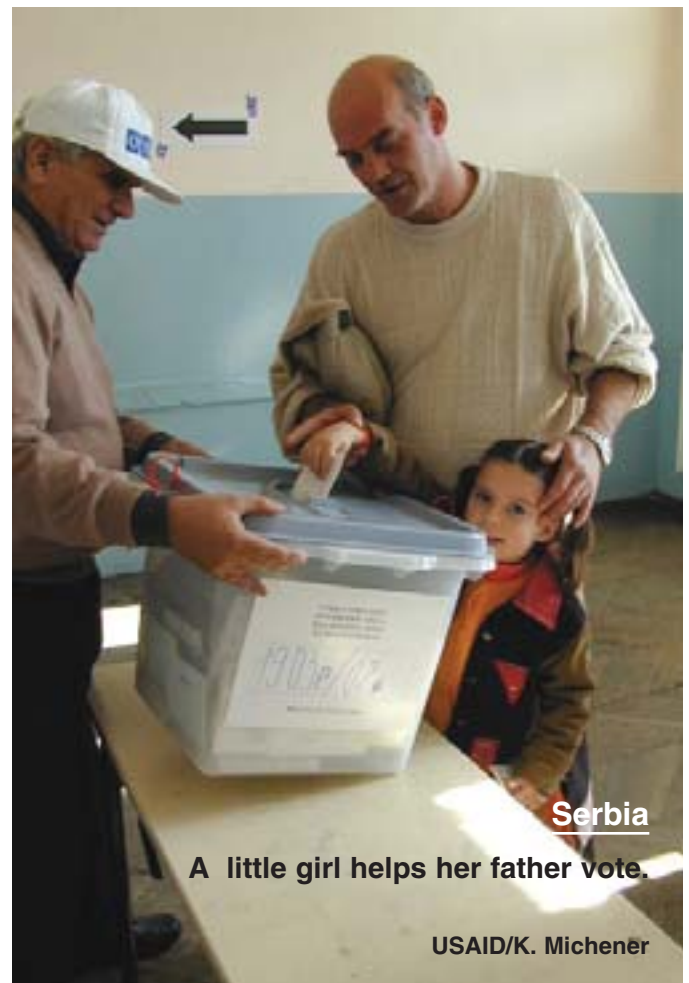
Serbia

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Police at times beat detainees and harassed citizens. Police effectively investigated high-level killings committed during and after the Milosevic era, although impunity for human rights abuses and corruption were problems. Prolonged pretrial detention was a problem. Courts remained backlogged and administratively paralyzed, and lengthy trials persisted. The war crimes court, a department of the Belgrade District Court established in 2003, began hearing war crimes cases during the year. The media was generally independent. Some journalists practiced self-censorship because of their vulnerability to private libel suits and indirect political manipulation. There were incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention. The judiciary continued to be susceptible to political influence, and poor cooperation between the judiciary and other government branches slowed the implementation of legislative reforms.

Two persons in Serbia indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) surrendered to the Tribunal.

The Government transferred many documents to the ICTY and gave waivers for witnesses to testify. Nonetheless, the ICTY remained dissatisfied with the overall cooperation of Serbia and Montenegro, in particular because it believed that key indictee General Ratko Mladic was at large in Serbia. In March, there were a number of incidents of societal violence and discrimination against religious minorities following widespread anti-Serb violence in Kosovo. Violence and discrimination against women and ethnic minorities were problems. Trafficking in persons (TIP) remained a problem that the Government took steps to address.

During 2004, the United States supported programs that trained political party leaders in capacity building, reform implementation, issue-based political dialogue and fair and transparent election campaigns. The United States also provided grants and technical assistance to non-partisan get-out-the-vote, election monitoring and election



Serbia

A little girl helps her father vote.

USAID/K. Michener

administration reform projects. The United States continued to support efforts to strengthen local government and promote decentralization through technical assistance and training.

Through U.S. funding, a number of organizations implemented programs to promote good governance and strengthen democracy. The International Republican Institute (IRI) promoted government reform, fostered civic organizations and strengthened political parties. Much of IRI's work with both municipalities and the Serbian Government focused on improving communication between the Government and constituents and accessibility of government services. In addition, IRI provided technical training to political parties on specific issues including building voter databases, targeting voters, establishing direct voter contact, and crafting issue-oriented campaigns that addressed citizens' concerns.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) assisted democratic political parties with organizational, electoral and strategic planning. NDI advised members of Serbia's parliament and municipal councilors on citizen outreach. The project also assisted a non-governmental organization (NGO) with nonpartisan election monitoring and voter mobilization.

With a U.S. grant, Freedom House Serbia worked to strengthen Serbia's civil society, cultivate civic and government leaders, and support Serbia's regional integration. Freedom House Serbia awarded grants to NGOs for institutional development, reform and policy projects, and cross-border activities. It also provided core support to two of Serbia's most important human rights NGOs.

The United States provided training, technical assistance, and grants to organizations seeking to increase media professionalism. The United States funded media training on such topics as NATO, the role of media in a democracy, election reporting, media management and journalists' rights. In 2004, the Independent Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), through a U.S. grant, helped Serbian media provide citizens with balanced and unbiased news and other information. In addition to improving professional journalism, IREX also promoted the efficient production and distribution of

news and information, helped to improve the legal and regulatory framework for media, and fostered sound business management. Additionally, IREX supported the delivery of media coverage of proceedings at the ICTY. The United States supported the production of documentaries and reports on topics ranging from war crimes to environmental issues. The United States funds three American Corners in Serbia, one of which was opened during 2004. These Corners are small American-style libraries that provide information about the United States, democracy, human rights, and other topics; they are co-located and co-funded with local municipal libraries or cultural institutions.

In 2004, the United States supported Serbia's efforts to promote accountability and the rule of law. Prosecuting war criminals was integral to this goal. The United States consistently made Serbia and Montenegro's cooperation with the ICTY a condition for full Euro-Atlantic integration. Although two persons indicted by the ICTY surrendered to authorities and were transferred to The Hague, the highest-level indictees remained at large. Largely because of U.S. support for Serbia's domestic capacity to adjudicate war crimes cases, the ICTY transferred two cases to Serbia during 2004. However, the United States halted some assistance to Serbia in March 2004 and announced the withholding of additional assistance in January 2005 because of Serbia's lack of cooperation with the ICTY.

United States grants facilitated the donation of equipment and supported training programs for police, prosecutors and judges in charge of rendering justice for war crimes. These programs helped establish a victim/witness protection unit and assisted the Serbian Government in drafting a witness protection law. The United States also lent assistance to the Serbian Ministry of Justice to reform the Criminal Procedure Code and other codes relevant for war crimes cases. A U.S.-organized trial monitoring program for war crimes cases will help to identify and resolve legal and technical issues that arise during such trials in Serbia. Additionally, the United States facilitated regional cooperation in the investigation and prosecution of war crimes cases. The United States helped to fund an NGO whose work includes locating and assisting victims and witnesses of domestic war

crimes. With U.S. assistance, this NGO is creating a center that documents the war crimes of the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

The United States supported the Government in its efforts to develop sound judicial institutions. With this support, the Government began the first systematic analysis of backlogs in Serbian courts and offered training and technical assistance to magistrates, judges, prosecutors, law schools, and associations of young lawyers. United States funds also supported programs that fostered the development of associations for prosecutors, judges and magistrates. Additionally, through the International Visitors Program, government and judicial officials received training on judicial reform and the U.S. judicial system.

The United States remained actively involved in encouraging systematic military reform to ensure civilian control over the military and respect for human rights by both civilian and military personnel in Serbia and Montenegro. Although the United States continued some military cooperation with Serbia and Montenegro, including education programs for reform-oriented mid-level officers in accordance with the Leahy Amendment, the U.S. Government conditioned full military engagement on Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY.

Supporting the rights of women, children, and minorities remained a priority for the United States. To heighten awareness of these issues, the United States funded media campaigns that promoted the rights of children with special needs and others with disabilities, and called for higher education to be available to disabled youth. The United States supported a public opinion survey on domestic violence and a project to involve young women attending institutions of higher education in student organizations.

The United States pressed Serbia to increase ethnic tolerance and accountability for attacks on ethnic minorities. In reaction to violence in Kosovo in mid-March, largely propagated by ethnic Albanians against the Serb minority, Serbs in Serbia launched protests and violence against Muslim religious sites. Anti-minority incidents in Vojvodina generated international concern. In

2004, the United States issued public statements condemning ethnic violence and urging tolerance and held meetings with representatives of ethnic minorities in Serbia. To facilitate political participation by minorities and encourage tolerance, the United States supported a university campaign to increase exchange visits and dialogue.

Although Serbia generally respected freedom of religion, propaganda against minority religions continued. In Serbia, religion and ethnicity are intimately tied, and it is often difficult to distinguish whether attacks against minorities are primarily ethnic or religious in origin. United States support of efforts to safeguard and promote the rights of ethnic minorities also promoted the rights of religious minorities. The United States helped persuade the Government to withdraw a draft religion law that favored certain religions. The United States also interceded with local authorities to prevent razing of an evangelical tent church that had been singled out for destruction.

In 2004, the United States trained and equipped police, prosecutors, and judges, and helped to establish a government agency to coordinate assistance to victims of TIP. Furthermore, the United States funded a TIP victims' shelter through the International Organization for Migration and assisted with the funding of a TIP documentary, NGO website, and workshops. Additionally, the United States promoted local government efforts to expand their anti-TIP activities to focus on child victims.

Kosovo

Since the termination of the 1999 NATO bombing campaign that brought an end to Serbia's brutal treatment of Kosovo's majority Albanian population, the international community - led by the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) - has sought to foster autonomy and democracy within Kosovo in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244. In addition to the presence of an international civil administration in Kosovo, whose principal deputy is American, approximately 17,000 international troops remained in the UN protectorate as part of the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR). The United

States continues to contribute approximately 1,800 troops to KFOR and maintains control over one of the four multinational sectors.

In order to help Kosovo build sustainable democratic institutions and integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures, in 2003, the international community outlined the “Standards for Kosovo,” which calls for the creation of a society “...where all – regardless of ethnic background, race or religion – are free to live, work and travel without fear, hostility or danger and where there is tolerance, justice and peace for everyone.” If Kosovo makes sufficient progress in fulfilling these standards by mid-2005, the international community has agreed to begin a political process that will determine Kosovo’s future status.

Following two days of widespread violence in March 2004, the Contact Group (U.S., UK, Italy, France, Germany and Russia) intensified its engagement in Kosovo and began meeting regularly in Pristina to monitor progress on post-March reconstruction and “Standards” implementation. The October 2004 Assembly elections, which generally met international democratic standards, resulted in a new provisional Government, which began an intensive campaign to move the Standards process forward. While Kosovo has made notable progress in building democratic institutions, much remains to be done, particularly in solidifying a multi-ethnic society that provides protection and freedom of movement for everyone. As Kosovo approaches a scheduled 2005 comprehensive review of Standards implementation, the United States will continue to provide financial, technical and diplomatic support to help Kosovo meet these Standards.

Officers for KFOR and UNMIK police were responsible for killing several protesters during riots in March after the protestors failed to heed prior warnings and threatened international security officials or those they were protecting. Several killings resulted from attacks that appeared to be ethnically motivated, and some perpetrators of the killings were arrested during the year. One death and several injuries resulted from landmines and unexploded ordnance. Lengthy pretrial detention was a problem, and the judiciary did not always

provide due process. UNMIK occasionally limited freedom of assembly and forcibly dispersed some demonstrations. Religious tensions persisted. Freedom of movement for ethnic minorities, particularly Kosovo Serbs, continued to be a serious problem. Violence and discrimination against women and TIP, particularly women for sexual exploitation, was a serious problem. Severe societal violence, abuse, and discrimination against minority communities to include those with mental and physical disabilities were serious problems, particularly during the March riots. Child labor was a growing problem.

The U.S. strategy to promote democracy and human rights in Kosovo consisted of working with the Contact Group and UNMIK and using a variety of tools including diplomacy, international visits, and assistance and training programs to help Kosovo protect human rights and foster democracy before the mid-2005 “Standards” review. The Chief of Mission and all United States Office Pristina (USOP) officers regularly followed and participated in “Standards” and Decentralization working groups, met with municipal officials and NGOs to encourage and observe local action on “Standards”, and raised democracy and human rights issues with governmental agencies and NGOs. United States assistance programs focused on improving the capacity and transparency of government institutions, the Assembly, political parties, NGOs, the police, judiciary, independent media, educational and cultural institutions, combating TIP, and protecting minority rights.

The United States provided a grant to the Council for Defense of Human Rights and Freedom (CDHRF) for election monitoring. CDHRF used these funds to train 60 polling station coordinators who in turn recruited and trained more than 2,000 volunteers to monitor the October 2004 elections. Many U.S. Mission officers participated in the monitoring efforts. The United States also funded a two-week workshop that trained journalists to cover the Kosovo elections objectively. These efforts improved the electoral environment described by international observers to be generally free and fair.

The United States supported efforts to strengthen civil society and NGO advocacy through training, technical assistance and grants. Before the October 2004 elections, NGO advocacy increased markedly on issues such as electoral reforms, get-out-the-vote campaigns and gender representation in political processes. Advocacy efforts by U.S. Mission personnel and U.S.-funded NGOs resulted in the adoption of the Freedom of Information Act in Kosovo, procedures for public participation in two municipalities, disabled access provisions in construction law, and several local regulations that protect consumers' rights.

The United States worked to strengthen local government through the Local Government Initiative (LGI). In 2004, LGI provided technical assistance to a local government working group established by UNMIK to help improve the legislative framework for local governance. LGI contributed two working papers addressing municipal finance, properties and facilities. LGI also assisted municipal governments by placing relevant U.S. and U.S.-trained professionals in selected pilot municipalities. The United States supported three Ron Brown Fellows at Lehigh, Duke, and Columbia Universities, who were selected particularly for their interest in public administration, and ten Kosovar municipal mayors to participate in a three-part workshop - including a month in the United States - on good governance and accountability, community access and service, and public management.

The United States continued to support the Kosovo Independent Media Program (KIMP). KIMP focuses on four areas: increased professionalism of journalists; increased capacity of media associations and the Kosovo Terrestrial Transmission Network (KTTN); an improved legal and regulatory framework that supports free speech and access to public information; and, improved business viability of targeted media outlets. A U.S.-funded workshop trained more than 40 provisional government spokespeople on the necessity of public information and mechanisms to access it.

United States efforts to strengthen the judiciary and the rule of law included assistance programs to improve the functioning and management of the courts and the oversight of judges and prosecutors, and to increase public awareness of Kosovo's evolving justice system. In 2004, the United States provided direct assistance to the UNMIK Department of Justice (UNDOJ) to develop a broad, judicial reform strategy. This plan included drafting concept papers on the ongoing transfer of responsibility from UNMIK to local institutions, the establishment of a UNDOJ Audit Section Unit, the compiling of internal audit manuals, and an operational plan to improve court operations, organization, records and case management, the professional training of judges and lawyers, and the strengthening of professional associations' institutional capacity.

In February 2005, the Kosovo Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, with significant assistance from the Regional Legal Advisor (RLA) and U.S. Overseas Prosecutorial Development Assistance and Training program (OPDAT), held the first judicial reform conference to present the expert-developed Judicial Assessment and Restructuring plan (JART). Approximately 200 judges, prosecutors, lawyers, members of parliament, legal scholars, government officials, diplomats, and other interested parties attended. At the end, Kosovo's President, Prime Minister, and the Principal Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General publicly pledged to support the JART.

Through the OPDAT, the RLA took steps to establish the University of Pristina Law School's legal clinic. As a result, the university now has a functioning pilot program that trains promising lawyers. A fully functioning legal clinic is expected to be in place by the end of 2005.

The United States funds the U.S. Civilian Police (CivPol) program, which provides the local Kosovo Police Service (KPS) with assistance in monitoring, training, transition activities, and capacity building. With U.S. technical and personnel support, Kosovar television crews filmed documentaries explaining community policing.

The United States continued to provide humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees from conflicts in Kosovo, providing support for those who chose to return to their homes in Kosovo. In addition to contributions to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) programs that aid the displaced, the United States provided assistance to specific NGO projects and initiatives that supported the return of refugees and IDPs. The United States provided the majority of support for UNMIK's Housing and Property Directorate (HPD), which has resolved more than 23,000 real property disputes. By the end of June 2005, HPD is working to conclude all 29,000 war-derived residential claims that it had received, thereby restoring property rights and allowing for IDPs to return to their homes. The United States also funds the Municipal Infrastructure and Support Initiative (MISI) in an effort to facilitate minority return and re-integration. The MISI program links local communities with municipal government structures in nine of Kosovo's 30 municipalities. In the process of seeking a small MISI infrastructure grant, municipal leadership and local community leaders worked together to gather matching funds, develop a work plan, and conduct a transparent tendering process.

United States personnel worked closely with UNMIK, the ICRC, the International Committee for Missing Persons (ICMP), counterparts at the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade, and victims' family associations to encourage increased cooperation on the issue of missing persons and swift identification and return of exhumed remains. The United States provided carefully targeted technical assistance to the ICMP to provide cutting-edge scientific support to forensic efforts to identify hundreds of exhumed remains. ICMP efforts are helping to bring closure to families still grieving the emotionally charged aftermath of the years of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.

The United States has supported UNMIK, the Kosovo Government, and NGOs, in the development of the Kosovo anti-trafficking Action Plan, as well as standard operating procedures for victim assistance. The United States funds efforts by the

NGO Hope and Homes for Children to implement the Action Plan's goal of providing accommodation and support services to child trafficking victims. Through U.S. funding, six Kosovars participated in two anti-TIP programs in the United States, meeting law enforcement and border security officials, learning about programs to reintegrate victims into society, and talking to federal policy makers about U.S. anti-TIP programs overseas. United States representatives keep in direct contact with local authorities on the nature and extent of trafficking in Kosovo.

The United States promoted human rights in Kosovo in 2004 through grants for NGOs working with women to combat domestic abuse, and with minorities to foster the development of a multi-ethnic society and the participation of minorities in U.S.-funded public diplomacy programs. Two U.S. experts on conflict resolution and ethnic reconciliation spent a week in Kosovo helping youth and NGOs develop the skills to resolve conflicts and address pressing issues. An International Visitors Program aimed at combating violence against women brought several Kosovar professionals to the United States to meet their counterparts in five cities and learn about the most successful U.S. anti-violence and protection programs. The United States provided thirteen grants to NGOs focused on promoting women's issues, combating female illiteracy, promoting gender equality, providing counseling about trafficking, prostitution, and strengthening women's and minorities' civil rights. Four English Language Fellows are working to incorporate civic education courses through the English language curriculum in two secondary schools and the University of Pristina.

Montenegro

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Police, at times, beat and abused civilians. Impunity for human rights abuses was a problem. Media independence was a problem. Pressure from politicians sometimes resulted in distorted coverage of events by state and some private media. Domestic violence and discrimination against women continued to be problems.

Trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation continued to be a problem. Some ethnic discrimination persisted, particularly with regard to Roma.

In 2004, the United States facilitated a survey of the causes and circumstances behind police abuse in Montenegro to facilitate development of tactics to combat the problem. The United States pushed for the adoption of Montenegro's new Criminal Code in April 2004, which helped minimize opportunities for police abuse of prisoners by changing pre-arraignment detainment procedures. The United States also gave significant and visible support to the establishment of Montenegro's Administrative Court, with the provision of material, structural, and training support. The new Court will speed the delivery of justice and, in the words of the Court President, help protect the civil and human rights of Montenegrin citizens.

In 2004, the United States trained and equipped police, prosecutors, and judges in how to detect, investigate, prosecute and try trafficking cases. The United States also helped to fund a TIP victims' shelter through the International Organization for Migration. The United States took the lead in urging the Government to reestablish the police's special Anti-Trafficking team and provided it with badly needed equipment. The United States also pushed hard for the appointment of a full-time national Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, and strongly supported the initiative by the State Prosecutor's office to speed up trials of accused traffickers.

In an effort to promote minority rights, the United States helped broker an agreement among ethnic Albanian parties, the University of Montenegro and the Government that led to the opening of a new university-level teacher-training program taught in the Albanian language.

Tajikistan

The Government of Tajikistan's human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained. President Emomali Rahmonov and an inner circle of loyal supporters continued to dominate the Government. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, it was subjected to political pressure from the executive branch, and corruption was a problem. Citizens' right to change their government remained restricted. The Government continued to deny the registration of two opposition political parties amid allegations that authorities made politically motivated arrests.

While the Government is authoritarian, it is in the uneven process of transitioning to a more democratically-based system. Following the civil war that devastated Tajikistan in the mid-1990s, concerns over stability often trump sweeping reforms, but do not completely prevent forward progress, albeit at a sometimes glacial pace. As parliamentary and presidential elections approach, the Government has regressed by taking measures to limit civil rights by passing a restrictive election law to limit free political expression, going so far as to shut down one of the most outspoken opposition papers, and by keeping some U.S.-funded democracy non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in registration limbo. In contrast to the treatment of free political expression and registration of democracy NGOs, the Government has taken steps forward in promoting the rule of law and in combating trafficking in persons (TIP). The Government can be an effective partner in these areas, provided the message is appropriately calibrated. The primary concerns with Tajikistan's human rights record include freedom of the press, TIP, protection of women's rights, corruption, and rule of law.

Taking these factors into account, the U.S. human rights and democracy strategy focused on reinforcing positive developments and explaining to the Government, the international community and the Tajik public that further movement towards democracy and human rights is necessary to

ensure Tajikistan's continued stability. The U.S. Mission sought to identify reliable partners in the NGO, governmental and private sectors who are reform-minded and who can help to express the message about human rights and democracy in Tajikistan. The U.S. Embassy maintained regular, close contact with like-minded embassies and international organizations involved in monitoring the human rights and democracy situation in Tajikistan in order to multiply the efforts of each thinly staffed organization.

With the Government increasingly targeting international NGOs, such as the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and Freedom House, U.S. officials regularly met with representatives of this community to ensure that the Government treated them fairly. United States officials remained on-call for international NGOs when they faced problems with the Government. United States officials encouraged all implementing partners and grantees to remain very open and transparent, in order to keep the Government from finding any pretense for closing the NGOs or for harassing them.

The primary focus of U.S. democracy promotion efforts were upcoming parliamentary elections in February 2005. Embassy officers met regularly with all registered and unregistered political parties and governmental structures to monitor their activities and the activities of the Government as parliamentary elections approach. Embassy officials regularly met with representatives of all political parties to gauge the political climate in the run-up to the elections. To ensure effective use of resources on elections issues, U.S. Embassy staff participated in regular elections coordination meetings, headed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the UN. These meetings were an opportunity to exchange information and to coordinate programming across different diplomatic missions in Tajikistan. The Embassy sent six parliamentarians to the United States as part of an International Visitors Program (IVP) to learn about the U.S. legislative process as well as two political party members on a program to learn about political party strategy development. These programs have sown the seeds to deepen democratic practices in Tajikistan.

The United States also funded several programs to promote democracy. As part of one program to improve the election process, U.S. implementing partner IFES will train 300 District Election Commission members prior to elections in proper administration of elections, with a focus on the ethical and moral responsibility that all election officials have to ensure a fair and open election process for all citizens of Tajikistan. Personnel for IFES developed a training manual as well as an administrative manual for District Election Commission and Precinct Election Commission members to address issues specific to poll-worker administration. United States-funded IFES also provided training to all six registered political parties in organization, campaigning skills and platform writing. The U. S. funded NDI to strengthen registered political parties. Based on previous assessments of each party's strengths and weaknesses, NDI created intensive single-party trainings for Tajikistan's six registered parties. The programs focused on the development of election organizing plans for the February 2005 parliamentary elections. As part of its political party development program, NDI also worked with women from political parties, NGOs, the Government and the media to advise them on methods of increasing women's participation in Tajikistan's political processes. This program is currently operating at reduced levels because of the Government's refusal to issue a visa for the expatriate director.

Tajikistan's most significant incidents regarding freedom of media were the repeated closures of independent newspapers and printing houses, ostensibly for tax violations. Most informed observers, however, charge that the Government took such actions because the papers wrote articles that were too critical of the Government. Each time that this happened, the U.S. Embassy made forceful public and private statements against these actions to the Tajik Government. United States officials in Dushanbe and Washington, D.C. consistently raised the issue in high-level meetings, including meetings held by Deputy Assistant Secretaries and higher with the President and Foreign Minister. Additionally, the U.S. Embassy held regular meetings with independent media representatives to show our support for a free press. The Ambassador gave a very public, candid

press conference in late August that was widely hailed as beneficial to the media situation in Tajikistan. To address the issue for the long-term, the U.S. Embassy is ensuring that international NGOs working on freedom of the press consult closely with the Tajik Government to gain their acceptance and understanding of their programs.

United States government-funded programs to support freedom of media include a program implemented by Internews, which is designed to provide training and technical assistance to independent media outlets. Internews is also working to establish an independent radio station network. United States implementing partner the Institute for War and Peace Reporting continued its program of training journalists on expanded human rights reporting. With U.S. funding, IREX established the Pamir Mass Media Center (PMMC) in Khorog. The Center provides badly needed infrastructural support as well as training to journalists and media outlets. The PMMC has launched a radio journalism training program and has outfitted the Center with the region's first full television production studio.

In order to further improve the media situation, the U.S. Embassy provided a number of Democracy Commission grants to help strengthen and professionalize the media. These grants included supporting the only remaining Tajik-language national paper, expanding a news agency's correspondent network to cover the entire country, and funding television stations to run non-partisan, informational segments about all of Tajikistan's political parties. These grants allow the media outlets to expand their reach and their professionalism in covering news stories of national, rather than local, interest, which helps to overcome the regional divisions that marked the civil war.

Focusing on the U.S. goal to promote transparency and rule of law, the United States supported many initiatives to improve the legal environment by providing training to judges, and funding a project to publish an annotated copy of the Tajik civil code, which will standardize application of the law. Funding also went to programs that work with law schools to develop courses, to establish

courtroom monitoring programs and to form student bar associations with a goal of cultivating a culture of transparency in the next generations of Tajik lawyers. Four Tajik lawyers participated in an IVP to the United States to learn about the American legal system, focusing on the defense side of trials.

The United States remains concerned about ongoing human rights abuses. As a result, U.S. implementing partner Freedom House began a program to support and strengthen the work of human rights defenders in protecting and promoting human rights, including press freedom, and to encourage cooperation between human rights organizations on both local and regional levels. Because the expatriate staff member has not been able to secure a visa from the Government of Tajikistan, the program continues to operate at reduced levels, but has been able to introduce Tajik human rights defenders to various international mechanisms of human rights defense.

Other civil society development programs include a U.S.-funded program implemented by the American Bar Association Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative that focuses on facilitating cross-border cooperation in the Fergana Valley. Project activities include cross-border and issue-specific training sessions focused on public relations, coalition building, human rights monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and institution building. The Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe is using U.S. funding for a program that promotes civic leadership, citizen participation, community involvement, civic education, and cross-regional networking in the five countries of Central Asia.

There were some restrictions on the practice of religion. The Embassy engaged with Tajik government officials on behalf of religious groups or individuals as warranted on a case-by-case basis, but few difficulties arose.

Due to a complicated economic situation and low employment opportunities, especially for women, Tajiks remain vulnerable to human traffickers. Tajikistan is one of the major source countries of forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation for Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan,

the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other countries. Working with the United States, the Tajik Government has taken some important steps to combat this threat.

In August 2004 the Tajik Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons was signed by the president and entered into force. The law was developed with U.S.-sponsored International Organization on Migration (IOM) support and introduces modern definitions and methods of working against exploitation and human trafficking. The comprehensive law includes both punishment for perpetrators (who heretofore were charged under other crimes), but also includes preventive and protective measures. The law shows a greater understanding of the issue and helps provide law-enforcement structures with the tools they need to better combat trafficking.

In May, U.S. funding through IOM helped create the Special Division for Combating Kidnapping, Trafficking in Persons and Racketeering under the Combating Organized Crime Department of the Ministry of Interior. The Division has dedicated five officers solely to the investigation of TIP cases. Since the establishment of this division, fourteen cases of human trafficking have been investigated and criminal proceeding instituted, as compared with none in previous years (when trafficking was prosecuted under different crimes). This funding is also linked to the successful prosecution in September of Tajikistan's first TIP trial, involving a woman who adopted a girl solely for the purpose of trafficking her to the UAE and Turkey for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The girl escaped, and the woman was charged with exploitation for prostitution, trafficking in under-aged people, organization of rape, pandering, and document fraud and sentenced to 14 years of imprisonment and property confiscation.

As the result of an investigative journalism exchange program sponsored by the U.S. Government, the head of a trafficking ring, who was previously arrested and released from custody without investigation, was re-arrested when one of the program participants began to investigate the case and started to uncover some of the problems with the trafficker's release.

Turkey

Turkey is a constitutional republic with a multi-party parliamentary system and a president with limited powers elected by the single-chamber parliament, the Turkish Grand National Assembly. In the 2002 parliamentary elections, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) won the majority of seats and formed a one-party government. In March 2003, AKP Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdogan was named Prime Minister. The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens. While there were significant improvements in a number of areas, serious problems remained. The Government continued to restrict religious freedom and to punish some forms of non-violent expression by the media and private citizens. The Government at times restricted the rights of assembly and association and limited the activities of some political parties and leaders. Human rights organizations continued to report widespread incidents of police torture and ill-treatment. In order to meet the Copenhagen Criteria for EU accession, the Government adopted extensive human rights-related legal reforms designed to crack down on torture and "honor killings" (the killing by family members of women suspected of behavior that brings "shame" to them in the community) and to expand freedom of religion and association. However, it is too early to assess what impact these reforms will have on actual government practices. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, the judiciary was sometimes subject to outside influences.

The United States focused on a broad range of human rights issues, including police and judicial practices, religious freedom; freedom of expression, government ethics, trafficking in persons (TIP) and the right of return for internally displaced persons. United States officials routinely meet with representatives of various political, religious, social, cultural and ethnic groups to discuss human rights conditions and relations between these groups and the Turkish State. United States officials also meet regularly with members of the bureaucracy, legislature, executive branch and judiciary to encourage broad reforms, including

reforms needed to meet EU accession criteria. In February 2004, Secretary Powell sent a letter to Foreign Minister Gul discussing the Turkish Government's anti-torture efforts and other human rights-related reforms. The U.S. Ambassador discussed human rights issues in meetings with Minister Gul and the Ministers of Interior, Justice and Education.

The U.S. Embassy used the U.S. presidential election as an opportunity to engage many different audiences on the U.S. electoral system. Election programming began in early October with an address to university students, academics, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local government officials by an American speaker with expertise in the electoral system, polling in election campaigns and political parties. The U.S. Embassy organized an Election Watch program that took place over 15 hours in two venues. The program at the Turkish-American Association was open to the public and included a panel discussion, screening of videotapes of the presidential debates, live election coverage and a press conference held by the Ambassador. The U.S. Embassy also held an Election Watch at the Ambassador's residence, which attracted approximately 300 government officials, politicians, editors and other high-level contacts. The program highlighted the U.S. presidential election process, with special emphasis on the role of campaign polling and political parties. On a municipal level, a U.S. government grant to the National Democratic Institute will help train municipal officials in recent decentralization legislation.

The International Visitors Program continues to provide opportunities for professionals in all fields to be introduced to their American counterparts and to the United States in general. Participants in the 2004 program joined a number of projects related to democracy and human rights: four women parliamentarians participated in a project on "Women in Politics;" an official of the Ankara municipality participated in a Civic Education multi-regional project; and mayors, journalists, parliamentarians and business leaders joined projects related to local government, investigative journalism and the U.S. presidential election.

The United States has emphasized the importance of prosecuting, convicting and sentencing to appropriate jail terms police who commit torture. In separate decisions in March and September, an Ankara court convicted five police officers in the Birtan Altinbas death-in-detention case dating from 1991 and sentenced them each to four years and five months in prison. The court acquitted five co-defendants. In November, the High Court of Appeals overturned the verdict on the grounds that the sentences were too lenient, sending the case back to the lower court. With the help of a U.S. grant, the Minneapolis-based Center for Victims of Torture, along with its Turkish NGO partners, held its New Tactics in Human Rights International Symposium in Ankara in late September.

An Embassy official who is a former defense attorney spoke on several occasions to members of the Turkish National Police. The official discussed concepts such as "due process of law" and "chain of custody" under the U.S. Constitution. The Institute for the Study and Development of Legal Systems (ISDLS) was awarded a continuation grant to address specific measures to improve the handling of freedom of expression, police conduct and trial alternatives in the criminal justice process. An ISDLS-U.S. delegation traveled to Turkey in September, and a Turkish delegation examining alternatives to criminal trial will travel to the U.S. in March 2005. Working with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training, the United States will collaborate with the Turkish Ministry of Justice to organize workshops in two cities in March 2005 on prosecution of police misconduct cases.

In compliance with the Leahy Amendment, the United States worked closely with the Turkish Ministry of Defense to vet military personnel for U.S. training. Under a United States-Government of Turkey memorandum of intent for anti-terrorist training for law enforcement officials, the United States provides training while the Turkish Government screens training candidates for human rights violations. To date, the United States continues to provide assistance for course offerings for Turkish law enforcement authorities.

The United States enhanced its collaboration with the NGO community through a grant to Kent State University and its NGO partner in Turkey on "Women's Leadership," a program that features a series of leadership conferences involving participants from women's associations in Turkey's conservative southeastern region. Another grant includes exchanges of American and Turkish high school students and is focused on development of student government and high school newspapers, which help instill democratic principles among young people. Such projects support U.S. goals to promote respect for human rights and to encourage democratic practices, especially among youth and non-elite communities.

The United States has also stressed the need to allow free religious expression for all faiths, including all Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and Baha'i, who have no legal standing in Turkey. The United States at the highest levels continues to urge the Turkish Government to reach agreement with the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the re-opening of the Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli, acknowledge the ecumenical nature of the Patriarchate and ensure the right of non-citizens to serve as clergy. On a regular basis, U.S. officials continue to engage Turkish Government officials in a dialogue on religious freedom. In December, the United States supported the visit to Turkey of the Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a U.S.-based group of Greek Orthodox laymen. The Ambassador accompanied Archon representatives to a meeting with the Turkish Foreign Minister to discuss Halki and other issues relating to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. President Bush met with Muslim and minority religious community leaders in Istanbul during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Summit in June. President Bush also met with President Sezer and discussed the importance of religious diversity and maintaining a tradition of religious freedom.

In June, Secretary Powell and Foreign Minister Gul presided over a signing ceremony that launched the first shelter for victims of TIP in the country. The Municipality of Istanbul and a local NGO located a temporary rental facility, which is currently being renovated, until more permanent facilities can be secured. Under terms of the

agreement, the Istanbul Municipality committed to renting the property and turning it over, cost-free. The United States has also given a grant to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to implement a TIP program. Its main objective is to assist Turkish authorities in setting up a comprehensive protection mechanism for TIP victims and enhance the country's capacity to combat TIP. Elements of the program include disseminating anti-TIP materials, conducting an information campaign, training law enforcement and judicial officers and establishing a screening and referral process for victims of trafficking.

Turkmenistan

The Government of Turkmenistan's human rights record remained extremely poor, and it continued to commit serious abuses. Turkmenistan is a one-party state dominated by President Saparmurat Niyazov, who retains his authoritarian monopoly on political power and on the Democratic Party, which remained the sole legally-recognized political party in the country. Niyazov has been president since independence in 1991 and may legally remain in office until 2010. In August 2003, Niyazov was elected to a life term as Chairman of the People's Council, giving him a substantial say in the selection of any presidential successor. Government efforts continued to focus on fostering centralized state control and the glorification of the President. The unicameral parliament has no genuinely independent authority; in August 2003, the Peoples' Council replaced it as the supreme legislative body. Parliamentary elections took place December 19. Foreign observers were not invited to monitor elections and all candidates were pro-government Democracy Party members cleared by authorities. President Niyazov controlled the judicial system. The Government severely restricts freedom of speech and does not permit freedom of the press. There were no domestic human rights groups. Throughout 2004, the Government remained repressive in its response to any perceived threats to the regime. While serious violations of religious freedom continued in Turkmenistan, the Government did make progress from a legislative perspective and with a noticeable reduction in harassment of minority religious congregations.

The United States maintained a three-pronged approach to promoting democracy and human rights. First, the United States urged the Government to respect human rights and advance democracy by raising these issues in high-level bilateral meetings and multilateral institutions, and by iterating its concerns in public statements. Second, the United States regularly advocated on behalf of individual cases of abuse, coordinating closely with other diplomatic missions and international organizations. Third, the United States funded programs designed to strengthen civil society and respect for human rights.

The United States recognized that the primary means of promoting democracy and human rights in Turkmenistan was to address the continued deterioration in the human rights situation after an armed attack on President Niyazov's motorcade on November 25, 2002. There were widespread, credible reports of human rights abuses committed by officials in the course of investigating the attack, including credible reports of torture and detention of suspects' relatives. During the past year, the United States, through diplomatic efforts at the highest levels, continued to support efforts by the International Committee of the Red Cross to gain access to prisoners detained following that attack. In 2003, the United States and nine other Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) members invoked the "Moscow Mechanism" (for only the second time in the organization's history) which called for a Special Rapporteur on Turkmenistan's human rights abuses after the November 2002 attack. Throughout 2004, the United States consistently and publicly called for follow-through action on the OSCE Rapporteur's report. In April, the United States and the EU jointly sponsored a resolution at the UN Commission on Human Rights which condemned the Government for human rights abuses and called on the Government to adopt measures called for by the OSCE Rapporteur. In November 2004, the United States and the EU jointly introduced a successful UN General Assembly resolution condemning the Government's human rights abuses and calling for fact-finding missions by international envoys to investigate reports of torture and abuse. The Government continued to refuse to facilitate such visits. While none of these

efforts have so far resulted in accountability for the human rights violations that have occurred, this diplomatic strategy succeeded in keeping very serious human rights issues in the public eye.

In January 2004, the Government formally lifted the exit visa regime imposed in early 2003. The Government took this action in response to notification from the United States in late 2003 that Turkmenistan was risking sanctions for not meeting the freedom of emigration requirements under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act of 1994. Although the Government maintained a black list of select individuals not permitted to travel, freedom of movement improved. Throughout 2004 the United States continued to monitor the situation to ensure Turkmenistan's compliance with its international obligations on freedom of movement.

In November 2003, the Government enacted draconian laws on public organizations and religious groups that severely curtailed freedom of association and religion by imposing criminal penalties for unregistered activities. These human rights violations were also a focal point for U.S. diplomatic efforts in 2004. In Ashgabat, the U.S. Ambassador, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Commander of the U.S. Central Command and visiting OSCE delegations informed President Niyazov that the improvement of the human rights situation was of the highest priority, and high-level U.S. officials raised their concerns in Washington D.C. After sustained U.S. and international pressure, Turkmenistan removed the legal requirement that minority religions must have a certain number of members in order to obtain registration and dropped criminal penalties against unregistered religious groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Four minority religious groups were permitted to register, as were several independent NGOs. Though registered, the religious groups continued to face difficulties in achieving all their rights under the law, and the United States continues to monitor the situation closely. The Government granted amnesty and released six conscientious objectors from prison in 2004. Government officials closed or destroyed at least six mosques.

To implement the second prong of its strategy, the United States raised concerns regarding individual cases of human rights abuse to the Government of Turkmenistan. In 2004, the Embassy coordinated with other diplomatic missions to protest the harassment and detention of a noted author. Upon his return to Turkmenistan, he was detained, his travel documents were seized and his relatives were arrested and accused of committing high crimes against the state. Intervention by the United States contributed to his release, and the cases against his relatives were reviewed. The Embassy consistently monitored and actively advocated on behalf of a reporter for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty who was frequently harassed. In one case, U.S. intervention helped secure his quick release after he was abducted, blindfolded, injected with an unknown substance and threatened with 15 years in prison. The Embassy subsequently persuaded the Government to allow the journalist to depart the country in 2004.

In response to continued harassment of religious minority groups, the U.S. Embassy raised issues of freedom of worship with the Council of Religious Affairs and other responsible bodies within the Government of Turkmenistan. One principle concern was that the Government was hindering some registered religious groups from establishing places of worship. The Government cooperated on hosting a visit to Turkmenistan by a representative of the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, who encouraged the Government to register additional religious groups and cease harassment.

The U.S. Embassy continued to advocate better treatment of relatives of those implicated in the November 2002 attack, urging the Government of Turkmenistan to cease systematically harassing them. In 2003, the Ambassador sent a letter to the Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan in advance of the annual presidential amnesty, urging the Government to release political prisoner Mukhammet Aimuradov and individuals imprisoned for refusing to perform compulsory military service due to their religious beliefs. The Embassy was a principal point of contact and advocacy for individual cases of abuse.

The third prong of the strategy was to fund programs that strengthen civil society. The Government of Turkmenistan was a hesitant partner in civil society programs and educational exchanges; it often used bureaucratic mechanisms to delay or hinder implementation of exchange programs or registration and operations of truly independent NGOs. Nonetheless, in FY 2004, the Embassy awarded 30 Democracy Commission grants focusing on civic education, Internet access, the free flow of information, community self-help and women's and human rights issues. A U.S.-funded civil society development program focused on grassroots community development and advocacy. In FY 2004, 53 capacity-building training events were conducted for more than 1,032 participants under this program.

In 2004, the United States gave more than 125 future leaders the opportunity to study and receive training in the United States through exchange programs. One new American Corner (four in total) and two new Internet Access Training Program sites (four in total) were opened in 2004, providing a critical link to the outside world by offering access to nonofficial sources of information. The Embassy also awarded three and four-year scholarships to 17 Turkmen college students to attend the American University of Central Asia in the Kyrgyz Republic.

In order to support rule of law, the U.S.-funded program implemented by the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) provided support to the Legal Resource Center (LRC) at Turkmen State University (TSU). ABA/CEELI also worked with LRC staff to develop strategies to increase its accessibility to the public. Since January 2004, the LRC has organized training programs on Turkmenistan's labor legislation, the development of its criminal legislation, legal guarantees of women's rights and the development of civil legislation. By the end of May, a total of 198 people had participated in the seminars. Between January 1 and the end of May, 4,053 people visited the LRC's facilities.

ABA/CEELI continued to sponsor student participation in moot court competitions. Working with the administration of TSU, ABA/CEELI conducted a modified moot court competition on the national level. In April, 12 students gave oral arguments on a hypothetical case focusing on the International Criminal Court and submitted written briefs. The event provided a much-needed opportunity for Turkmenistan's law students to sharpen their practical legal skills.

ABA/CEELI's Street Law program in Turkmenistan developed over the past year in cooperation with TSU offered young people the opportunity to learn about the law and basic principles of human rights and democracy. Law students involved in the program learned techniques for teaching primary and secondary school students about their rights and responsibilities under Turkmen law. The program's objective is to sensitize students at a young age to the ways in which the law can help solve critical family, social and political issues. Trainings during the past year covered topics such as children's rights under Turkmen law, the law on delinquency, administrative violations, the right to individuality, the right to marry and the legal status of women. The program was effective at promoting practical skills and legal knowledge among law student participants and providing desperately needed legal information to the population at large.

A civil law clinic in which TSU law students provide legal consultations under the supervision of qualified practicing attorneys began operating in Ashgabat in May 2004. This was the first clinical program in Turkmenistan, and it offers a unique opportunity for students to serve their community and gain practical legal experience. ABA/CEELI staff will provide ongoing training to clinic staff attorneys on managing a student-run clinical program and addressing practical and pedagogical issues surrounding clinical legal education.

The U.S. government-funded civil society development program supported a network of four Civil Society Support Centers (CSSC) that provided training seminars, technical support, information resources, networking opportunities and professional services to NGOs and associations. The

United States provided training and resources to strengthen the financial and institutional sustainability of these centers, and also created opportunities to develop new centers. The program included funding to provide institutional grants for leading NGOs in specific sectors and community development grants with a focus on social partnerships to help NGOs engage with their communities and advocate for their needs at the local level. The United States also provided assistance in the development of a comprehensive legal and fiscal framework that will support and strengthen the NGO sector, as well as direct legal support and services for NGOs through the CSSC Network.

In 2004, U.S. funding to combat trafficking in persons (TIP) supported the International Organization for Migration's work with the State Border Service on a Ministry of Justice-approved program attempting to ascertain the extent and patterns of TIP in Turkmenistan. Funding also supports an anti-trafficking public education campaign and training for the Border Service to combat TIP.

Ukraine

Ukraine is a mixed parliamentary and presidential republic governed by a directly elected president, a prime minister who heads a cabinet of ministers and a unicameral parliament (Rada). Citizens' right to peacefully change their government was restricted during most of the year by authorities, who engaged in many forms of manipulation in parliamentary by-elections and local elections, especially the mayoral election in Mukacheve. This was particularly true of the October 31 presidential race and its November 21 run-off vote. However, the December 26 repeat run-off, which followed the Supreme Court's invalidation of previous results, was judged by reputable international observers, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), to have brought Ukraine substantially closer to meeting international standards for democratic elections. The Government's human rights record remained poor and worsened in a number of areas; however, there were also improvements in some areas, particularly toward the end of the



Ukraine

**Pro-democracy supporters
brave sub-zero temperatures
to call for free and fair elections**

Photo: U. S. Department of State

year. Members of the security forces committed human rights abuses including torture and custodial deaths with impunity. Arbitrary searches, seizures, arrests and detention, sometimes apparently politically motivated, remained a problem.

For most of the year, authorities interfered with news coverage either directly or indirectly through pro-government media oligarchs. Tactics included harassment and intimidation of journalists, censorship of material, pressuring journalists to apply self-censorship, and blocking or closing down independent broadcasts. Toward the end of the year, after the fraudulent second round vote in the presidential election, many reporters refused to report the stories ordered by the Government or by pro-government media oligarchs, and the media coverage became more balanced. The Government failed to render justice for murdered journalists Heorhiy Gongadze and Ihor Aleksandrov. In the lead up to the two rounds of the presidential election, the Government intensified its repression of civil society, especially members of the opposition and independent media, curtailing civil and political liberties, and violating human rights. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, courts were subject to political interference and corruption and trial delays were common. Trafficking in persons (TIP) remained a serious problem.

In 2004, the U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Ukraine focused largely on creating the conditions for a free and fair presidential election. This included strengthening the rule of law, independent media and respect for civil liberties, and improving the monitoring and advocacy capacity of human rights organizations. Combating TIP was also a key goal. To achieve these goals, the United States engaged in diplomatic efforts and supported a variety of assistance programs. United States officials extensively monitored and reported on democracy and human rights issues and regularly coordinated assistance strategies with donors and members of the international community.

The Ambassador, Embassy officers and senior U.S. officials frequently met with senior officials in Kiev, including former President Leonid Kuchma, and in the regions to stress that membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions such as the NATO hinges on respect for democracy and human rights. That message was regularly reinforced in Washington by Secretary of State Colin Powell, then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky, and Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Elizabeth Jones in meetings and telephone calls with high-level Ukrainian officials.



Ukraine

President Viktor Yushchenko releases a dove during his inauguration.

AP Photo

Moreover, a series of distinguished current and former American officials visited Kiev during the year, stressing to senior government and opposition leaders the importance of open and transparent presidential elections. These visitors included former President Bush, former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Madeleine Albright, former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Senator Richard Lugar, Senator John McCain and former Supreme Allied Commander Europe, retired U.S. Army General Wesley Clark. Sharp criticism of the fraudulent second round of voting in the presidential election by presidential envoy Senator Lugar and Secretary Powell were important factors in the series of events leading to the decision by the Ukrainian Supreme Court that the election was invalid.

United States officials also continued to work with members of the international community through multilateral institutions such as the OSCE and the UN to press the Government to uphold its international human rights commitments.

To help eliminate human rights abuses committed by security forces, the Embassy continued to work with the Ukrainian military, primarily focusing efforts on the rules of land warfare, rules of engagement formulation, and the legal basis for conflict. The Defense Institute for International

Legal Studies sent two mobile training teams to provide instruction on human rights issues. This and other U.S.-funded international military education training courses provided the Ukrainian military with an important understanding of the legal aspects of peace support operations. Leahy Amendment procedures were used to ensure that the United States did not train individuals credibly alleged to have committed human rights abuses.

Although all credit rightly goes to the Ukrainian people, U.S. efforts to promote free and fair elections, strengthen the rule of law, civil society, and independent media no doubt were positive factors in the presidential election and popular resistance to government attempts to subvert the people's will. The resulting massive, weeks-long, non-violent protest movement known as the "Orange Revolution" radically transformed the political landscape and media environment in Ukraine.

While the United States Government supported numerous valuable projects, several election-related examples stand out. Several projects provided substantial assistance to the Ukrainian legislature in drafting election legislation that was recognized by the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights as "a significant improvement over its predecessors...providing an adequate framework for the conduct of democratic elections." To improve implementation, U.S.-supported projects trained over 100,000 election commis-

sioners, as well as thousands of lawyers and judges, concerning their respective rights and responsibilities under the new law.

The United States Government contributed observers and other support to the OSCE election observation mission, and funded the participation of more than 2,500 other non-partisan international observers and 10,000 domestic monitors for the presidential election. The reports from these observers formed the basis upon which the results of the November 21 vote were judged invalid, both internationally and by the majority of the Ukrainian people. Conversely, the presence of international observers helped validate the results of the December 26 vote as reflecting the will of the people. The conclusions and recommendations in the observation mission reports will assist the Ukrainian legislature in its continuing efforts to bring election laws into conformity with international standards.

The United States Government supported a respected media watchdog organization that worked during the presidential election campaign to galvanize Ukrainian journalists dissatisfied with being forced to report the "government line." This NGO helped draft a now-famous petition, signed by more than 300 reporters, anchors and editors, which touched off the so-called "Journalists' Rebellion" that began shortly before the presidential election and gained significant momentum during the "Orange Revolution." Many media analysts and watchdog organizations now say that the press is more free and diverse than at any point in modern Ukrainian history.

The United States Government, working in coordination with 12 other embassies and international organizations, provided support to an NGO to conduct an independent exit poll during each round of the election. This NGO played a particularly important role during the November 21 runoff round of the election, when its polling results differed substantially from government-announced election results. This NGO was repeatedly vilified by the Yanukovich campaign, pressured by the Government, and nearly broken apart by attempts to compromise the professional integrity of two of the organization's partners. The United States provided assistance to Ukraine's

top elections monitoring NGO. During the months leading up to the presidential campaign, this NGO became increasingly active, issuing reports on government transparency and parliamentary activity, generating significant national and international attention. This organization and its thousands of domestic election monitors also played a critical role in publicly highlighting problems with voter lists during the first and second rounds of the election. The United States also provided funding to a Ukrainian NGO to help alert the public and the Government to problems with the lists and how to rectify them.

The United States Government supported nationwide voter education campaigns apprising people of their civic rights and publicizing candidate platforms. Through newspaper inserts, public service announcements, leaflets, radio programs and community educational events, citizens were advised of the procedures to follow to ensure they were properly registered to vote. People who believed their rights were infringed upon were referred to other U.S.-funded projects providing pro bono legal assistance.

A U.S. grant to a Ukrainian media NGO funded the preparation of election-related inserts that were distributed by more than 50 newspapers throughout Ukraine. In a number of eastern and southern oblasts - where access to information was highly restricted - these professional, non-partisan inserts broke an "information blockade" and played a critical role in providing unbiased updates to voters on the political situation in the country during the presidential election period.

The Embassy also worked to encourage respect for the rights of women, children, minorities and people with disabilities. A U.S. Government grant supported the work of an NGO that successfully involved individuals with disabilities in the political process and helped ensure that they were able to cast votes at polling stations on election day.

A program funded through the U.S.-supported Ukraine Citizen Action Network (UCAN) project significantly reduced the number of newborn infants who were abandoned in Crimea. Using a UCAN grant, a Crimean NGO launched an innovative program to counsel disadvantaged women

and conducted a large-scale public information campaign in Crimea that encouraged adoption. The information campaign was covered by at least 100 local media outlets in Crimea and stressed, among other things, that adoption was not as legally complicated as people thought. As a direct result of these efforts, adoption rates increased seven-fold overall in Crimea during the year - and four-fold for children with disabilities.

Through another UCAN grant, an Odesa-based NGO created an innovative alternative registration system for homeless adults and children that provides them with access to medical and psychiatric care. During the year, this NGO trained 12 social service organizations nationwide in how to use the alternative registration system. In addition, the city of Luhansk sent a representative to Odesa to train with this group. As a result, Luhansk is working effectively with community organizations in addressing the problem of homelessness in that major eastern city.

Religious freedom continued to improve, but some registration difficulties and property restitution issues remained. The United States actively worked with the Government to protect religious sites neglected or mistreated during the Soviet era. The United States encouraged the Government to return religious properties and edifices to their rightful owners and requested that the Government register religious groups, including minority and non-native faiths, to practice freely.

The United States Government supported the labor movement in its efforts to obtain independence from government control and to exercise its legal rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. With U.S. funds, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) supported the Solidarity Center's program of trade union development in Ukraine. The NGO administered seminars, maintained ongoing contact with union representatives, and regularly reported on workers' rights issues. The United States also funded a number of technical assistance programs in Ukraine to promote basic rights of workers.

Eliminating TIP and assisting victims were also priorities during the year, and the United States

actively engaged the Government on this subject. The United States funded a number of well-respected organizations that assisted trafficking victims and worked to prevent trafficking through educational programs for police officers, judges, students, and the general public, and supported information hotlines. Through the U.S. International Visitors Program, a group of Ukrainian anti-trafficking specialists visited the United States for training.

Partly due to U.S. efforts, the Government continued to increase its cooperation with other governments and anti-trafficking NGOs and participated in international task forces to investigate trafficking cases. With support from U.S.-funded organizations, the parliament established a working group on the ratification of the UN Convention on Combating Organized Crime and its anti-Trafficking Protocol; the parliament ratified the Convention during the year.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is an authoritarian country with a very poor human rights record. While the Government took important steps during the course of 2004 to address torture and to establish police accountability, it made no progress on democratic reform and placed further restrictions on the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the press. Despite some progress, physical mistreatment in pretrial detention was widespread, prison conditions remained extremely harsh, and independent journalists, opposition politicians and human rights activists continued to be subject to harassment. Even after a series of large-scale amnesties in 2002-2004, an estimated 5,000 to 5,500 political prisoners remained in prison, the vast majority of whom were suspected members of Islamic extremist groups such as the Party of Islamic Liberation (Hizb ut-Tahrir).

Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov was elected to a second term of office in 2000 in an election that was widely considered to be neither free nor fair. His term was extended from five to seven years following a January 2002 referendum, which multilateral organizations and foreign embassies refused to observe. Elections for the lower cham-

ber of parliament, held on December 26, fell significantly short of international standards, according to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). No opposition parties were allowed to participate and none of the nominally-independent candidates permitted to run represented views critical of the president or his policies. In July, Secretary of State Powell determined that Uzbekistan had not made sufficient progress in meeting its commitments under the 2002 Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework Agreement, a decision that affected \$18 million of assistance to the central Government. In December, Secretary Powell also declined to certify Uzbekistan for Cooperative Threat Reduction assistance in 2004 based on human rights criteria.

In promoting human rights, the United States has sought to engage with Uzbekistan on two levels. On the first level, the United States maintains a vigorous bilateral dialogue with the Uzbek Government on a host of issues, from democratization to religious tolerance, and from legal and penitentiary reform to advocacy on behalf of specific prisoners of conscience. Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) Michael Kozak visited Uzbekistan in November, meeting with officials in Tashkent, Namangan and Andijon to highlight ongoing U.S. concerns about human rights and democracy. Human rights and democracy also featured prominently in the July visit of Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR) Beth Jones and the November visit of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for EUR Laura Kennedy. The Ambassador and his staff treated the promotion of human rights and democracy as a major U.S. priority in Uzbekistan and incorporated these goals in discussions with officials at all levels of government. In Washington, then-Assistant Secretary for DRL Lorne Craner and Assistant Secretary for EUR Beth Jones twice provided Congressional testimony on U.S. efforts to engage the Government of Uzbekistan on U.S. concerns about human rights and democracy.

The second level of the U.S. strategy focuses on the development of civil society. Working with NGOs and individual Uzbeks, the United States

seeks to expand the ability of local organizations to affect positive change in society, to develop the foundations of a free press, and to create space for human rights activism and independent political expression. The United States places particular value on exchanges and training, in order to provide the next generation of Uzbek citizens with the tools necessary to move their country's politics and society out of the shadow of its Soviet past. All programs operated by the Open Society Institute (OSI) were forced to close when the Uzbek Ministry of Justice (MOJ) refused to reregister OSI, effectively shutting it down. In February, the Government issued a decree making it more difficult for foreign entities to fund the activities of their local NGO partners. The United States has devoted considerable attention to this issue and is working to ensure that local organizations are able to continue their work.

Under the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework Agreement signed in 2003, the Government of Uzbekistan committed itself to moving toward a multiparty democracy. Despite consistent calls from the United States for political reform, there has not been the type of progress the Agreement envisions. No opposition party was registered to participate in the December elections, and none of the independent candidates on the ballot represented views critical of the Government. Opposition politicians from the Birlik, Erk, and Free Farmers parties were subject to harassment. The U.S. message on political reform has been clearly articulated to the highest levels of the Government by the Ambassador and embassy staff, as well as by a host of visiting officials. Both DRL Acting Assistant Secretary Kozak and EUR Deputy Assistant Secretary Kennedy, who traveled to Tashkent a month before the elections, made this a centerpiece of their visits.

Despite continuing pressure from the Government, the U.S.-funded National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) worked actively with Uzbekistan's opposition parties, providing guidance on grassroots organizing, press relations and the drafting of party platforms. In May, the MOJ publicly criticized NDI and IRI for their work with unregistered political parties, prompting an immediate

public response from the Embassy. NDI and IRI also sought to work with Uzbekistan's five registered, pro-government parties, but these parties were for the most part unreceptive. While the Government refused to register independent political parties or the candidates they supported, NDI and IRI's training seminars over the past two years have offered an invaluable education in how party politics works at the local level. Although none of the independent parties were registered, they were able to organize at the grass roots, hold national and regional conferences, and launch signature drives – a level of political activism not seen in the past. U.S. efforts have resulted in more citizens being willing to engage in political expression than has been seen in years, as seen in the number of citizens willing to sign petitions to register independent candidates for December's elections.

Combating torture remained at the top of the U.S. human rights agenda, and here there was notable progress. Unlike previous years, there were no credible reports of persons dying in custody as a result of torture. At the urging of Embassy and State Department officials, the General Prosecutor and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) for the first time invited international and local human rights observers and diplomatic personnel to oversee investigations into three separate cases in which torture had been alleged. Although the independent observers concluded that the inmates had not died as a result of torture, in one case MVD investigators, working with local human rights activists, determined that police had committed serious procedural violations. These findings resulted in disciplinary action, including the firing of the local police chief. Freedom House took an active role in organizing each of these investigations, using resources from its U.S.-funded Torture Prevention Project. With U.S. Embassy support, Freedom House also sponsored a series of roundtables, seminars and trainings bringing together representatives of local human rights NGOs and officials from the MVD, General Prosecutor's Office and National Security Service to discuss torture prevention. In these, as well as many less high-profile cases, the United States works with victims' family members, local human rights workers and

defense attorneys, and international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch to investigate allegations of torture and raise them with appropriate government officials.

In its efforts to combat torture, the United States has devoted considerable attention to conditions in pretrial detention, where much of the most serious abuse occurs. Using U.S. funding, the American Bar Association Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) operates Public Defender Centers in Tashkent, Nukus, Fergana and Andijon. These Centers, which provide high-quality pro-bono legal advice to indigent clients, are a key component of the U.S. strategy to fight torture in pretrial detention. ABA/CEELI, together with Freedom House and the OSCE, has been an active partner in programs designed by the Embassy's Resident Legal Advisor (RLA) to promote respect for detainees' rights. Central themes have included access to defense counsel and habeas corpus. The RLA also organized training for Uzbek forensic pathologists to investigate custodial deaths. The United States also funded an OSCE initiative to instruct prison officials on international standards of human rights practice. The OSCE also provided training to local NGOs on the basics of prison monitoring. All of these programs have been initiated as a means of assisting the Government of Uzbekistan to implement the 2003 recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Theo Van Boven.

Exchange and visitor programs have played a role in the U.S. effort to end torture in Uzbekistan. In October, for example, the RLA, working with Freedom House, took a contingent of senior officials from law enforcement, the security services and the prosecutor's office to Slovenia, where they heard first-hand how Slovenia's law enforcement bodies handled their country's transition to democratic governance. In November, the U.S. Embassy paired human rights workers from outlying regions of Uzbekistan with reform-minded law enforcement officials from the same locations for an International Visitors Program study tour. In the course of their three-week trip, participants attended court proceedings, examined procedures

for investigating police misconduct, and spoke with civilian review boards and human rights monitoring groups. As mandated by the Leahy Amendment, all Uzbek participants in U.S. security training programs are subject to strict human rights vetting. The United States also sponsored the participation of Uzbek human rights defenders in an international conference on sharing new tactics in promoting human rights, including on addressing torture.

The United States has also invested considerable attention and resources to increasing awareness of human rights issues in Uzbek society and to expanding the capacity of the local human rights and democracy community. The United States has continued a three-year program, which aims to develop civil society in Uzbekistan by supporting a national network of seven NGO resource centers. A related civic advocacy support program assists NGOs in becoming more involved in public policy issues. In an effort to cultivate new groups, the Embassy's Democracy Commission in 2004 awarded grants directly to 39 independent NGOs that are in the vanguard of developing civil society in Uzbekistan. It is largely through these micro-grants that a number of human rights activists have been able to do valuable reporting and advocacy work in the regions. A U.S.-funded program implemented by ABA/CEELI focuses on facilitating cross-border cooperation in the Fergana Valley. Project activities include cross-border and issue-specific training sessions focused on public relations, coalition building, human rights monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and institution building. The Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe is using U.S. funding for a program that promotes civic leadership, citizen participation, community involvement, civic education and cross-regional networking in the five countries of Central Asia.

Freedom House and ABA/CEELI are key components of U.S. efforts to promote respect for human rights. Continuing a U.S.-funded program, in November Freedom House opened a Human Rights Resource Center in Samarkand, in addition to the existing Centers in Tashkent and Namangan. The Centers offer a secure environment for human rights activists to network and to organize, and they provide essential access to

information and Internet technology. Freedom House's extremely popular training programs are giving a new generation of human rights defenders the tools they need to be effective, while its small grants and legal defense programs provide important support. Under ABA/CEELI's supervision, the United States has continued to fund a very successful human rights law clinic at the Tashkent State Law Institute (TSLI), designed to train young lawyers in human rights law as well as give them practical experience providing pro bono consultations to citizens. In November, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Kozak participated in the opening ceremonies of a second U.S.-funded Human Rights Clinic at the Andijon State University Faculty of Law. In February, the Ambassador spoke at the opening of a Tashkent law firm specializing in human rights, founded by graduates of the TSLI Clinic, with U.S. funds and ABA/CEELI guidance. In addition to providing human rights legal defense, the law firm also provides public education in Uzbekistan's international human rights commitments.

Fundamental to democratic governance is the rule of law. United States grantees ABA/CEELI and (IRIS) have worked with the RLA on projects designed to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and to promote judicial ethics. Trainings also focused on raising the stature and professionalism of the defense bar. In an effort to expand legal literacy in the population at large, ABA/CEELI's Legal Resource Centers in Fergana and Samarkand conducted a series of education and training programs throughout the year. Other ABA/CEELI programs, such as street law summer courses and moot court competitions, emphasize legal education among high school and university students.

Freedom of media continues to be a serious concern for the United States. Although official censorship of the press ended in 2002, self-censorship remains the rule, and very few journalists were willing to publish investigative or critical stories. Although no journalists were arrested this year, one prominent reporter and one editor were fired, reportedly as punishment for stories that cast officials in a bad light. In July, a Namangan court

found Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty guilty of libel in connection with a story it broadcast questioning the accuracy of a report published in a state-run newspaper. In September, the Tashkent City Administrative Court, acting on a complaint from the MOJ, suspended the operations of Internews Network Uzbekistan, a local NGO working to enhance the capacity of independent media with U.S. funding. Later in August, the MOJ froze the bank account of the NGO's parent organization, Internews.

In this climate, a U.S. priority has been to broaden access to objective information and to support the efforts of those journalists willing to test the limits. United States-funded training programs have exposed promising print and broadcast journalists to modern, independent journalistic practices. Although the Government continues to deny it registration, the U.S.-funded Institute for War and Peace Reporting continues to provide opportunities for on-the-job training to courageous independent reporters, with an emphasis on expanded human rights reporting. With U.S. funding, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) established a Media Resource Center in Namangan, which provides infrastructural support as well as training to journalists and media outlets. The United States also supports several independent television stations nationwide through training, production assistance and equipment grants. While government-dominated television continues to be devoid of serious news, a U.S.-funded grant program has been instrumental in increasing the number of talk shows on political, social and economic issues that are broadcast by these stations. U.S. programs support an independent radio station in Tashkent that produces quality news and information. The U.S. Internet Access Training Program (IATP) operates 18 sites throughout Uzbekistan. Internet access provides many Uzbeks their first exposure to uncensored news and information, and in many areas outside of Tashkent, IATP represents practically the only publicly available Internet source.

The United States continues to monitor and advocate on behalf of religious freedom, in the face of the Government's largely unchanged policies on religion. A continuing campaign against groups

the Government suspects are involved in extremist Islamic activity has tended to constrain religious practice of some observant Muslims, particularly young men, who hesitate to display outward signs of piety for fear of being identified as extremist. Unwieldy registration requirements made it difficult for many evangelical churches to function. Religious activity in non-registered mosques or churches is a criminal offense. Proselytizing is illegal, as is private religious instruction. The United States is engaged actively in monitoring religious freedom issues, and maintains contact with imams, educators and independent religious leaders. The Ambassador and his staff regularly raise issues of religious freedom with their counterparts in the Uzbek Government, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the MOJ, the Muslim Board, and the Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA).

A number of U.S. exchange and educational programs are specifically designed to promote religious tolerance and to expand religious freedom; the Chair of the CRA, for example, recently visited the United States. Two U.S.-funded projects, both implemented by IREX, have brought local Islamic leaders to the United States, exposing them to the diversity of religious practice in the United States. A three-year University Partnership Program, funded by the Embassy and managed by the University of Washington, provides for exchanges of experts and professors from five local universities. One of the major goals of the project is the development of school curricula that foster religious tolerance. In all of these programs, the central premise is that religious tolerance and political security do not conflict, but rather are complementary goals.

Another top human-rights priority for the United States in Uzbekistan has been trafficking in persons (TIP). Trafficking of Uzbek citizens to other countries for sexual exploitation and forced labor remained a problem, but with U.S. assistance, the Government continued to take steps to combat it. Working together, the United States, local NGOs and the Uzbek Government came up with a number of innovative campaigns designed to educate the public, to prevent trafficking and to help ensure that traffickers are prosecuted. The key NGO in this effort was funded by a U.S.

Democracy Commission grant. The NGO recently completed the first comprehensive study of human trafficking in Uzbekistan and will release its findings in late February. Throughout the year, the United States supported trainings designed to teach Uzbek consular officials how to identify and assist trafficking victims. Additional trainings focused on enhancing the ability of law enforcement and the Office of the General Prosecutor to combat trafficking rings. The Embassy also hosted regular meetings with Uzbek officials to discuss trafficking and encouraged the Government to form an Interagency Working Group to coordinate its efforts to combat trafficking. This group, which operates with U.S. assistance, held its inaugural meeting in December. In September, the United States sponsored an OSCE event in which key Uzbek officials from the General Prosecutor's office, MVD and National Security Service met their Ukrainian counterparts and TIP-focused NGO representatives in Kiev to discuss methods for combating trafficking.

As a result of these joint efforts, regular stories designed to raise awareness of and prevent trafficking continued to appear in Uzbek newspapers, radio and television. After a "train the trainer" seminar sponsored by the OSCE with U.S. funds, the MVD trained an additional 1,500 MVD officers throughout Uzbekistan on trafficking-related investigation techniques. Legislation to combat TIP, including a new Victims Rights Act and a draft law on repatriation, has stalled, due in part to delays related to the formation of a new bicameral legislature; however, this has not deterred law enforcement officials from actively prosecuting suspected traffickers under existing TIP-related legislation.

