


EUROPE AND EURASIA

The background of the page is a complex marbled paper pattern. It features a dense, repeating design of teardrop or fan-like shapes. The colors are a mix of deep forest green, bright yellow, and dark blue, with some lighter, almost white, areas. The pattern is highly detailed and creates a rich, textured visual effect.

“We appreciate greatly the United States’ support throughout all these years and the aid and support they have extended to our country.”

– Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, January 25, 2004



The past year has shown mixed results in advancing human rights and democracy across Europe and Eurasia. The most positive overall development has been an increasingly activist and resilient civil society throughout the region, often in the face of serious repression. Where elections have been manipulated, the press has been harassed or individuals have had their rights abused, people have bravely stood up to protest and to demand change.

In Georgia, when it became clear that the Government was manipulating vote counting, peaceful demonstrations with broad popular support led to the resignation of President Shevardnadze and a new election that represented a significant improvement. Such democratic success stories are unfortunately rare, however. Azerbaijan's flawed presidential election led to violence, as opposition-led protests were soon suppressed by authorities who then used the excesses of some demonstrators as pretext for a wave of politically motivated arrests. Elsewhere in the region there were elections or constitutional referendums marred by procedural and substantive irregularities that violated democratic norms, including in Armenia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. In Russia, there were significant flaws and misuse of state-controlled media in the run-up to the Duma elections, as well as Chechnya's presidential election. However, in every case, in ever-increasing numbers, the citizens of these countries were able to observe election proceedings and document their flaws in expectation of holding their governments accountable. With important elections coming up in Belarus, Ukraine and throughout Central Asia, the United States is urging governments to take adequate measures to ensure the entire election process, including campaigns, meets Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) standards, and it continues to work with civil society groups to improve the prospects for free and fair elections. Elections in Serbia and Croatia this year were judged by the OSCE to meet international standards.

Many countries continued to make legislative and structural changes that brought them closer to meeting international standards and joining Euro-Atlantic organizations. The Government of Turkey, for example, passed extensive reforms in areas such as torture, religious freedom, freedom of expression and association, and the role of the military in a democracy. However, some reforms have not yet been implemented. Property law implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is nearing completion and more than one million refugees and displaced persons have returned home. The international community, including the OSCE, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the United Nations, has played a major role in promoting progress through its assistance activities and policies. Many governments in the region resisted further democratic change, however, and there was backsliding on previous gains in a number of countries.

Other challenges remain. The continued involvement of the international community continues to be crucial to overcoming post-conflict issues, the development of democracy and rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Reports of continued violence and human rights abuses in Chechnya remind that there are those in the federal and local security forces – and among the separatists – who are still resorting to unacceptable methods of resolving a conflict that ought to be dealt with by political means. Significant rule of law reform from the Balkans to Central Asia is needed to

ensure equal protection under the law for all citizens and to combat corruption and organized crime. Turkmenistan's authoritarian regime continues its highly repressive and capricious policies.

Torture remains a problem in much of Eurasia. The United States is particularly concerned about continued reports of deaths in detention in Uzbekistan. The United States is waiting to see progress there on recommendations made by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, including the introduction of habeas corpus. While there has been some progress in the Balkans, several key indicted war criminals remain at large. Media freedom remains a concern throughout much of the Eurasian region.

Government efforts to restrict media freedom procedurally, e.g., through denying licenses, exerting pressure on broadcasting or newspaper management and distribution channels, or by harassing journalists is a problem throughout the region, as are "hostile takeovers" of independent media outlets.

Violence and repression against religious minorities must be addressed in Georgia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and religious freedom also is limited in several other Eurasian countries and Belarus.

The U.S. strategy for promoting democracy and human rights employs a combination of consistent, high-level diplomacy and assistance programs. The combination of diplomatic and programmatic efforts was particularly effective in promoting a positive resolution to the post-election crisis in Georgia. The United States continues to fund a range of country-specific and regional projects supporting free media, civil society, including human rights groups and independent labor unions, religious freedom, democratic elections, political party development, good governance, the rule of law and anti-trafficking measures. The United States uses bilateral and multilateral channels, primarily the OSCE but also the UN Commission on Human Rights, both to support positive developments and to highlight instances of abuse.

INDEPENDENT PRINTING PRESS IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC



The Kyrgyz Republic's only independent printing press began operations on November 14, 2003, in a ceremony attended by Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner and Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Askar Aitmatov. Funded by the United States and implemented by Freedom House, the printing press enables media outlets for the first time to publish without fear of being denied access to the state-run printing press or having to engage in self-censorship. Citizens in the Kyrgyz Republic and elsewhere in Central Asia are

able to read non-government controlled media reports and opposition points of view that would otherwise be inaccessible to them.

Culminating an 18-month effort, the printing press is the result of diligent work by Freedom House and the U.S. Embassy, with the participation of many other organizations. The Eurasia Foundation assisted in the founding and registration of the Media Support Center (MSC), the Kyrgyz non-profit foundation that operates the press. The MSC is governed by an international board of directors, including U.S. Senator John McCain as chairman, former U.S. National Security Advisor Anthony Lake and other distinguished individuals from the United States, Europe and Central Asia. The Open Society Institute financed the purchase of state-of-the-art computer-to-plate pre-print equipment and the Government of Norway contributed financially to the project. In the end, it was the U.S. Air Force stationed at Manas Air Base in Bishkek that provided the transportation for the printing press to its final destination in Bishkek.

By early 2004, the press is already printing 28 independent newspapers; in December alone the press run totaled nearly 300,000 copies. The MSC also sponsors training programs for journalists. From a technological perspective, the combination of modern pre-press technology and full-color printing will strengthen all publications' abilities to compete in the marketplace. Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Aitmatov hailed the press as a step forward for needed freedom of the press in his country. More touching was the independent journalist at the opening ceremony who also spoke, saying he had "dreamed of this day," calling the opening of the press a "truly epochal event." Thanking the United States, he pledged that his fellow journalists and publishers would do their part to strengthen democracy in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Above: Foreign Minister Askar Aitmatov, Assistant Secretary Lorne Craner, Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Jones, Executive Director of Freedom House Jennifer Windsor, Ambassador Steve Young and Presidential Advisor Bolot Djanuzakov at the inauguration of the Kyrgyz printing press.

ALBANIA

Albania is a republic with a multiparty democracy, led by Prime Minister Fatos Nano and President Alfred Moisiu. The Government's human rights record remained poor in some areas, although there were improvements in others. 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 a lack of democratic tradition.

The U.S. strategy focuses on improving election administration and credibility, expanding citizen involvement in public affairs, strengthening legislative and civil institutions, including independent media, and improving the Government's capacity to fight crime and curb corruption. Some key successes included improved local government elections, passage of a landmark asset declaration law and a comprehensive anti-money laundering law, the airing of several documentary-style television series exposing corruption, increased convictions of senior officials and police on charges of abuse of office, and a further curtailment in human trafficking. Citizens' advocacy groups also played a greater role in speaking out against government corruption and mismanagement.

Corruption and weak rule of law remained among the greatest obstacles to improving human rights and democracy in Albania. These issues factored prominently in embassy officials' public remarks and private meetings with government officials. Visiting U.S. officials also stressed these issues with their Albanian interlocutors at every opportunity, including during the separate visits of Secretary of State Powell and U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Andrew Natsios in May, and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in June. Washington-based officials also regularly raised these concerns with visiting Albanian officials. In April the Embassy hosted a conference on promoting government transparency and accountability, bringing to Tirana representatives from the U.S. House of Representatives

Ethics Committee, the General Accounting Office, Common Cause and the Oregon State Election Commission to meet with Albanian politicians, civil servants and citizens' advocates.

The United States provided funding to anti-corruption initiatives, including the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption, an umbrella organization representing 210 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals involved in the fight against corruption. The United States also supported the Citizen's Advocacy Office, an NGO offering legal assistance to private citizens in corruption cases. The result was an unprecedented level of cooperation between the Government and civil society on the issue of corruption and increased scrutiny and accountability related to central and local government activities.

In the area of law enforcement, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program supported the creation of the Office of Internal Control (OIC) in the Albanian State Police. The OIC is charged with investigating internal corruption and building a more professional police force. DOJ maintained a full-time advisor with that office. OIC investigations led to a significant increase in arrests, dismissals and other disciplinary actions against police officers for corruption and abuse of office, including a senior police official at Mother Teresa Airport involved in migrant smuggling. Total disciplinary actions in 2003 exceeded 1,200. DOJ assisted in the creation and training of the Organized Crime Task Force, which brings together an elite group of police and prosecutors to fight organized crime and corruption.

As a result of U.S. training programs for judges and other legal officials, the climate for successful prosecutions of previously "untouchable" criminals improved, with several cases brought against notorious organized crime figures. A number of judges were dismissed on corruption after the successful implementation of a judicial code of conduct and a code of disciplinary proce-

dures. The United States was a strong proponent of Witness Protection legislation, which is currently nearing passage in Parliament, to improve the success of prosecutions for trafficking, corruption and other crimes. The United States chaired the International Consortium, an informal mechanism for the many international donors who are involved in legal reform in Albania, to coordinate and streamline their efforts.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other international observers judged Albania's local elections, held in October 2003, to be the fairest and most transparent in the country's democratic history, although administrative problems remained and there were a few isolated incidents of irregularities and violence. The progress was due in large part to important reform of Albania's electoral code, achieved with significant OSCE assistance and U.S. political support. The number of Albanians serving as election monitors with NGOs more than doubled in 2003 from the last election in 2001 (from 1,000 to 2,200 people). Assisted by the Embassy, local organizations established a Forum of Local Monitors, produced a standardized monitoring form and conducted educational campaigns and televised campaign issue debates. Embassy per-

sonnel also served as election monitors under OSCE auspices.

In 2003 the Peace Corps resumed operations in Albania, after a six-year absence. Peace Corps volunteers worked with municipal governments and local communities throughout Albania to make government more responsible and accountable to civil society, spreading democracy at the grassroots.

To help the Albanian media continue to progress from its origins as a state-controlled machine, the United States funded training programs on-site and in the United States, in order to raise the level of professionalism among reporting, editorial and management staff. U.S. officials, particularly the Ambassador, also stressed the need to ensure media freedom in public remarks and private conversations with government officials.

The Embassy has actively vetted all Joint Combined Exchanges of Training and bilateral exchange exercises with the Albanian military through the human rights vetting process. Through the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, 32 officers received military training and training in human rights,



IFES

democracy and civics in the United States. In addition, the Expanded-IMET program sponsored several educational events bringing U.S. officials to Albania. For example, the Embassy arranged for the Defense Institute International to assist the Albanian Ministry of Defense's legal experts in establishing and implementing a modern code of military justice that complements civilian law.

U.S. programs also sought to promote religious freedom in Albania. Funding for local community developments that build ties between the country's four main religious groups – Sunni Muslims, Bektashi Muslims, Albanian Orthodox and Roman Catholics – helped maintain and foster even greater tolerance and cooperation among members of different faiths. A U.S.-supported Civic and Faith-Based Education Project was launched to develop ways to introduce the teaching of civics into religious school curricula.

The United States remains committed to eradicating trafficking in persons, and U.S. officials continue to actively engage the Government in fighting trafficking in persons, including through a country-specific strategy tailored to helping authorities meet the minimum standards as defined by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. In 2003 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. U.S.-assisted programs addressed the reintegration of victims, including the strengthening of women's legal rights as they relate to trafficking, domestic violence and the new Albanian Family Code. A systematic national referral mechanism to test models for sustainable reintegration and shelter mechanisms for victims of trafficking was also developed. A U.S.-funded bilateral initiative is focused on reducing the trafficking of Albanian Children to Greece and Italy.

With \$70,000 in U.S. assistance, the Government's National Reintegration Center expanded its mandate in 2003 beyond third-country nationals to provide assistance to Albanian

trafficking victims, including children, and migrant workers. The Government formed the Child Trafficking Working Group to develop and pursue strategies specifically focused on combating child trafficking.

ARMENIA

The Government's human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained.

Armenia's Government held presidential and parliamentary elections in 2003. President Robert Kocharian was re-elected in a controversial vote that was marred by numerous serious irregularities; as a result, the election did not meet international standards. Some members of the security services committed human rights abuses. There were reports of arbitrary arrest and detention, and lengthy pretrial detention remained a problem. Prison reform efforts were under way, but prison conditions remained generally poor. Judges were subject to pressure from the executive branch and some were corrupt. There were some limits on freedom of the media, assembly, association and religion. Societal violence against women was a problem. Trafficking in persons was a problem that the Government took some steps to address.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy continues to focus on fundamental issues, including the need for elections that meet international standards, the development of a vibrant civil soci-



ety, respect for human rights and the rule of law, reform of the judiciary, respect for freedom of the media, assembly and religion, increased government transparency, and anti-trafficking efforts. U.S. assistance to support this strategy in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 totaled approximately \$22.4 million, of which about \$12.2 million was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchange programs.

U.S. officials routinely meet with Armenian government officials, parliamentary opposition leaders, religious minorities and human rights activists regarding these issues. The Embassy hosted several representational events and roundtables during the year to raise awareness and encourage dialogue in support of these aims.

To promote democratic presidential and parliamentary elections, the United States repeatedly urged the Armenian Government to adapt specific reforms. The United States also funded activities to promote democratic elections, which included work with citizens groups to strengthen the integrity of voters lists and protect voter rights, political party training, training and deployment of domestic election monitors and deployment of a high level delegation of international election observers in parliamentary elections. Following last year's flawed elections, the United States joined the OSCE in raising the importance of accountability for election fraud.

U.S. programs to support the work of Armenian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Embassy's Democracy Commission program, remained an effective means for the United States to advance its democracy and human rights agenda. With U.S. funding for projects and institutional support, local NGOs pursued initiatives to promote human rights, media freedom, democratic development and civil society.

International Visitor (IV) programs also focused on human rights and civil society development. One IV program in December 2003 focusing on prison reform and other human rights issues sent Armenian human rights activists and government

officials to the United States. One of the participants was subsequently appointed Armenia's first Human Rights Ombudsman. Other IV programs focused on developing women's leadership and increasing government transparency.

Through U.S. programs focused on increasing citizen participation and awareness, 220 town hall meetings were held throughout Armenia in which local citizens raised their concerns with community leaders. Other programs included a civics education curriculum that was implemented in Armenian schools and work with the National Assembly that increased the public's ability to access information regarding the legislature and its actions.

The United States continues to place high priority on judicial reform. After revising its approach in FY 2003 due in part to the judiciary's actions during the presidential elections, the United States continued to promote the rule of law, focusing on providing legal education and strengthening the capacity of lawyers. Judicial assistance is limited to promoting the independence and integrity of judges, including the development of a judicial code of ethics. After several years of little movement and effort on the part of Armenian judges toward promoting their own independence, a working group of judges, with U.S. assistance, developed an agenda of reforms needed for an independent judiciary. The United States is closely monitoring the progress of the working group.

The United States has been engaged with the Government as it develops an anti-corruption strategy. Embassy officials are providing commentary to the Government on the draft strategy.

To support media freedom, U.S. programs, including the Embassy's Democracy Commission Small Grants program and the IV program, provided training designed to strengthen the professionalism of reporting and financial viability of Armenia's independent media outlets and technical assistance for reform to create an enabling legal framework for the media.

Military-to-military contacts focused on promotion of fundamental human rights and on humanitarian outreach including medical assistance and peacekeeper exercises. To foster more professional security forces and reduce human rights abuses, the Embassy used a grant to support the training of key police officials and officials from the Procurator's office. 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 continued to highlight the issue of religious freedom. The Embassy disseminated more information than in previous years on religious freedom issues (including hard copies and Internet links to the State Department's International Religious Freedom Report) to government contacts, the NGO community, and human rights libraries in rural areas throughout Armenia. The Embassy supported successful public roundtables on religious freedom and religious minorities through Democracy Commission grants. High-level meetings with religious leaders based in Armenia and with visiting leaders from religions with communities in Armenia focused on ways to promote tolerance and more effectively include religious minorities in discussion of human rights in Armenia. The Embassy hosted representational events that included the full spectrum of Armenia's religious communities on the occasion of an inter-faith leadership visit in Fall 2003. This event was hailed as one of the most successful gatherings of religious leaders in a non-government and secular setting.

Combating trafficking in persons continues to be on the U.S. agenda. The Embassy has strongly supported the Government's Interagency Commission to Address Issues Related to Human Trafficking, and provided input on the draft National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking. The United States funded a victims' assistance

program that provided services to eight victims of trafficking in 2003, and a program for journalists and government officials on awareness campaigns and investigative reporting. The second program resulted in a marked increase in media coverage of trafficking and improved government cooperation with journalists reporting on trafficking in persons. An IV program also focused on anti-trafficking.

AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan's human rights record remained poor, and the Government continued to commit numerous serious abuses. In October 2003, President Ilham Aliyev was elected in a controversial election marred by numerous serious irregularities; as a result, the election did not meet international standards. Members of the security forces continued to commit numerous serious abuses, including excessive use of force with demonstrators and torturing and beating persons in custody. Arbitrary arrest and detention continued and after the election, authorities conducted a wave of politically motivated detentions and arrests. More than 100 remained in detention as of March 1, 2004. Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening. Lengthy pre-trial detention was a problem, and fair and expeditious trials were problematic due to a judiciary dominated by the executive branch and subject to corruption. The Government continued to restrict some freedom of speech and the press, as well as freedom of assembly and association and some religious freedom, and continued to hold a number of political prisoners. Trafficking in persons was a problem.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Azerbaijan addresses a wide range of critical issues, including respect for human rights, democratic processes, civil society, the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and anti-trafficking efforts. U.S. assistance in support of this strategy in Fiscal Year 2003 totaled approximately \$16.1 million, of which about \$7.6 million was allocated in U.S.-based training and exchanges.

In support of the U.S. strategy, State Department and embassy officials regularly meet with a range of human rights and democracy activists, representatives of pro-reform political parties and religious minorities, as well as with government officials. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Lynn Pascoe, Members of Congress and Congressional staff traveled to Azerbaijan in 2003 and early 2004 to reinforce support for U.S. objectives.

Following post-election violence, Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage telephoned Ilham Aliyev to urge the Government not to crack down on the opposition. The Department Spokesman stated, “We are ... extremely concerned with the post-election violence and what appears to be a wave of politically motivated arrests.” The Ambassador and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Pascoe also raised concerns with senior government officials. Both privately and publicly, the United States urged the Government either to release the detainees or transparently charge and try them in accordance with international standards. Embassy officials visited some of the detainees, including Imam Ilgar Ibrahimoglu of the Juma Mosque community, to monitor their condition. The Embassy also monitored the trials.

Recent elections have not met international standards. The United States has focused sustained effort on addressing this deficiency. In 2003, much of the U.S. human rights and democracy effort focused on promoting democratic elections in advance of the October 15 presidential election. Early in the year, U.S. officials, including the Ambassador, continued a dialogue that had begun after the 2002 constitutional referendum with senior government authorities on necessary reforms. The U.S. also provided non-partisan training to political parties on political party building and election monitoring. The United States worked to improve election administration by funding programs that provided technical assistance to the Central Election Commission (CEC), training for members of precinct and

regional election commissions and a series of voter education programs.

With U.S. funding, non-partisan domestic and international observers were trained and deployed for the parliamentary by-elections and the October presidential election. U.S. funds also paid for procurement of transparent ballot boxes. In preparation for the presidential election, the Embassy established an Election Strategy Team, including non-governmental organization (NGO) representation, to coordinate the international community’s efforts to promote an election that would meet standards set by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Senior U.S. officials including Secretary of State Powell, Deputy Secretary Armitage and the Ambassador, urged senior Azerbaijani officials to adopt specif-



ic reforms to strengthen the fairness and transparency of the election in three areas: the conduct of the campaign, the administration of voting procedures on election day and, most importantly, the integrity of the vote-counting process. The Embassy's public affairs section funded and coordinated the creation and distribution of anti-fraud posters to all 5,000 polling places. Democracy Commission grants to local NGOs helped to encourage the development of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan. For example, grants enabled local NGOs to host seminars on democracy.

The Embassy fielded approximately 30 observers to monitor parliamentary by-elections in March and approximately 100 observers to monitor the presidential election on October 15. The Embassy also funded the deployment of another 180 observers to monitor the vote tabulation process at the regional election commissions during the presidential election. When serious irregularities marred the conduct of both elections, the United States raised concerns with senior Azerbaijani officials. The United States also urged the CEC to invalidate the results in those polling stations where there were serious irregularities. The CEC subsequently cancelled election

results in 694 polling stations; however, it did not do so in many other precincts where serious violations occurred. In the State Department's October 21 statement, the United States concluded that "Azerbaijan's leadership missed an important opportunity to advance democratization by holding a credible election." The United States also called for an investigation of both the election violations and the post-election violence.

The United States also used the media to encourage citizens' participation in the democratic process. Through the International Foundation for Election Systems and Internews, the United States funded public service announcements instructing voters on their rights. The Embassy's Public Affairs section also funded the national broadcast of the Emmy-winning documentary on the American electoral process, "Vote for Me," in Azeri.

A strong civil society is integral to democracy, and the United States continues to support the development of civil society in Azerbaijan. For example, in 2003 and early 2004 the United States continued a two-year program designed to strengthen the ability of 36 NGOs to effectively



represent the interests of a well-defined constituency. Democracy Commission grants have supported a variety of projects ranging from resource centers for NGO development to publication of NGO newsletters. Embassy officers have traveled throughout Azerbaijan to support NGO activities. The Embassy also works closely with the Government to help improve cooperation between the Government and NGOs.

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, assist a future bar association in developing and administering a bar exam, expand programs for law students, assist women in gaining better access to justice, and conduct a legal literacy program for the general public. A U.S. Resident Legal Advisor is working to improve legislation and to increase the professionalism and skills of the judiciary and procuracy. A U.S. program implementer and the Resident Legal Advisor are also working with the Government and private lawyers to amend the current Law on Advocates and to develop an independent bar association.

Another focus of U.S. efforts was the development of a free and responsible media. The Ambassador, embassy officials and visiting U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect media freedom. U.S. funding supported the professional development of journalists and advocacy for media rights. U.S. programs enabled the production of three weekly television programs, and provided extensive ongoing technical and programming support to several independent television stations and newspapers. U.S. Democracy Commission grants supported newspaper production and provided training for journalists in how to avoid and defend themselves against libel charges.

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

parties. Embassy officials also attended several of these gatherings.

The United States has worked actively to encourage respect for religious freedom. The Embassy and officials in Washington maintained close connections with local religious communities and made contact with some communities outside Baku. U.S. officials met frequently with government officials to stress the importance of respecting religious freedom. Intervention by the Ambassador helped a local expatriate church obtain its registration. The Ambassador and other U.S. officials met frequently with government officials to urge them to not evict the independent Juma Mosque community from the historic Juma Mosque.



IFES

The United States also has used programs to encourage religious tolerance and respect for religious freedom. The Embassy organized a very successful visit by Dr. Hibba Abudigeiri of George Washington University to Azerbaijan, where she spoke about Islam in America, gender and Islam, and democracy and Islam. The State Department hosted an International Visitor program for several Muslim leaders. The Embassy actively spread the message about religious tolerance and Islam in America throughout the year, including at an Iftaar dinner hosted by the Ambassador in November.

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 exercis-

es and operational training conducted in the country.

Trafficking in persons is 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 partially funded a trafficking research study by the International Organization for Migration. U.S. officials visited the region to discuss the issue, and Azerbaijani officials were invited on International Visitor programs on trafficking and to the Department's anti-trafficking conference in Washington.



BELARUS

Belarus is a republic with a directly elected president and a bicameral parliament. President Alexander Lukashenko, first elected in 1994, amended the Constitution in 1996 through a seriously flawed referendum and extended his term in office in 2001 through an election that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) described as neither free nor fair. Local elections in March and November 2003 were neither free nor fair. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for Fall 2004. The judiciary is not independent.

In 2003 and early 2004, the Lukashenko government's human rights record remained very poor and worsened in some areas; although there were improvements in a few areas, it continued to commit numerous abuses. The Government effectively continued to deny citizens the right to change their government. Security forces continued to harass and detain political opponents, journalists, human rights activists and trade unionists. Police abuse and occasional torture of prisoners and detainees continued. The authorities continued to refuse to undertake serious efforts to account for the disappearances of well-known opposition political figures in previous years or to address credible reports regarding the regime's role in those disappearances. In addition to committing widespread human and civil rights violations, the regime embarked on an apparently calculated campaign to close independent media outlets and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Journalists critical of the Government were administratively punished (usually fined) on libel charges. The Government also increased its repression of independent trade unions, prompting an International Labor Organization (ILO) Commission of Inquiry to investigate serious violations of workers' rights. The authorities continued to restrict religious freedom by threatening, fining and arresting those engaged in unsanctioned religious activity. Government intimidation of opposition parties and civil society groups

severely hindered the development of a transparent and democratic political process. Trafficking in persons remained a problem.

The U.S. strategy to promote democracy and human rights in Belarus consists of applying political and economic restrictions, maintaining bilateral and multilateral diplomatic pressure, and selective engagement, monitoring and reporting on abuses. The United States funded \$8.9 million in programs to bolster independent media, political parties, civil society and trade unions, promote free and fair elections and the rule of law, and protect human rights. U.S. officials above the assistant secretary level do not meet with Belarusian authorities. The United States refuses to provide any bilateral assistance to the Government except humanitarian assistance and exchange programs with educational institutions. The United States closely cooperated with the OSCE in Belarus, and pressed hard for the Government to maintain an OSCE presence in the country. In concert with the European Union, the United States instituted visa restrictions on senior Belarusian officials that convinced the Government to agree to a new OSCE office in Minsk. Embassy staff actively monitored the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus and met with local organizations active in promoting human rights and democracy. The Embassy also established a notification network with Western embassies and international organizations to coordinate monitoring efforts.

The Embassy continued to press the Belarusian Government to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the disappearances of several opposition activists. In January 2003, the United States offered to provide assistance for such an investigation. U.S. officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, National Security Council officials and Members of Congress, met with family members of the disappeared who actively seek justice for their family members. The United States sponsored a resolution that passed at the 2003 UN Commission on Human Rights calling for an independent, credi-

ble investigation into the disappearances. The United States will sponsor a similar resolution in 2004.

In response to the Belarus authorities' ongoing campaign of intimidation and harassment directed against civil society, independent media and the political opposition, a joint delegation of U.S. and European Union representatives met with the Foreign Minister of Belarus in March 2004 to demand an immediate halt to this campaign and to urge the Government to take the necessary steps to ensure a free and fair electoral process for October parliamentary elections. The delegation also reaffirmed its immediate willingness to initiate serious discussions with the Government on how to improve bilateral relations. The United States will continue to monitor the situation very closely and respond appropriately to the actions of the Government of Belarus.

With specific regard to elections, the United States consistently urged the Government to hold free and fair elections and to invite an OSCE election-monitoring mission well in advance of elections. In May 2003, the United States sponsored a conference on election reform that, despite the Government's unwillingness to participate, attracted international experts and local political party and NGO representatives. U.S. funding supported political process training, technical assistance and cross-border exchanges for pro-democracy groups, focusing on internal party governance, strategic planning, membership recruitment and retention, and message formulation. Despite intense government pressure, in the March 2003 elections, 53 opposition candidates who received U.S.-funded training won seats on their local city councils. On the national level, five political parties that received U.S.-supported training formed a coalition with a common candidate list, electoral strategy and positive, democratic platform. This coalition now offers Belarusians a promising alternative in the 2004 elections.

The Embassy closely monitored the Government's calculated attacks on civil society

and opposition political parties. In July, the Government refused to reregister IREX – a U.S. NGO providing assistance to independent media organizations. The Embassy released a press statement protesting this action. Embassy staff regularly observed the trials of NGOs and media outlets throughout Belarus that were targeted by the Government for closure on flimsy pretexts. In April, former Ambassador Michael Kozak met with jailed newspaper editor Viktor Ivashkevich. The United States made statements at the OSCE Permanent Council calling on Belarus to cease its repression of civil society and independent media and supporting the OSCE's efforts to assist Belarus in meeting its OSCE commitments.

Bolstering civil society and independent media and promoting the rule of law are key U.S. goals. The Embassy's Democracy Commission program awarded grants to strengthen independent mass media and civil society.

The United States also supports journalism and management training, legal defense and on-site business consultations to strengthen independent print and broadcast media outlets and increase their capacity to provide objective, fact-based information. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2003, U.S.-supported public clubs offered local forums to share information and resolve local issues. One public club generated widespread community support and convinced local authorities to co-finance a local clean water project. In 2004, the number of clubs rose to 18 throughout the country. To promote the rule of law, the United States provided legal and advocacy training for lawyers, activists and NGOs and supported the network of Legal Advice Centers.

Training, exchange and educational reform programs are another component of the U.S. democracy and human rights promotion strategy. In FY 2003, some 200 Belarusian citizens participated in professional or academic training programs. Traveling to the United States, Belarusian participants received short-term train-

ing in business, journalism, public health and secondary school administration and took part in International Visitor (IV) programs focusing on NGO management, elections, grassroots democracy, foreign policy and human rights. Fifty Belarusian students participated in the Future Leaders Exchange program, attending U.S. high schools and living with American families for one academic year.

Embassy staff also monitored the Government's hostile actions against those promoting academic freedom. U.S. officials 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 demand that the rector of the privately run European Humanities University resign and later issued a press statement describing the meeting.

The United States continued to support NGOs advocating for the rights of youth and women. Program graduates organized more than 50 community events in 2003 and spearheaded new youth groups that raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and work with at-risk youth.

As the Government implemented a new, highly restrictive law on religion, the Embassy intensively monitored violations of international norms and urged government officials to respect religious freedom. Embassy officials expanded their contacts among the religious community to include many smaller groups that have been government targets. The Embassy also assisted in arranging meetings between representatives of religious groups and high-level U.S. delegations visiting Belarus. Embassy staff participated in outreach programs with groups of American citizens visiting Belarus to discuss religious freedom issues. The Embassy also arranged for representatives of several traditional and nontraditional

faiths to participate in an IV exchange program to the United States in March 2004.

The Embassy closely monitored incidents of anti-Semitism that occurred throughout Belarus. On May 31, 2003, the Embassy issued a public statement condemning the vandalism of Holocaust memorials and Jewish cemeteries in several Belarusian cities. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, along with American and international NGOs, regularly raised with the Government the concerns of international Jewish groups over the expansion of a sports stadium built on a Jewish cemetery in Grodno; this action led to agreement on the renovation and the appropriate treatment of unearthed remains.

In response to workers' rights violations, the United States ended Belarus trade benefits in 2000 under the Generalized System of Preferences and supported an ILO Commission of Inquiry in 2003. The Embassy maintained close contact with local independent labor leaders and the ILO, which is continuing to implement a U.S.-funded program promoting labor rights and independent trade unions. In 2003, eight labor leaders participated in an IV program to learn about American trade unions.

In 2003, the Embassy helped organize several anti-trafficking roundtables that included government, NGO, diplomatic mission and international organization representatives. The Embassy worked closely with the International Office for Migration's (IOM) 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 IV program in the United States. The Embassy also worked with IOM on a U.S.-funded program to raise public awareness and protect trafficking victims. The United States funded and developed a women's economic empowerment project to combat trafficking in persons.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Since the signing of the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Dayton Accords), human rights abuses have diminished. Still, serious problems remained and the Government's human rights record remained poor. Police brutality continued, but police accountability for individual abuses improved. Dominant political parties and authorities continued to influence the judiciary and to pressure and harass the media. Entity governments and private groups continued to restrict religious practice by minorities in majority areas; religious discrimination remained a problem. Trafficking in women and girls continued to be a serious issue.

U.S. efforts to improve human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) focused on strengthening the rule of law and building institutions at the state level to strengthen the effectiveness of law enforcement and the application of justice. This strategy yielded some notable successes, such as the creation of a State Court and State Prosecutor's office, which is empowered to hear cases involving organized crime and trafficking. Bosnia and Herzegovina established a nascent national law enforcement agency known as the State Information and Protection Agency, adopted new state and entity-level criminal procedure codes, and initiated a vetting process for every judge and prosecutor in the country. A new religion law was adopted and there were important developments in combating trafficking in persons (TIP). After the 2002 national elections, the Embassy worked with the international community to vet appointments to key ministerial positions, allowing the international community to reject nominees clearly unsuitable for these posts, including on human rights grounds.

The United States continued to support efforts leading to reconciliation and justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina. U.S. assistance to the International Commission on Missing Persons enabled the use

of cutting-edge DNA technology to help identify some of the estimated 20,000 to 30,000 persons missing from the 1992-95 conflict. Some 1,536 remains were recovered in 2003. The Embassy also provided strong political support for the construction of the Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial and Cemetery Project. The Ambassador attended three burial ceremonies in which nearly 1,000 victims of the massacre were buried, and former U.S. President Bill Clinton spoke at the formal opening ceremony for the Memorial on September 20, 2003. The United States also continues to support minority returns in Bosnia through U.S. assistance activities.

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 2003 to encourage further reform in Bosnia and to press home the message of Bosnian responsibility in locating and apprehending indicted war criminals. The same message was conveyed to Bosnian authorities, particularly in the Republika Srpska, during the course of several visits by Ambassador at Large for War Crimes Issues Pierre Prosper. Other key high-level U.S. visitors in 2003 included Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs Lincoln Bloomfield, who raised human rights and democracy issues while focusing primarily on defense reform and non-proliferation issues. In addition, Presidency member Dragan Covic, Council of Ministers Chairman Adnan Terzic and Foreign Minister Mladen Ivanic paid official visits to Washington on separate occasions in 2003; discussions on human rights, democratic freedoms and combating trafficking all featured heavily in their meetings with U.S. officials.

In order to strengthen the rule of law in Bosnia and combat human rights abuses, the United States funds programs aimed at training police, prosecutors, judges and relevant authorities in criminal procedure, administrative structure and criminal justice data management. The United States provided \$1.5 million to the U.S.



Department of Justice International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICI-TAP) to build local capacity in entity-level Ministries of Interior (responsible for policing activities), helping them implement policies to combat organized crime and terrorism and strengthening their managerial, long-range planning and personnel evaluation capabilities. The United States contributed an additional \$1 million to ICITAP's Criminal Justice System Data Management project to expand nationwide a successful pilot project allowing prosecutors to more efficiently track casework. In addition, the United States provided approximately \$7 million for associated rule of law programs, including criminal procedure code field training to judges and prosecutors, support for a Resident Legal Advisor and prosecutorial development programs, assistance to judicial and prosecutorial training centers, and seconding U.S. personnel to the State Court and State Prosecutor's offices.

The United States was also vitally involved in the development of Bosnia's judicial sector, providing \$2 million to the Independent Judicial Commission and the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils, which are responsible for appointing and disciplining judges and prosecu-

tors to all courts (both state and entity-level). The United States also provided \$300,000 for a witness protection program for individuals who testified against war criminals at The Hague. The program helped extremely vulnerable individuals and their families relocate to safe municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United States also deeply engaged in developing civil law and provided \$1.7 million through its Administrative Law and Procedural Systems (ALPS) program to eliminate barriers that average citizens continue to experience in the unwieldy 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. The ALPS project also established the first administrative law clinic in Bosnia and Herzegovina, within the Sarajevo Law School. The Embassy, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funding support for the American Bar Association, helped unify the ethnically splintered Federation Bar Association and forged an improved professional partnership between the two entity-level (Federation and Republika Srpska) bar associations.

At the municipal level, U.S. small grant mechanisms supported the efforts of municipalities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to develop grass roots democratic activity, strengthening citizen participation in civil society. The United States provided \$270,000 in grants for projects that included helping minority refugee populations gain access to information and public services, as well as form economic cooperatives, creating public councils to oversee and act as a “check” on local government performance, and strengthening the ability of women to organize and advocate their interests effectively at local levels. The \$700,000 “New Practices” program initiated in 2003 built upon best practices in municipal governance and encouraged local governments to promote democratic reform, transparency and refugee returns. The program increased municipalities’ consultation with civic groups and supported community improvements undertaken in partnerships between local governments and NGOs.

Educational programs formed an important part of the Embassy’s civil society initiatives. USAID sponsored a second cycle of the National Democratic Institute’s Parliamentary Internship Program, giving 58 talented interns an opportunity to serve in Bosnia’s state and entity-level parliaments. The program increased the parliaments’ staff resources and allowed young Bosnians to gain leadership skills and experience. The United States also played a direct role in fostering democracy education in Bosnia’s schools through the Civitas civic education project. Civitas has developed a democracy and human rights course that is now taught in every secondary school in the country (and is the only course in Bosnia and Herzegovina taught with the same materials in every school). In 2003, the United States provided more than \$300,000 to Civitas to institute a formal civic education teacher certification program, building on prior in-service Civitas training for thousands of teachers across Bosnia and Herzegovina. A pilot university-level program also was developed.

Independent and self-sustaining press remained a U.S. priority. The United States sponsored a conference organized by the Bosnia and Herzegovina Press Council on professional standards and self-regulation in journalism. The United States also assisted two Sarajevo newsweeklies in relocating their printing operations, ending their dependence on a facility owned by a large and increasingly nationalist daily paper that had been known to exploit control of local printing capacity to exert pressure on competing print media. Through such support, the United States has encouraged independent voices in the media and discouraged political pressures and threats to individual journalists.

Embassy democratization efforts also extended to the military. Under the U.S.-funded Expanded International Military Education and Training program, mobile training teams were brought to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003 to present seminars on civil-military relations. BiH officials attended courses in the United States as well, focusing on civilian control of the military. These programs underscored the military’s democratic role in Western societies and pointed to necessary reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United States also works to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina in prohibiting discrimination on such grounds as sex, race, disability or religion. Using U.S. funding, the Centers for Civic Initiatives (CCI) in 2003 launched a national campaign under the slogan “We Are All Equal,” aimed at improving the lives of disabled persons. This campaign ultimately led BiH authorities to adopt the UN Charter on Standard Rules and opened the door to enhancing the rights of disabled people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The United States continues to view combating the TIP problem in Bosnia as a key priority. Important developments include the creation of a state level National Coordinator’s Office for Anti-TIP activities and a variety of efforts aimed at fighting complicity and corruption. In March, in the first trafficking case to be prosecuted under

the new BiH-level Criminal Code, three traffickers were sentenced to up to nine years in prison. The men were part of a regional trafficking ring that forced women into prostitution across the Balkans. U.S. engagement on this issue, in particular the Embassy's efforts to focus government actions through a country-specific strategy tailored to the minimum standards of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, was a driving force in helping to elevate Bosnia and Herzegovina from Tier III to Tier II status in the State Department's 2003 Trafficking in Persons Report.

In addition to rule of law work supporting police and prosecutorial development to fight organized crime and trafficking, the Embassy has supported a number of workshops, conferences and internships for journalists who report on trafficking in persons. The Embassy funded a comprehensive study on human trafficking in Bosnia and Herzegovina, increasing public awareness of this issue and providing accurate data on the scope of the trafficking problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States continued to provide training and support for an interagency law enforcement task force investigating trafficking and illegal migration, and provided assistance to trafficking victims through a grant to the International Organization for Migration, which runs a shelter based in Sarajevo. U.S. officials also consistently stress the importance of combating TIP in meetings with senior BiH officials, including the Presidency, Prime Minister, Minister of Security and State Border Service, and the Entity Prime Ministers and Ministries of Interior, as well as other police officials.

GEORGIA

Georgia's Government is headed by President Mikheil Saakashvili, who was elected on January 4, 2004 in an election that brought Georgia closer to meeting international standards. Parliamentary elections held on November 2, 2003 were marred by massive fraud and manipulation of results by government-controlled election commissions.

Peaceful popular protests of the fraud led to the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze and the annulment of the proportional results. The Government's human rights record remained poor although there were some improvements in a few areas. Numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) blamed the Government for several deaths in custody due to physical abuse, torture or inhumane and life-threatening prison conditions. NGOs reported that police brutality continued. Security forces continued to torture, beat and otherwise abuse detainees. Corruption in law enforcement agencies remained pervasive. Arbitrary arrest and detention remained problems as did lack of accountability. Reforms to create a more independent judiciary and ensure due process were undermined by failure to pay judges in a timely manner. Lengthy delays in trials and prolonged pretrial detention remained problems. The press generally was free; however, occasionally security forces and other authorities intimidated and used violence against journalists. Security forces refrained from violently dispersing demonstrations in November. Government officials infringed upon freedom of religion and continued to tolerate discrimination, harassment and violence against some religious minorities. Trafficking in persons remained a problem.

Previous elections in Georgia had been marred by serious irregularities that limited citizens' right to change their government. As a result, the U.S. human rights and democracy strategy consisted of providing assistance designed to increase participation and transparency in the election process; combating police abuses, discrimination and harassment directed against religious minorities, corruption and trafficking in persons, supporting civil society, fostering judicial reform, and promoting independent media. U.S. assistance to support these efforts in Fiscal Year 2003 totaled approximately \$20.4 million, of which about \$8.3 million was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchange programs.

In support of the U.S. strategy, U.S. officials regularly highlight publicly the need for improve-

ments in human rights conditions. The Ambassador and other embassy officers work privately with Georgian officials, NGOs and other domestic and international organizations to identify and highlight areas of particular concern and encourage reform. Secretary of State Powell, former Secretary of State James Baker, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Beth Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Lynn Pascoe, Members of Congress and Congressional staff reinforced support for U.S. objectives in Georgia in 2003 and early 2004.

To promote democracy and increase participation and transparency in the November parliamentary elections, the United States provided funding for campaign and coalition-building training for political parties, training for election commission members, training and deployment of domestic election monitors; computerization of the voters list, voter marking; and a parallel vote tabulation (PVT). At the request of the United States, former Secretary of State Baker brokered a deal between the Government and the opposition on election commission composition to increase opposition representation. The Ambassador maintained public and private pressure on the Government to meet democratic standards throughout the election process, to include protesting against violence and the incarceration of NGO election activists. U.S. assistance, especially the PVT, was instrumental in proving that the official results had been manipulated and did not reflect the will of the people. During the subsequent peaceful popular demonstrations, the Ambassador publicly and privately urged the Government and the opposition to avoid violence and to guarantee citizens' rights of assembly and expression. The demonstrations remained peaceful and eventually led to President Shevardnadze's resignation. Following the election, the Embassy secured the release of a domestic election observer arrested on Election Day for allegedly interfering in the voting process – an arrest that many NGOs considered to be politically motivated.

Following President Shevardnadze's resignation, the United States provided assistance for the January presidential election, including additional training for new election commission members, a get-out-the-vote campaign, exit polling and voter marking. The Embassy's direct intervention helped secure the participation in the election of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara, a region of Georgia that had threatened to boycott. Following the presidential election, the United States immediately turned to preparing a diplomatic and assistance strategy for the repeat parliamentary elections scheduled for March 28.

The United States continues to provide strong support to leading NGOs that promote human rights, religious freedom, anti-corruption and issue-based advocacy throughout the country. Coalitions of leading NGOs now lobby for legal reform and serve as "watchdogs" both at the local and national levels. NGO mentoring partnerships have successfully strengthened many nascent organizations, helping them to become more effective at the local level.

Upholding the media's independence remained a strong theme of U.S. assistance. Support for fledgling television stations, training media professionals in key aspects of journalism, assisting media outlets to become financially viable businesses and providing assistance during major legal disputes continued throughout 2003. Moreover, Georgia's first independent media ratings system was launched, which will enable media outlets to fairly and openly compete for advertising funds in an increasing marketplace. During both the parliamentary and presidential elections, the United States supported debates on key issues in both print and broadcast media.

The United States pursued a vigorous policy promoting the rights of minority faiths and combating religious violence. Embassy officials attended the trial of religious extremist Basili Mkalavishvili and protested the lack of security in the courtroom and failure to follow judicial procedure. Embassy officials also intervened

when followers of Basili disrupted an ecumenical service, and spoke to the congregation at a rescheduled event. The Ambassador attended a service at a Baptist Church that was destroyed in a suspicious fire, a move that encouraged senior government officials to join him. Embassy officers also defended the right of the Jehovah's Witnesses' to conduct services and import literature – efforts that ultimately resulted in a sharp decrease in harassment. Senior State Department officials met with high-level government officials both in Washington and in Tbilisi to discuss violence against religious minorities. The Department sent an officer to Tbilisi to discuss this problem with government officials, religious leaders and human rights groups.

Rule of law efforts have focused on strengthening judicial integrity, implementation of the Administrative Code with its Freedom of Information (FOI) provisions to curb opportunities for corruption, and creating capacity in Georgian NGOs to monitor the performance of local government. Judges known for integrity set up a hotline for citizens to complain about suspected corruption. The judiciary's willingness to enforce the FOI provisions has led to citizens' gaining information on municipal government, including budgeting and expenditures that had not previously been available.

To combat police human rights abuses, the Embassy worked closely with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Ministry of Justice and NGOs to monitor conditions and report abuses. The United States, through its NGO partners, provided training to the Prosecutor's office. The United States also funded human rights awareness training for the police and detention facility personnel. Embassy officials visited prisons and detention facilities and met with prisoners that alleged torture. In compliance with the Leahy amendment, all Georgian participants in U.S. security service training programs are subject to strict human rights vetting through the Defense Attaché's Office in coordination with other embassy offices.

U.S. efforts on anti-corruption stress law enforcement as well as government transparency and accountability. The United States also supports NGO "watchdogs," which monitor local governments, using hotlines, citizen complaints, FOI lawsuits and budget and procurement analysis to spot problems and publicize corruption cases. Grants proved very effective in getting local branches of national agencies and local governments to be more open and more responsive to citizen participation. Several international NGOs funded by the United States also formed a coalition to monitor the former administration's national anti-corruption campaign; the coalition submitted its own shadow report on Georgian corruption problems.

Trafficking in persons remains a problem in Georgia and the United States took significant steps to assist the Government to confront it. The Embassy worked with the Georgian National Security Council to help define an anti-trafficking strategy, resulting in a public awareness campaign, the opening of a trafficking hotline and the creation of a trafficking unit in the MIA. Embassy efforts also facilitated the passage of criminal code amendments designed to fight trafficking.



In support of all these efforts, the Embassy sent various government officials and non-governmental representatives on International Visitor programs in 2003 on topics such as journalism, democracy, religious tolerance and trafficking.

Also in support of all these efforts, the Embassy's Democracy Commission awarded small grants to 15 Georgian NGOs and media outlets to address challenges in public administration and policy, civil society and mass media. Examples of successful projects in 2003 include a grant to Independent TV Lomsia in the ethnically diverse Samtskhe-Javakheti region to expand the local news production broadcasting area, grants to three Internet and resource centers, including one in Abkhazia to support the free flow of and access to information, a grant to the Union of Azerbaijani Women to offer Georgian classes to local public leaders and promote their integration into the Georgian community, and a grant to the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs to translate two American textbooks for inclusion in its Local Government Program curriculum.

KAZAKHSTAN

During 2003 and early 2004, the Government's human rights record remained poor, and it continued to commit numerous abuses. The Government severely limited citizens' right to change their government and democratic institutions remained weak. Members of the security forces, including police, tortured, beat and otherwise mistreated detainees on some occasions. Some officials were punished for these abuses, including the first convictions under the 2002 amendment to the criminal code on torture. Prison conditions remained harsh; however, the Government took an active role in efforts to improve prison conditions and the treatment of prisoners. The Government continued to use arbitrary arrest and detention and to selectively prosecute political opponents, and prolonged detention was a problem as well. Amendments to several laws governing the authority of prosecutors further eroded judicial independence. The

Government restricted freedom of the press, assembly and association and limited democratic expression by imposing restrictions on the registration of political parties. Freedom of religion improved during the year. National and regional officials worked to correct incidents when local authorities harassed nontraditional religious groups or their members; as a consequence, such incidents declined significantly during the year. Violence against women, including domestic violence, was a serious problem. Discrimination against women, persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities remained problems. The Government discriminated in favor of ethnic Kazakhs. Child labor persisted in agricultural areas. Trafficking in persons, primarily teenage girls, was a problem that the Government took steps to address.

Opposition leader Galymzhan Zhakiyanov remained imprisoned at year's end and local government elections in September and October 2003 were marred by irregularities; most analysts agreed that electoral legislation did not comply with Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) standards and therefore disadvantaged opposition candidates. Observers reported that after the Government eliminated most media outlets that were willing to directly criticize the President in 2002 through a variety of means, including criminal and administrative charges, physical attacks and vandalism, these events continued to have a chilling effect on journalists, most of whom practiced self-censorship. After a difficult 2002, a year in which opposition politicians were imprisoned and independent media outlets harassed, the United States focused its human rights and democracy strategy on reversing the tide and resuming progress.

The United States maintained diplomatic pressure on the Government throughout 2003, culminating in a letter from Secretary of State Powell to President Nursultan Nazarbayev noting U.S. concerns about flawed draft election and media laws as well as the continuing imprisonment of Mr. Zhakiyanov and Sergey Duvanov. The Secretary also raised these issues during the July visit to the



United States of Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev. Throughout the year, the United States urged the Government to give a fair hearing to independent journalist Duvanov whose criminal trial early in the year was deemed procedurally flawed by international experts. The United States also maintained forceful advocacy on behalf of Mr. Zhakiyanov and Mukhtar Ablyazov, opposition politicians both convicted in 2002. The Ambassador, embassy officers and every senior level U.S. official to visit Kazakhstan, including Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Beth Jones and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner, raised these cases and broader democracy issues with the Government and urged that just solutions be found. In addition to applying diplomatic pressure, the United States provided visible signs of support by arranging a U.S. non-governmental organization (NGO) visit to the imprisoned journalist, and by convincing the Government to allow an embassy officer to visit Mr. Zhakiyanov in his remote penitentiary. By the end of January 2004, Mr. Ablyazov had received a pardon and Mr. Duvanov was released on a parole-like arrangement allowing him to resume his work.

U.S. diplomatic work during the year was closely tied with democracy assistance programs, which

totaled approximately \$13.9 million in Fiscal Year 2003. Of this total, \$6.4 million was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchange programs. A key focus of diplomatic and assistance efforts was laying the foundation for improving the conduct of parliamentary elections in 2004. The U.S. assistance came partly in the form of a series of small grants by the Embassy's Democracy Commission. One of these grants went to support regional discussions among civic leaders on electoral reform. The United States also provided support to local NGOs that monitored elections and conducted exit polling during local elections in September and October. These NGOs are developing skills that allow them to provide independent electoral reform consultations as well as pre-election monitoring. Another Democracy Commission grantee launched a new Kazakh- and Russian-language television series aimed at voter education. The United States supported the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) efforts to train the only nationwide organization of independent election monitors; this local NGO will continue to work with Parliament to push for key changes to the draft election law. The United States also fielded its own team to monitor the local elections. These efforts have strengthened U.S. calls for a new electoral law that meets international standards.

The United States lobbied vigorously for electoral reform and worked closely with the OSCE in providing recommendations to government officials drafting a new electoral law. In late January 2004, a joint session of Parliament nearly unanimously approved a set of principles the Government proposed for the new election code. The OSCE had previously determined that the Government's draft law contained serious shortcomings and did not meet international standards. A joint parliamentary working group continued through February to debate amendments to the law's text; a third joint session of Parliament will debate further on March 15. The United States will continue to push for improvements to bring the law into compliance with OSCE standards.

The United States remained active on a full array of human rights concerns. With funding from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Freedom House launched in November a training program for human rights defenders that will build capacity of human rights activists to monitor and document the human rights situation in Kazakhstan. U.S. efforts to promote civil society as the basis for not only free and fair elections in 2004, but also for long-term democratic stability, remained strong in 2003. The combined efforts of U.S. diplomatic lobbying, NDI's spearheading of an NGO advocacy campaign, and the engagement of the U.S.-funded network of NGO partners led to a government decision in Fall 2003 to withdraw a controversial law that would have unduly regulated NGOs. Furthermore, U.S. civil society programs provided training and legal support to NGOs and mobilized communities to solve local problems. This year the network expanded to eight NGO resource centers with the addition of a center in Atyrau.

The United States continued its work with the younger generation by supporting a variety of educational programs. To encourage student participation in a democratic society, the United States supports a civics education program that includes textbook and complementary student activities. The United States also funds legal edu-

cation activities geared toward changing the way young legal professionals learn and practice law.

Political parties will play a crucial role in the 2004 elections. The United States continued to sponsor programs to strengthen political parties to foster a competitive electoral environment. The joint efforts of the International Republican Institute and NDI, supported by U.S. funds, are improving the capacity of political parties to represent citizens, better articulate their platforms, and compete with one another, thereby broadening the spectrum of political forces in Kazakhstan. The United States sponsored the visit of opposition political party leaders to the United States to deepen their understanding of democratic processes. The United States also sponsored a training session for local governmental (Maslikhat) candidates.

The United States continued to press the Kazakhstan Government to honor its commitment, enshrined in its Constitution and OSCE membership, to respect free speech. This came partly in the form of vigorous U.S. lobbying to prevent the imposition of new restrictions on the media. U.S.-funded organizations participated in the government-sponsored working group on proposed new media legislation and offered important suggestions to improve the draft law. While a draft law that contains several articles restrictive of freedom of speech was passed in late December 2003 by the lower house of Parliament, lobbying continues by U.S.-funded media and civic organizations in the hopes that this law will either be positively changed in the upper house, vetoed by the President, or ruled unconstitutional. A broad range of journalist organizations, including one run by President Nazarbayev's daughter, has called for the law to be withdrawn.

The United States maintained crucial support for organizations that seek to develop and strengthen the capacity of journalists and independent media outlets, including training on their rights and responsibilities in covering elections. The United

States also funds Adil Soz, a local NGO, to monitor the infringement of rights of journalists and media outlets. The United States sponsored several programs for independent media, including a Democracy Commission grant for an advocacy organization to launch a new newspaper, a grant to a nationwide television channel to run a series of programs on human rights and democracy in the Kazakh language, a Citizen's Exchange program to train journalists and programs bringing several speakers to Kazakhstan to discuss the role of an independent media.

The United States worked closely with UN High Commission for Refugees to assist the Government in upholding its commitment to the Chechen refugees in Kazakhstan. As a result, the Government's policy to deport Chechens was reversed. The United States also supported refugee communities by providing a grant to the Red Crescent/Red Cross to expand its medical assistance for the most vulnerable and neglected groups.

U.S. efforts to promote religious tolerance in the past several years produced a major step forward in 2003. Not only did President Nazarbayev initiate a series of high-profile conferences to strengthen dialogue among religious faiths, the Government also increasingly tended to its own non-traditional religious communities. On several occasions, the United States brought cases of heavy-handed harassment of religious groups by local officials to the attention of national authorities in Astana. In each instance the harassment stopped. Increasingly, the Government has intervened in such cases without pressure by the United States or others and, as a consequence, such harassment has declined significantly. The United States also encouraged the President's religious tolerance initiative by working with groups from the United States that attended the Peace and Harmony Conference held in Almaty in February 2003 and by helping to promote the goals of the conference. President Bush sent his greetings to that event, and to the Congress of World Religions held in Astana in September

2003. The United States also sponsored a month-long program to have 20 regional Muslim leaders travel to the United States in an effort to help foster understanding of religious diversity among the large population of Muslims in Kazakhstan's south, as well as other programs to promote moderate interpretations of Islam and showcase Muslim life in America.

The Embassy greatly expanded its cooperation with the Government of Kazakhstan to fight against trafficking in persons (TIP). The United States pressed for the appointment of a national TIP Coordinator, a robust national plan to combat TIP and the development of a large-scale public awareness campaign. The Government made significant progress in each of these areas. With U.S. assistance, local NGOs are working to educate the public on the dangers and impact of human trafficking, help law enforcement agencies investigate trafficking crimes and provide a host of services to trafficking victims. The Government began producing its own TIP public service announcements. The United States has worked to educate and train the media about the importance of reporting cases of trafficking.

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

During 2003 and early 2004 the Kyrgyz Government's human rights record remained poor and worsened in some areas; although there were improvements in some areas, it continued to commit numerous abuses. The Government severely limited citizens' right to change their government and democratic institutions remained weak. Members of the security forces at times beat and otherwise mistreated persons. Prison conditions remained very poor, but improved slightly during the year. Although impunity remained a problem, numerous law enforcement authorities were dismissed or prosecuted for abuses or misconduct. There were many cases of arbitrary arrest or detention. Executive branch domination of the judiciary limited citizens' right to due process, and its interference affected verdicts involving prominent opposition figures. The Government

restricted freedom of speech and of the press, although it allowed an independent printing press and television station to begin operations. The Government used bureaucratic means to harass and pressure the independent media, some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the opposition, although a government Ombudsman's Office actively worked to advocate individual rights. Particularly problematic was a highly flawed constitutional referendum in February 2003 that strengthened control by the President and weakened the Parliament and the Constitutional Court.

With parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for 2005, the U.S. strategy to promote democracy and human rights 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.

To promote democracy, the United States maintains 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 November 2003 visit to Bishkek, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Beth Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner and the Ambassador held discussions with local NGO 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 June 2003 and February 2004, high-level U.S. officials discussed with Foreign Minister Askar Aitmatov the need for continued progress in democratization in order to broaden U.S.-Kyrgyz bilateral relations.

The Embassy criticized, both publicly and privately, the Government's highly flawed constitutional referendum in February 2003. Violations included manipulation of the ballot count, forged voting results and incidences of individuals voting multiple times or without documents. In addition, there were many occasions where election officials prevented independent observers from monitoring the election process. Following the referendum, the United States also raised concerns with Kyrgyz officials about harassment of independent and opposition observers who criticized the referendum. In late February, U.S. officials visited Edil Baysalov, chair of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, when he was held in a military hospital for medical testing despite several prior waivers from military service. With U.S. funding, Baysalov's organization was active in deploying independent monitors during the constitutional referendum.

Throughout the year, the United States worked closely with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the National Democratic Institute and the International Foundation for Election Systems to provide Kyrgyz officials with concrete ways in which election legislation could be improved and brought into compliance with international norms. In December 2003, the Kyrgyz Parliament adopted a new election code, which President Akayev signed into law in January 2004. The election code, which the OSCE determined does "not establish a legal framework that provides for democratic elections," will nonetheless play a crucial role in how parliamentary and presidential elections in 2005 are conducted. In late 2003, U.S. officials met extensively with pro-government and opposition legislators as well as senior government officials, including President Akayev, urging them to adhere to international standards in the coming election. President Akayev has given his pledge to step down from the presidency and to ensure a peaceful transition.



The United States was highly engaged on rule of law issues, such as arbitrary arrest and excessive use of force. U.S. officials continued to raise the need for due process in the case of imprisoned opposition leader Felix Kulov as well as the need for accountability in the 2002 police killing of unarmed protesters in Aksy. In May, U.S. officials met with a group of women whose relatives were killed or injured in the March 2002 incidents. The women initiated a hunger strike and demanded that President Akayev punish officials responsible for the protesters' deaths. U.S. officials also raised with Kyrgyz authorities the case of Galena Kaisarova, a prominent Bishkek attorney threatened with the loss of her license based on statements she made while defending her client in court.

The United States participated in planning an OSCE-sponsored community-policing project aimed at improving civil-police relations and providing training to Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies on proper crowd control tactics. Throughout 2003, the United States worked closely with the Government and the OSCE to ensure that local NGOs would have a significant opportunity to provide input during the implementation of the project.

In Fiscal Year 2003, U.S. democracy assistance programs in the Kyrgyz Republic totaled approximately \$14.2 million in technical assistance and grants in the areas of civil society, rule of law and media to strengthen democratic practices among citizens and institutions. Of this total, \$4.4 million was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchange programs.

A U.S.-funded program to support human rights defenders worked closely with grassroots activists and youth leaders on training in human rights monitoring and advocacy. U.S. 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 tax code to allow grants and humanitarian aid to be tax-exempt. The number of high schools using a civics textbook developed by U.S. implementing partners increased to 324 from 170 the year before, reaching almost 20,000 students across the country. U.S. implementing partners worked with reform-minded parliamentarians and promoted public hearings as a way to elicit citizens' views on new legislation. The U.S.-funded local governance program helped to draft a new law

that, starting in 2005, will change the financing of local government and allow for more local control of revenue. A growing network of U.S.-funded Information Centers for Democracy provided citizens with access to independent media and infrastructure to host “town-hall” meetings to discuss current political issues.

U.S. officials intervened with Kyrgyz government officials on numerous occasions in support of freedom of the press. During his visit to Washington June 2003, senior U.S. officials reminded Foreign Minister Aitmatov of the importance of freedom of media for democratic development. In his meetings with senior Kyrgyz officials, the Ambassador objected to a spate of “honor and dignity” lawsuits brought against independent media outlets that were stifling freedom of the press in the Kyrgyz Republic. Since mid-2003 there has been a reduction in the number of these cases.

A notable success was the November opening of the U.S.-funded independent printing press, the first of its kind in the Kyrgyz Republic. Assistant Secretaries Jones and Craner and the Ambassador attended the opening ceremony for the press, an event that marked the culmination of two years of effort by the Embassy and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Since its inauguration, the press has already been printing 17 independent newspapers, enabling media outlets for the first time to publish without fear of being denied access to the state-run printing press. The Media Support Center, the umbrella foundation that operates the press, also sponsored training programs for journalists. Other U.S. programs include supporting independent print and broadcast media by conducting training seminars, providing technical and legal assistance, and producing and facilitating the exchange of news programs and information for independent outlets and journalists.

The United States used public diplomacy funds to sponsor International Visitor programs focused on

the issues of religious tolerance, ethics, law enforcement, human rights, promoting independent media and developing young leaders. 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 61 grants to local NGOs in support of independent media outlets, information dissemination, combating human trafficking, 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, student groups at 11 Kyrgyz universities received grants to combat corruption within the education system.

Remaining engaged on the issue of religious freedom, the United States maintained regular contacts with representatives of various religious communities and several Kyrgyz religious leaders visited the United States on the International Visitor Program. The Ambassador hosted an annual Iftaar dinner for Muslim leaders and addressed a crowd of worshipers in the Bishkek main square on the feast of Eid marking the end of Ramadan. U.S. officials met frequently with leaders of the country’s largest Protestant church, who complained of government harassment, and raised the church’s concerns with officials at the State Commission on Religious Affairs. As a result of U.S. efforts, the church has now been able to register but continues to experience difficulties, which the United States is monitoring.

On numerous occasions, U.S. officials lobbied for the Kyrgyz Republic to employ more effective efforts to combat international trafficking in persons. Anti-trafficking was an important component of the U.S. “Information Initiative.” In par-

tial response to U.S. efforts, the Kyrgyz Republic adopted laws making trafficking a crime in August 2003. These efforts also contributed to a sharp increase in the number of prosecutions for trafficking and associated crimes in 2003. The United States launched a new two-year program to combat trafficking in persons by strengthening the capacity of local NGOs to conduct public information campaigns and provide assistance to victims. In November 2003, the Kyrgyz NGO Sezim used U.S. funding to open a shelter in Bishkek for victims of trafficking.

MACEDONIA, FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF

Macedonia is a multi-ethnic, multi-party parliamentary democracy. The current multi-ethnic coalition Government is led by Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski. In February 2004, President Boris Trajkovski was killed in a plane crash; the first round of presidential elections for his successor will be held April 14, 2004. In an improvement from 2002, the Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, although serious problems remained. Impunity for state agents, a corrupt and inefficient judiciary and trafficking in persons were problems. The police's human rights record improved during the year, and the state acted to combat trafficking in women. The U.S. Ambassador and EU Special Representative, in their capacities as co-facilitators of the 2001 Framework Agreement (FWA), which brought the 2001 insurgency to an end, monitored and encouraged implementation of the agreement. Legislative implementation of the agreement, scheduled to be completed in 2004, strengthens minorities' civil rights.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Macedonia focused foremost on encouraging the Government of Macedonia to continue to implement the FWA. U.S. efforts to encourage the state to improve its current human rights performance were largely successful. The United States continued to press for a resolution of cases involving state agents of the prior government

credibly accused of committing human rights crimes during 2001 and 2002. The U.S. assistance strategy addressed a wide range of critical issues, such as respect for the rule of law, support for democratic processes, civil society, free and independent media, judicial and police reform, religious freedom and anti-trafficking efforts.

The Ambassador and embassy officials, often in coordination with other representatives of the international community, frequently engaged in direct human rights advocacy. In early 2003, the Ambassador met with government officials to encourage them to implement the Amnesty Law in good faith, and to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia regarding alleged war crimes cases stemming from the 2001 conflict. Subsequently, the Government decided to remove from office Chief Public Prosecutor Stavre Jikov, who had obstructed prosecution of state agents.

The United States continues to emphasize that international norms, as well as Macedonia's aspirations to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), require that the country bring human rights abusers to account. On numerous occasions, the Embassy pressed the Government to bring to justice the perpetrators of the 2002 Rostanski Lozija massacre, in which police in the former government murdered seven South Asian itinerant workers and planted weapons and National Liberation Army uniforms on their persons in a blatant attempt to incriminate them. Despite constant pressure by the United States and other international actors, the state has yet to open judicial proceedings against the perpetrators or their political masters.

In March 2003, after a mine killed two Polish NATO soldiers, the Ambassador traveled to Lipkovo, a northern Macedonian village, to send a clear message that the United States would not tolerate violent extremism in the region. He pressed the Government to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators. In May 2003, the

Ambassador, in coordination with government officials, met with ethnic Albanians in Vejce, a northern Macedonian village near the Kosovo border, to defuse an armed standoff and persuade the local residents to allow ethnic Macedonian family members to place flowers at the site where eight ethnic Macedonian security force members were killed in 2001. A dignified, positive outcome resulted.

The United States continued to work with the Government to ensure FWA-mandated legislation passed parliament. Many of these legislative actions relate to the devolution of power to local governments and strengthened civil rights for minorities. The Embassy emphasized the importance of efficient and transparent local government as critical to consolidating Macedonia's democracy. The United States allocated more than \$2.7 million in 2003 to the Government's decentralization efforts.

The United States promoted the right to a fair, speedy and transparent trial as basic elements of a defendant's right to due process in all of its program activities, which include investigating and prosecuting human and narcotics trafficking, money-laundering and other serious crimes, assistance in penal code reform and day-to-day cooperation with the Macedonian judiciary. The United States contributed more than \$3 million in assistance to improve the effectiveness of the courts, the quality of judicial decision-making, judicial access for under-served groups and minorities, and the work of public prosecutors.

Police reform, focusing on expanding minority representation and improving human rights performance, is a central requirement of the FWA and an important factor in ensuring the country's future stability. The U.S. Department of Justice International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) is supporting a community policing model. ICITAP provides guidance to the Ministry of Interior's Professional Standards Unit, which is responsible for rules of conduct, internal investigations and policy devel-

opment. ICITAP trained police and community members in leadership development, forming community action teams, using citizen-advisory groups and developing a police academy. ICITAP works in close coordination with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the EU's new police advisory mission, Proxima, inaugurated on December 15, 2003.

To advance the protection of human rights, the Embassy awarded grants totaling approximately \$275,000 for projects to improve basic human rights, empower minorities, promote a free and independent press, strengthen the rule of law and other themes that support equality and basic freedoms. The American Corner in Bitola, Macedonia's third largest city, regularly hosts programs to increase public awareness of human and civil rights. The Embassy disseminates U.S. government material on human rights to key contacts in the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others. Video products explaining human rights were distributed to and displayed by local broadcasters. The Ambassador served as the host of an annual embassy initiative recognizing the contributions of women to society. Training programs for journalists that are designed to inculcate the practices of an independent media and their role as societal watchdog continued.

The United States worked with 90 community groups in coordination with municipal governments to use community meetings to identify local communities' most urgent needs and provided \$650,000 in grants, primarily to under-served communities, to support HIV/AIDS prevention, conflict reduction, youth employment and community development.

The International Republican Institute (IRI), with \$600,000 in U.S. grants, focused on efforts to strengthen political parties' organization, improve their communication with the public and increase youth and women's participation in politics. In preparation for the fall 2004 local elections, IRI

is working to prepare women and youth to run for office and manage election campaigns. IRI also conducted regular opinion polls, and worked with political parties on how to use the results to better address the public's concerns. The United States allocated \$1.3 million to parliamentary assistance and legislative strengthening, of which \$900,000 was used by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to work with members of parliament from all parties, including minority members, to ensure that the interests and rights of citizens are well represented in the legislature. NDI helped members of parliament conduct public hearings to ensure that citizens' interests and rights are appropriately accounted for in draft legislation. NDI also helped 70 members of Parliament establish 40 constituency offices around the country, with the aim of making parliamentarians more accessible to their constituents, and supported a parliamentary intern program.

The Ambassador and other embassy officers regularly met with Macedonian religious groups. The Embassy closely monitors an ongoing dispute between the Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Churches over the Macedonian Church's 1967 declaration of independence from the Serbian Church and associated freedom of religion concerns. In August 2003, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Charles Ries and embassy officials attended the Dialogue Among Civilizations Conference, which brought together numerous heads of State as well as representatives of religious groups.

To help improve workers' rights, the United States provided \$500,000 to allow the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS) to implement a labor union education and outreach program. ACILS' education and exchange programs on privatization, collective bargaining and social dialogue helped trade unions develop effective strategies for engaging employer representatives, including alternatives to strikes that were in fact utilized. ACILS was

also successful in encouraging the ethnic integration of trade unions and in keeping integrated trade unions intact despite inter-ethnic tensions stemming from the 2001 conflict.

Initiatives to help combat Macedonia's human trafficking problem through training, education and public awareness campaigns were conducted throughout the year. ICITAP hosted an ongoing series of training programs intended to strengthen collaboration among prosecutors, police and investigative judges, as well as improve prosecutorial and police techniques to combat trafficking. Coordination and support of activities and programs sponsored by the international community, which was actively engaged in anti-trafficking issues, was an integral part of the Embassy's overall efforts. U.S. representatives participated in the National Commission for Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons.

The Embassy conducted an exchange program to demonstrate how the United States combats trafficking, disseminated State Department reports



and other relevant documents and targeted small grants at NGOs to raise public awareness about human trafficking. The United States allocated \$595,000 to anti-trafficking activities, including a variety of activities with NGOs, media education campaigns and police training. NGO activities include development of television programs and brochures, focus groups and town hall meetings, especially in eastern Macedonia and rural areas, to raise low-income women's awareness of the issue. A network of organizations will be formed throughout the country to provide services and counseling to victims, potential victims and their families. The Embassy also sponsored a Human Trafficking Reporting Awards program in 2003 to encourage local media to investigate and report on issues related to trafficking.

Advocacy by the Ambassador and embassy officials on anti-trafficking issues was instrumental in the recapture and sentencing of a notorious Macedonian trafficker, Dilaver Bojku, and in another case where six traffickers received prison sentences for a trafficking incident in which three victims were killed. As a result of U.S. and international community involvement, there has been an overall increase in both the number of trafficking related convictions and length of prison sentences.

MOLDOVA

The Constitution of Moldova provides for a multiparty representative government with power divided among a president, cabinet, parliament and judiciary. In 2001, parliamentary elections resulted in a new communist parliamentary majority and government. The elections were generally free and fair; however, authorities in the separatist Transnistria region interfered with the ability of residents there to vote. In 2001, the Parliament elected Communist Party leader Vladimir Voronin president. Although local elections in May and June 2003 generally met international standards, observers raised concerns about intimidation and arrests of some opposition candidates, pressure on independent media and

use of the state media to broadcast biased information. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, judges were reportedly subject to outside influence and corruption.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas, and the human rights record of the Transnistrian authorities was poor. Citizens generally had the right to change their government, although this right was severely restricted in Transnistria. Authorities reportedly tortured and beat some persons, particularly detainees and Roma. Prison conditions remained harsh. Security forces were widely believed to monitor political figures, use unauthorized wiretaps and at times conduct illegal searches. There were some restrictions on freedom of the press, including defamation and calumny laws that encouraged self-censorship, and the Government continued to restrict access to independent media. During the year, the Government adopted new limits on freedom of association. A few religious groups continued to encounter difficulties in obtaining official registration. Societal violence and discrimination against women, children and Roma persisted. There were some limits on workers' rights. Trafficking in women and girls remained a very serious problem.

The Transnistrian authorities reportedly continued to use torture and arbitrary arrest and detention. Prison conditions in Transnistria remained harsh, and three ethnic Moldovan members of the Ilascu group remained in prison despite charges by international groups that their trials were biased and unfair. Human rights groups were not permitted to visit prisoners in Transnistria. Transnistrian authorities harassed independent media, restricted freedom of association and of religion, and discriminated against Romanian-speakers.

The U.S. strategy to promote human rights and democracy in Moldova focuses on strengthening the rule of law, good governance and civil society, promoting free and fair elections and combat-

ing trafficking in persons. In Fiscal Year 2003, U.S. democracy assistance programs in Moldova totaled more than \$8.4 million in technical assistance and grants. Of this total, \$4.2 million was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchange programs.

The United States supported several efforts to promote the rule of law in Moldova. The Resident Legal Advisor (RLA) worked with the Government to combat corruption and human trafficking, and increase the effectiveness of law enforcement assistance programs. To combat corruption, the RLA's initiatives included a series of training seminars and roundtables addressing criminal procedure and prosecutor-investigator teamwork, efforts to institute codes of conduct, conflict of interest rules and independent audits within law enforcement bodies, and efforts to draft, enact and implement anti-corruption laws and policies. The U.S.-funded Criminal Law program conducted training for judges on human rights and training for the defense bar on advocacy skills.

Other rule of law programs provided training and assistance on advocating human rights issues (including freedom of speech, association and religion, minority rights, labor law and family law), building legal associations and developing institutional capacity. The advocacy program in particular helped citizens gain a better understanding of the legal system.

To improve local governance, the United States worked with more than 50 communities to improve fiscal management skills and capacities, increase transparency and citizen participation in community decision making and improve strategic planning for local governments and municipal associations.

The United States undertook a number of activities specifically related to local elections in 2003, including training local observers and election officials, fielding international observers, organizing a get-out-the-vote campaign and making

repeated diplomatic interventions with Moldovan officials on the importance of free and fair elections. These efforts, combined with those of other international donors, helped prevent more serious problems from occurring.

Several initiatives were undertaken to strengthen civil society. U.S. programs helped to foster local political leadership and support a non-governmental organization (NGO) resource center that worked to improve the accountability and managerial capacity of reform-oriented civil society groups. The Embassy-administered Democracy Commission program supported an information Internet portal called Moldova Azi, an independent newspaper that publishes a weekly youth supplement promoting democratic values and freedoms among youth in Transnistria, and a center working on children's rights.

The United States promoted media freedom in several ways. In 2003, the Ambassador raised concerns over licensing issues for independent media with high-level Moldovan officials. Many media outlets and media-related NGOs received U.S. financial support to implement different projects that promote freedom of speech and access to a full range of opinions. The United States supported the Institute of Social Technologies in producing 50 radio programs promoting democratic principles and human rights that aired on National Radio, Sanatatea radio in Edinet in producing a program for youth, "Jurnal de Chisinau" in developing and printing a column on small business, Flor TV in Floresti in producing a program promoting freedom of speech and free access to information, the Ungheni newspaper *Unghiul* in publishing its youth supplement "Junior" and *Cuvintul Liber* newspaper in Leova in publishing articles on women's issues.

In addition, the Embassy sponsored several exchange programs, some of which are targeted at journalists. During 2003, ten Moldovan journalists traveled to St. Louis and spent three weeks discussing strategies and methods of investigative

journalism with their American counterparts. The Embassy has also sent Moldovan journalists to the United States each year for the past several years to participate in a program called Television Cooperation. Through this program, teams of Moldovan journalists have the opportunity to work with an American producer and create programs about American life and American approaches to various issues for broadcast in Moldova. Last year, a team from Euro TV traveled to the United States and produced a series of programs on local elections in the United States.

The United States also brought American media experts to Moldova to participate in seminars and conferences with Moldovan media professionals and students. During 2003, an American professor taught Moldovan journalism students basic principles of news reporting, interviewing and newspaper design and layout during a summer camp, a former U.S. news anchor participated in a similar camp for more advanced students and young professionals on fundamentals of broadcast media and an American professor presented a course at Moldova State University on media ethics. The United States also continued to support a three-year partnership between Moldova State University, the Department of Communications, the Independent Journalism Center and Missouri School of Journalism to improve journalism education in Moldova.

The Expanded International Military Education and Training program promoted respect for human rights in the Moldovan military by providing a seminar on civil-military relations, emergency response training for military and civilian physicians, a seminar on “Legal Aspects of Deployment on Peacekeeping Missions” for the Moldovan military contingent sent to Iraq and a course for military officers on “Military and Peacekeeping Operations in Accordance with Rule of Law.” The Defense Department also supported 18 military, civilian and law enforcement officials in Marshall Center courses focusing on democracy, civil-military relations and regional

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

In an effort to highlight U.S. concern for religious freedom, the Ambassador met with leaders of most major religious groups in 2003. The Embassy raised concerns about some religious groups’ persistent registration difficulties to the Government’s State Service on Religions. In December 2003, the Embassy forwarded copies of Holocaust-related documents turned over by the Government to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

The Ambassador and other U.S. officials repeatedly emphasized the importance of combating trafficking in persons. The RLA provided technical assistance for judges, prosecutors and investigators on trafficking in persons, including training that emphasized education, sensitivity and skills development, supported the creation of anti-trafficking units, case review teams, and working groups, with the goal of having a unit in each of Moldova’s administrative regions provided assistance to improve law enforcement cooperation between transit and destination countries and provided legislative drafting assistance.

The United States continued to support the work of the Center for the Prevention of Trafficking in Women to provide legal assistance and counseling, legal representation and help processing identity papers and other lost documents for victims. Through the Center, the United States also promoted and developed specialized legal knowledge and practices for applying anti-trafficking laws and norms, and monitored activities related to strengthening the judiciary’s capacity to reduce trafficking. Funding for an information campaign, implemented by the International Organization for Migration, targeted potential and actual victims of trafficking and relevant Moldovan authorities, seeking to prevent trafficking by increasing public awareness of a new toll-

free hotline number and strengthening governmental institutions' and society's understanding of trafficking. In November 2003, the Embassy supported the Association of Electronic Media to distribute TV footage of a national conference on combating trafficking to local television stations in rural areas.

RUSSIA

Although the Russian Government generally respected human rights in some areas, its human rights record worsened in a few areas in 2003. Its record remained poor in Chechnya, where there were credible reports of serious violations, including numerous reports of unlawful killings, and of abuses of civilians by both federal security forces and the Kadyrov regime as well as by Chechen fighters. Parliamentary elections in December 2003 failed to meet international standards. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) issued a press release calling the March presidential election "generally well administered" but "lacking elements of a genuine democratic contest," citing the "dearth of meaningful debate" and the bias in state-controlled television in particular. Throughout 2003 and early 2004, Russian government pressure weakened freedom of expression and the media, and independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their supporters came under increased pressure. Credible reports continued that law enforcement personnel engaged in violence and other brutal or humiliating behavior, often with impunity. Although seriously impaired by corruption and undue influence from the executive branch, the judiciary showed some increasing independence. A series of alleged espionage cases caused continued concerns regarding the lack of due process and the influence of the Federal Security Service in court cases. Authorities harassed and imposed restrictions on some religious groups. Ethnic minorities, including Roma and persons from the Caucasus and Central Asia, experienced widespread governmental and societal discrimination, including violence. Limits on workers' rights

increased, as did reports of forced labor and child labor. Trafficking in persons remained a serious problem.

The U.S. human rights strategy in Russia is to promote awareness and respect for the entire range of human rights, an open, transparent and representative democratic political system, including a vibrant civil society, fundamental freedoms; development of a fair and impartial judiciary and access to diverse and independent media. U.S. assistance in support of these goals in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 totaled approximately \$79.2 million, of which about \$48 million was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchanges.

In his September 2003 meeting with President Vladimir Putin at Camp David, President Bush raised a broad range of bilateral issues including democracy and human rights concerns such as Chechnya. In a January trip to Moscow, Secretary of State Powell raised democracy and human rights concerns, including Chechnya, media freedom and rule of law. In an op-ed in the prominent newspaper *Izvestiya*, he acknowledged that the civic institutions of a democratic society take time to develop, but welcomed the future prospect that Russia would achieve stable democratic institutions, noting that "without basic principles shared in common, our relationship will not achieve its potential."

Senior U.S. officials, including the Ambassador, made human rights a major public diplomacy theme, urging improvements in human rights conditions and focusing on specific cases. 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 human rights climate.

The gravest threat to human rights in Russia continued to be the conflict in Chechnya. During the joint press conference of Presidents Bush and Putin following their September meeting at Camp David, President Bush stated, "Terrorists must be

opposed wherever they spread chaos and destruction, including Chechnya. A lasting solution to that conflict will require an end to terror, respect for human rights and a political settlement that leads to free and fair elections.” Senior U.S. officials, including Secretary Powell and the Ambassador, regularly expressed concern and continued their dialogue on the conduct of the Russian military in Chechnya with high-level Russian political and military leaders and with Russian and American NGOs. In public and private forums, U.S. officials, including Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Beth Jones, used testimony before Congress, regular meetings with the Russian President’s aide for Chechnya, media interviews and public speeches to highlight the issue. They stressed both publicly and privately that the conflict in Chechnya requires a political, not military, solution, that Russian forces in Chechnya should end human rights abuses, and that the Russian Government should hold those found responsible accountable when violations occur. The United States also called on the Chechen leadership to end terrorist acts and violence against civilians, repudiate terrorism in word and deed and cut all ties to Chechen and international terrorists. The day after the October presidential election in Chechnya, the State Department Spokesman stated, “Unfortunately, the presidential election that took place yesterday and the political process that led up to it fell short of the potential for producing a positive democratic outcome.”

The United States voted for the European Union’s resolution on Chechnya at the 2003 UN Commission on Human Rights. The United States used OSCE forums to convey human rights and humanitarian concerns about Chechnya. Secretary Powell drew attention to human rights abuses in Chechnya during his address to the OSCE’s Ministerial Meeting in December. U.S. funding supported efforts by Russians to promote accountability for human rights abuses in Chechnya. U.S. officials repeatedly urged that all returns of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to Chechnya be purely voluntary and that IDPs in

tent camps who wish to remain in Ingushetiya be given the choice of moving to alternative shelter. The United States supported legal assistance to indigent people, including through an NGO that assisted nearly 5,000 IDPs in the North Caucasus in FY 2003. Also in FY 2003, the United States gave a total of \$22.5 million to international humanitarian assistance programs addressing a wide range of IDP needs in the North Caucasus, and the United States continues to provide such assistance.

Throughout 2003, U.S. partners trained electoral and party officials as well as independent poll watchers for the December 2003 Duma elections and continued such activities in early 2004 for the March presidential election. Special training for election reporting was also organized for mass media representatives in the regions. With U.S. funding, one Russian NGO organized, in 30 regions, the first independent domestic election observation mission. The United States supported and closely coordinated with program implementers who provided training and development activities for Russian political parties and citizens groups. Following the Duma elections, the State Department Spokesman expressed concern with the conduct of the elections, stating, “It’s clear to us... that administrative resources were widely used to assist pro-Kremlin parties.”

A strong civil society is integral to democracy. To assist Russia’s civil society, the United States supports nearly 2,000 NGOs through resource centers, direct grants and technical assistance. The United States continued to support Russian human rights activists’ efforts to raise awareness and respect for human rights and broaden networks of NGOs across the country. For example, in 2003 one U.S.-supported project continued to fund the training of human rights activists in the use of data and other social marketing techniques to mount public awareness campaigns about human rights in the regions. Strengthening civil society also was a key theme in public diplomacy work, which included holding meetings with activists – including a meeting by Secretary

Powell during his January 2004 trip to Moscow – and highlighting the U.S. stance in the Russian media.

To foster respect for the rule of law, the United States provided expert advice to legislators, judges, court administrators, prosecutors, defense attorneys and law enforcement officials to facilitate the development and functioning of an independent judiciary and a fair, impartial justice system. The United States continued to monitor and assist in the implementation of the new Criminal Procedure Code, which is turning the rights promised by Russia's Constitution into practice, expanding the use of jury trials for certain crimes and establishing adversarial proceedings, including new procedures that place the defense on a more equal footing with the state. The United States worked with several judiciary organs to strengthen judicial governance, court administration and ethics. Other U.S. programs fostered legal education reforms such as legal clinics, work on gender-related issues, rights of the physically and mentally challenged, labor rights and migrant rights and advocacy skills of individuals and organizations. The Russian Leadership/Open World Program continued to expand ties between the Russian judiciary, procuracy, defense law experts and their U.S. counterparts.

Continued government pressure on the independent media raised major concern. The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials often raised the issue with Russian officials and maintained a dialogue with Russian editors, journalists and media advocates through day-to-day contacts and periodic roundtable meetings on media freedom. In 2003, U.S. programs provided training and exchange opportunities to professional journalists and students and expanded public access Internet sites. For instance, one U.S. partner trained more than 1,000 participants from 200 regional television stations in management, journalism, sales and production skills. The United States also funded the production and distribution of materials covering media independence, jour-

nalists' rights and responsibilities and freedom of speech to television and radio stations in eight target regions of Russia. It supported improved legal literacy of regional television companies, adoption of a legal and policy framework for open and democratic Internet development in Russia, and improved legal literacy and protection of regional newspapers.

Senior U.S. officials, including the Ambassador, maintained a dialogue on freedom of religion and belief, and on religious and ethnic tolerance, with Russian government officials, religious denominations and NGOs. The Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission hosted a series of lunches and receptions and encouraged Russian officials to meet with visiting delegations on religious issues. When the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom visited Russia in January 2003, the Embassy lent active support, securing ministerial-level meetings and facilitating public and media outreach opportunities.

The United States continued to monitor crucial court cases and visa issues affecting religious workers across Russia. A Department official traveled to Moscow to raise religious freedom concerns with government officials and met with others, especially those involved in crucial court cases and visa issues. The Embassy established the Tolerance Grants Initiative under the Democracy Commission and provided ten grants to NGOs working to improve interethnic and inter-religious tolerance. U.S. assistance to three regional tolerance councils brought together the general public, law enforcement officials, local NGOs and local governments to combat intolerant attitudes toward various ethnic and religious groups. International Visitor programs focused on Islam in America and on Tolerance and Diversity for Russian Muslim leaders. In December 2003, the Ambassador hosted a roundtable on human rights in Russia.

Gender issues remained a central element of U.S. human rights strategy. An inter-embassy working

group coordinated Embassy efforts on women's issues. A U.S. gender-law program trained legal specialists to handle domestic violence cases and other gender-related issues. Its implementing partner worked to change how law enforcement bodies respond to domestic violence complaints. The U.S.-supported Women's Consortium drafted and successfully promoted equal rights legislation passed on the first reading by the legislature in 2003.

The United States also continued working to promote the rights of the disabled and children. A U.S.-assisted NGO project promoted access to education for disabled students. As a result of a U.S. partner's efforts, the Nizhny Novgorod and Samara governments earmarked funds to build access ramps and provide services to help integrate disabled students at more than 20 schools. The Nizhny Novgorod Resource Center, with help from the University of Oklahoma, strengthened local resources to prevent juvenile delinquency in the Nizhny Novgorod region. Their teams of trained experts were able to reach 336 at-risk children and adolescents in 2003.

A key aspect of promoting human rights and international norms is to train military officials and legislators responsible for defense issues. The U.S.-funded Expanded International Military Education and Training program provided training for Russian legislative staffers in civil-military relations and for a legal scholar in jury trials. To ensure the United States trains individuals who have not violated human rights, the United States uses a vetting procedure in accordance with the Leahy amendment, which also serves as the benchmark for the U.S. military's European Command.

Workers' rights and trafficking remained priority issues. In 2003, the United States urged Russian officials to permit the AFL-CIO's long-serving representative in Moscow, Irene Stevenson, to return to Russia after she was denied reentry into Russia in December 2002. The United States supported public interest law centers, trade union

legal departments and individual lawyers committed to social and labor rights. Public interest law clinics provided 8,800 legal consultations and represented workers in more than 1,000 court hearings. Trade union educational programs included seminars on the new labor code and civil procedures code.

With U.S. help, organizations devoted to preventing trafficking in Russia engaged in public outreach, service provision and promotion of legislation. The United States also supported the efforts of the Russian Government to combat the problem by providing expertise in drafting anti-trafficking legislation, training and equipment to form Russian anti-trafficking taskforces and other types of assistance. These efforts bore fruit in 2003, when President Putin identified human trafficking as a top law enforcement priority and sponsored U.S.-suggested amendments to the Russian Criminal Code. These amendments included provisions criminalizing human trafficking and the use of forced labor. With U.S. assistance, NGOs in five regions worked with local governments and the public to raise awareness about trafficking and the need for legal and governmental responses, while providing counseling to more than 2,000 women. They also supported a training network to provide at-risk women with opportunities for professional development.

TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan is ruled by an authoritarian regime that has established some nominally democratic institutions, including a Constitution adopted in 1994. The politically motivated violence and kidnappings of the post-civil war period have ceased. Citizens' right to change their government remained restricted. A June 2003 referendum on 56 constitutional amendments, including granting the president the possibility of two more terms, was passed with little opportunity for debate amid widespread irregularities. The Government's human rights record remained poor and worsened in a few areas; although there were improvements in a few areas, it continued to



commit numerous, serious abuses. Police and security forces occasionally tortured, beat and abused detainees and other persons with impunity. The Government arrested and detained fewer persons arbitrarily and for political reasons than in the past, but it continued to restrict freedom of association and assembly by exercising strict control over political organizations and delaying registration of political parties. The Government instituted new restrictive laws on free speech and media and harassed several independent newspapers. The Government continued to require registration of religious institutions and monitor the content of mosque sermons, although to a lesser extent than in previous years. The judiciary was subject to political and other pressures, and trial delays were common. Trafficking in persons remained a serious problem.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy focuses on building government and civil society capacity, promoting the rule of law and free and fair elections and combating trafficking in persons. The United States took advantage of the ever-improving security situation and rapidly expanding U.S. presence by increasing engagement with all levels of the Tajik Government and

international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In Fiscal Year 2003, U.S. democracy assistance in Tajikistan totaled more than \$7.5 million in technical assistance and grants in the areas of human rights, civil society, rule of law and media to strengthen democratic practices among citizens and institutions. Of this total, \$1.9 million was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchange programs.

In support of human rights, the United States funded two regional programs in 2003: one establishing a network of 28 human rights advocates in the Fergana Valley that was instrumental in the adoption of amendments to the criminal code by Tajikistan's overseeing commission and awarded community grants, and another assessing and building the capacity of human rights NGOs. In November, embassy personnel began attending a bimonthly UN human rights thematic group to share information and ideas and to raise concerns.

To strengthen the rule of law, the United States funded programs to train lawyers, judges and law students, provide judges with civil law volumes, disseminate legal information and support the

development of professional associations that advocate for legal reforms. Presently, U.S.-sponsored training programs are the only source for updated legislative information in remote areas. In addition, the Embassy's Democracy Commission program funded several Tajik NGOs that disseminated legal information to women, youths, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

To promote free and fair elections, embassy officials observed and reported on the flawed 2003 constitutional referendum. Embassy staff met repeatedly with the election committee head and the deputy chairman of the lower house of parliament, held consultations with other diplomatic missions and, along with other high-level U.S. officials, consistently raised the need for free and fair elections with all levels of the Tajik Government and in press statements. In preparation for elections in 2005, the United States is urging the Government to adopt the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-vetted election law amendments that were submitted by two of the political parties in Parliament. The United States collaborates with the OSCE and UN offices as well as local and international NGOs to build local election monitoring capacity, and regularly participates in election strategy working groups with other embassies and international organizations.

On March 2, 2004, the Ambassador delivered a landmark speech on democracy at Tajik State University before a large audience of invited government officials, journalists, NGO representatives, students and the diplomatic corps. The speech was a clear marker of international expectations for democratic norms in the run-up to early-2005 parliamentary elections. The State Department also highlights these themes prominently during ongoing contacts with the Embassy of Tajikistan and with high-ranking Tajik officials when they visit Washington. For example, when Secretary of State Powell met with the Tajik Foreign Minister in Washington, D.C., in March 2004, he highlighted the importance of Tajikistan holding democratic elections that meet interna-

tional standards.

To strengthen civil society and encourage political pluralism, the United States lends public and diplomatic support to political parties and to NGOs that promote civil society development. Embassy staff met with representatives from heretofore-unregistered parties to encourage them to submit their registration documents and attended party-sponsored press conferences denouncing the Government's delay tactics. Through its assistance program, the United States supports a national network of NGO resource centers, trains NGOs and awards grants to advocate legal reform, mobilize communities to solve local problems and hold their government officials accountable. Through the Democracy Commission, the Embassy funded Tajik NGOs that promoted civil society capacity and provided legal education specifically for women. The United States also funds a civics textbook program. The textbook is for 9th graders, and a companion text is under development for 10th graders.

In support of media freedom, the United States funds training for young journalists to produce a weekly television program promoting youth participation and Media Resource Centers that develop the capacity of independent media outlets in the Fergana Valley and provide small grants. The United States provides support to 14 independent local television stations scattered throughout the country. In 2003, these stations continued to broadcast two weekly supported by U.S. Agency for International Development information programs – "The Pulse of Life" and "Open Asia." Two government-controlled television stations in the capital are now broadcasting these programs as well. Independent media faced increasing pressure at the end of 2003 and early 2004. Embassy officials met numerous times with editors of opposition papers under government scrutiny. In early January, the Embassy convened diplomatic missions to discuss media restrictions, which resulted in a statement from the European Union presidency at the OSCE and

a statement by the U.S. Mission to the OSCE calling on the Government to respect its OSCE commitments to media freedom. U.S. officials in Dushanbe and Washington, D.C., the Ambassador and other embassy officials consistently raise this issue with the Tajik Government.

The U.S.-funded Expanded International Military Education and Training program provided training to military and civilian personnel that fosters a better understanding of civilian control of the military, rule of law and human rights. The Embassy Defense Attaché's Office sent more than 80 participants to Marshall Center-sponsored programs and other exchange programs that promoted human rights and democracy. In compliance with the Leahy amendment, Tajik participants in any U.S.-sponsored training or exchanges are regularly vetted for human rights abuses.

Many programs and human rights promotion efforts are specifically designed to help women. After the 1992-97 Tajik civil war, many women became the head of household. This trend is exacerbated by mass male economic migration to Russia. The Embassy funded micro-finance programs for women. The Democracy Commission funded projects that addressed the rights and needs of women and children, ranging from increasing their legal knowledge to creating a teen crisis hotline.

To promote religious freedom, embassy staff consistently advocated religious tolerance and regularly investigated transgressions. The Ambassador hosted an Iftaar dinner in the new residence to foster tolerance. When two Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested for holding an unregistered religious meeting, embassy staff met with the head of the State Committee on Religion and helped broker a resolution. Embassy staff also investigated reports of anti-Semitism when the sole Dushanbe synagogue was slated to be torn down to make room for a civic improvement project. The United States determined that anti-Semitism was not involved, and the Ambassador has met with the Tajik Jewish community in New York to seek their assistance to build a new syna-

agogue in Dushanbe if the city government pursues its urban renewal project.

To combat trafficking in persons, the Embassy supported the training of law enforcement officials and the establishment, in conjunction with the International Organization for Migration, of information centers for workers. The Embassy is developing a strategy to educate women about trafficking.

TURKEY

Turkey is a constitutional republic with a multi-party parliamentary system and a president with limited powers elected by the single-chamber parliament. In 2000, Parliament elected Ahmet Necdet Sezer as President for a seven-year term and in March 2003, Justice and Development Party Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdogan became Prime Minister. The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens. There were improvements in a number of areas, but problems remained including military influence over the political process and reported incidents of torture. Erdogan's government has passed a series of reforms to address these problems. An October 2001 constitutional amendment revised the military-civilian balance of the National Security Council (NSC) in favor of a 9-5 civilian majority. Subsequent reforms allowed for a civilian to serve as the NSC's Secretary General and reduced the number of regular NSC meetings to every other month. The Government passed extensive human rights reform packages that covered a broadening of laws on torture, impunity, access to attorneys, fair trials and freedom of speech. Erdogan's government also adopted a "zero tolerance" policy on torture. Although all of the reforms have not been fully implemented, the Government has committed publicly to doing so by the end of 2004.

The United States focused on a broad range of human rights fields, including police and judicial practices, freedom from torture, religious freedom, freedom of expression, government ethics,

trafficking in persons and the right of return for internally displaced persons (IDPs). U.S. officials regularly raise human rights issues with visiting Turkish government delegations, and did so most recently during Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to the United States in January 2004 and Turkish Justice Minister Cemil Cicek's visit in December 2003. Secretary Powell also wrote a letter to Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul on February 19 stressing the need for Turkey to continue to work on its human rights record and to implement the recent political reforms. U.S. officials also stay in contact with European Union (EU) officials to discuss Turkey's efforts to fulfill the Copenhagen political criteria. Embassy 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 Government. 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.

The Embassy has emphasized the importance of prosecuting, convicting and sentencing to appropriate jail terms police who commit torture. On April 4, 2003, a Turkish appeals court upheld the conviction all ten police defendants in the high-profile Manisa torture case and sentenced them to prison terms ranging from five to 11 years. (According to the Prosecution Law, their actual time behind bars is expected to range from two years to four years, four months.) In addition, Parliament passed legislation lengthening the statute of limitations for torture and prohibiting courts from suspending or postponing sentences in torture cases. The United States contributed \$895,000 to the Center for the Victims of Torture's New Tactics in Human Rights project which brings together human rights activists to share strategies and experience, and will culminate in an international conference in Ankara next year.

In compliance with the Leahy amendment, the

Defense Attaché's Office worked closely with the Ministry of Defense to vet military units for U.S. training. The Government formally signed a U.S. government memorandum of intent (MOI) for anti-terrorist training for law enforcement officials. To date, \$8.5 million in course offerings have been provided to Turkish law enforcement authorities. Under the MOI, which both the U.S. and Turkish Governments have been following in principle for almost a decade in the absence of a formal agreement, the United States will provide training organized through the Embassy while the Government screens training candidates for human rights violations.

Together with the Young Businessmen's Association of Turkey, the Embassy held a seminar on Ethics and Government with State Department-sponsored speaker David Apol, Associate General Counsel in the U.S. Office of Government Ethics. The seminar was designed to raise public awareness of ethics issues and build support for the establishment in Turkey of an office to implement a government ethics program.

The State Department funded an American Council of Young Political Leaders delegation visit to Turkey for programs in Ankara and Istanbul in conjunction with the ARI Movement, a non-governmental organization (NGO) devoted to democracy building. The Embassy helped send two U.S. academics to the International Political Science Association Meeting at Bogazici University in Istanbul who spoke on "U.S. Political Systems, Elections and Political Parties." The Embassy's Political Counselor addressed the topic of Turkish political, economic and social reform before a major Turkish foreign policy association in Istanbul.

The Embassy worked closely with NGOs to help strengthen civil society in Turkey. Because an important issue for Turkish NGOs was their legal status vis-à-vis the Government, the United States supported a conference on the NGO Legal Framework organized by the Third Sector

Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV) to strengthen advocacy for creating a regulatory framework friendly to civil society. Douglas Rutzen, President of the Washington D.C.-based International Center for Non-Profit Law, spoke at the conference and a series of meetings to help TUSEV demonstrate to the Government that its relationship with NGOs could be mutually beneficial.

The International Visitor (IV) program continues to provide opportunities for professionals in all fields to be introduced to the United States and American counterparts. Two-thirds of the 2003 IV participants joined projects related to democracy and human rights. Projects on Civic Education, Municipal Government in the United States, Human Rights and Legislation, and NGOs and Municipalities were designed to give Turkish contacts a focused look at democratic practices and human rights issues.

The Institute for the Study and Development of Legal Systems (ISDLS) and the U.S. Department of Justice continued activities from U.S. grants totaling \$512,000 to engage U.S. judges and prosecutors and their Turkish counterparts in discussions of freedom of expressions and elimination of torture and to promote sustained professional relations. ISDLS brought Justice Mustafa Bumin, President of the Turkish Constitutional Court, to the United States for consultations.

The Ambassador and other high-level embassy officials meet regularly with Justice Ministry officials to improve judicial treatment of Turkey's obligations under the Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and ensure that child abduction cases move as swiftly as possible through the court system.

The Embassy has also stressed the need to allow free religious expression for all faiths, including all Protestant denominations, Jehovah's Witnesses and Baha'i Faith, which are not recognized by the Government. Turkish authorities rescinded in December an order to expropriate a property

sacred to Baha'is in Edirne. The United States, at the highest levels, continues to urge the Turkish Government to re-open the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli. Embassy and other U.S. officials continue to engage with the Directorate of Religious Affairs in dialogue on religion.

Embassy officials worked with the Government to take greater measures to combat trafficking in persons (TIP). As a result, the Government launched a number of initiatives in 2003, earning a promotion from Tier III to Tier II in the State Department's TIP report. The Mission continues to urge the Government to follow up on these initiatives.

TURKMENISTAN

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 legally may 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, the Peoples' Council replaced it as the supreme legislative body. President Niyazov controlled the judicial system.

The Government of Turkmenistan's poor human rights record worsened, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses. The human rights situation deteriorated markedly 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 hundreds of suspects' relatives. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) called for fact-finding missions by international envoys to investigate those reports; the Government refused to facilitate such visits. Throughout 2003 and early 2004, the Government grew increasingly repressive in response to perceived threats to the regime. In early 2003, the Government made ill-defined crimes against the state punishable with life imprisonment and imposed an exit visa regime on its citizens, making it extremely difficult for Turkmen citizens to travel abroad. The exit visa requirement was formally lifted in January 2004. In November 2003, the Government enacted draconian laws on public organizations and religious groups that severely curtail freedom of association and religion by imposing criminal penalties for unregistered activities. The Government severely restricts freedom of speech and does not permit freedom of the press. There were no domestic human rights groups because of restrictions on freedom of speech and association.

The United States implemented a three-pronged approach to promote 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, by iterating its concerns in public statements and by invoking the possibility of Jackson-Vanik sanctions if the Government did not lift exit visa requirements. 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 has supported programs designed to strengthen civil society.

The United States and nine other 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. The United States has supported unsuccessful efforts by the International Committee of the Red Cross to gain access to prisoners detained following that attack. In April 2003, UNCHR members, including the United States, successfully passed a resolution condemning the Government for human rights abuses and calling on the Government to adopt measures called for by the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur. In November 2003, the United States and the European Union (EU) jointly introduced a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution condemning the Government's human rights abuses. The Government recently stated that it is willing to begin a dialogue with the governments that sponsored the UNGA resolution. The United States and the EU are again sponsoring a resolution on the human rights situation in Turkmenistan at the UNCHR in 2004.

In response to the imposition of the exit visa regime, the United States determined that Turkmenistan did not meet the requirements for freedom of emigration under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act of 1994. The Government's assurance that the exit regime visa would be temporary prompted President Bush to grant a temporary waiver of mandatory sanctions. The United States notified the Government that it was risking Jackson-Vanik sanctions, and in January 2004 the Government formally lifted the exit visa regime although implementation of this decision remains incomplete.

To implement the second prong of the strategy, the United States advocated on behalf of individual cases of human rights abuse. In 2003, the Embassy helped coordinate international condemnation of the Government's decision to detain civil society leader Farid Tukhbatullin, directly contributing to his release in April 2003. The Embassy coordinated with other diplomatic missions to protest the forcible abduction, beating and resettlement of a 77-year old man, whose "crime" was being the father of an individual accused of criminal acts by the Government. The Embassy consistently monitored and actively

advocated on behalf of a reporter for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty who has frequently been 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.

In response to a resurgence of harassment of religious minority groups and a repressive new law on religion, Turkmenistan is currently in danger of being designated a “Country of Particular Concern” by the United States under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. Embassy advocacy on behalf of a beleaguered religious minority group helped save one congregation member’s job.

The 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. 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 U.S. Embassies in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan successfully urged the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to follow up on a case involving the forcible resettlement of UNHCR-registered refugees. The Embassy is a principal point of contact and advocacy for individual cases of abuse.

The third prong of the strategy is to fund programs that strengthen civil society. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2003, U.S. democracy assistance programs in Turkmenistan totaled approximately \$4.7 million, of which, \$2.8 million was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchange programs.

In 2003, the Embassy awarded 24 Democracy Commission grants focusing on civic education, Internet access and the free flow of information, community self-help, and women’s and human

rights issues. The U.S.-funded civil society development program focuses on grassroots community development and advocacy. In FY 2003, 37 capacity-building training events were conducted for more than 550 participants under this program. Civil society support centers have also been opened in four of the country’s five administrative regions to provide community-based resources offering management and advocacy training programs to strengthen non-governmental organizations.

In 2003, the United States gave more than 150 future leaders the opportunity to study and receive training in the United States through exchange programs. Three new American Corners and two Internet Access Training Program sites were opened last year, 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 21 Turkmen college students to attend the American University of Central Asia in the Kyrgyz Republic.

In 2003, U.S. funding to combat trafficking in persons 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 trafficking in persons in Turkmenistan. Funding also supports an anti-trafficking public education campaign and training for the Border Service to combat trafficking.

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). Flawed parliamentary and local elections in 2002 and 2003 restricted citizens’ right to change their government. Eleventh-hour, procedurally flawed constitutional amendment proposals in December 2003 and February 2004 raised concerns about Ukraine’s commitment to democracy. The

Government's human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained. Members of the security forces committed human rights abuses including torture and custodial deaths with impunity. Arbitrary arrest and detention, sometimes from what appeared to be political motivation, remained a problem. Authorities continued to interfere with news media by harassing and intimidating journalists, censoring material and pressuring them to apply self-censorship. The Government failed to render justice for murdered journalists Heorhiy Gongadze and Ihor Aleksandrov. In the latter part of 2003 and in early 2004, 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 women and girls remained a serious problem.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Ukraine focuses on creating the conditions for free and fair October 2004 presidential elections. This includes strengthening the rule of law, independent media and respect for civil liberties, and improving monitoring and advocacy capacity of human rights organizations. Combating trafficking in persons is also a key goal. To this end, the United States engaged in diplomatic efforts and supported a variety of assistance programs.

Diplomatically, the Ambassador, embassy officers and senior U.S. officials regularly met with relevant officials in Kiev, including President Leonid Kuchma, and the regions, and Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky met with high-level Ukrainian officials in Washington, D.C., to stress that membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and other Euro-Atlantic institutions hinges on respect for democracy and human rights. This message was reinforced in March 2004 when Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage met with President

Kuchma, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, Foreign Minister Kostyantyn Gryshchenko and opposition leaders Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko in Kiev. Deputy Secretary Armitage stressed the importance of Ukraine holding free, fair, open and democratic presidential campaigns and elections in October 2004 in order for Ukraine to achieve its stated goal of joining Euro-Atlantic institutions and for U.S.-Ukraine relations to deepen. In particular, the United States has called for an end to harassment of independent media and the abuse of administrative resources, especially tax inspections targeting certain businesses associated with the opposition, and to attempts to amend the Constitution during the pre-electoral period. Under Secretary Dobriansky regularly met with high-level Ukrainian officials and urged them to respect human rights and uphold democratic practices especially in the run-up to the October 2004 elections.

U.S. officials continuously work with members of the international community through multilateral institutions such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations to press the Government to uphold its international human rights commitments.

Programmatically, the United States provides financial and technical assistance to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and technical assistance to governmental bodies. In Fiscal Year 2003, U.S. democracy assistance to Ukraine totaled \$55 million, about \$26.5 million of which was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchange programs. Embassy officials also extensively monitor and report on democracy and human rights issues and regularly coordinate assistance strategies with donors and members of the international community.

In order to strengthen the rule of law, the United States funded efforts to increase the independence and efficiency of the judiciary. Key components include establishing the first National



Independent Judges Association, which provides judges with a forum to share information and resources and a mechanism to strengthen the judiciary as a counterweight to the executive branch, training judges and developing and implementing a computerized court administration program that increased pilot courts' processing capacity by nearly 100 percent and reduced corruption. In 2003, a U.S.-funded anti-corruption program provided more than 7,000 legal consultations and represented citizens in more than 1,000 cases against government officials.

Through the Democracy Commission Small Grants Program and the Media Development Fund, the Embassy helped establish a network of NGOs that advocates human rights and media freedoms, providing 42 grants to organizations that monitor and report on human rights abuses, monitor elections and help develop the NGO sector. In September, the grantees held their second annual human rights and media freedom conference to discuss the results of their monitoring. Ambassador Herbst made his first speech on the

importance of human rights at the September Democracy Commission conference, garnering press attention for the event and for the U.S. stand on these issues.

The United States continues to employ a variety of means to promote the conditions for free and fair elections in Ukraine. The United States consistently emphasizes to Ukrainian officials the importance of holding elections that fully meet OSCE standards. High-level U.S. officials and public figures also traveled to Ukraine in 2003 to deliver this message and will do so again in 2004. The State Department issued a statement decrying the establishment of a parliamentary commission to investigate foreign and foreign-funded NGOs involved in election-related activities. The United States and the Council of Europe voiced objections to last minute, procedurally flawed constitutional amendment proposals resulting in the withdrawal of the most controversial component. The United States also pressed the Government to appoint balanced electoral commissions resulting in the confirmation of two

opposition members. Election-related programs focus on reforming key institutions, bolstering administrative capacity, coordinating domestic and international efforts, improving monitoring, increasing civic education, and strengthening independent media.

U.S. assistance aims to help Ukraine improve and comply with its electoral legislation and regulatory framework. The goal is to create the necessary institutions for democratic elections at every level. The program also aims to strengthen the professionalism, competence and independence of election commission members, civil servants, judges and all officials involved in administering, supervising and adjudicating elections.

The Ambassador initiated a series of roundtables with the international community and NGOs involved in elections, political analysis and media issues to identify the steps necessary for a free and fair campaign and election and to facilitate coordination of election-related projects and resources. In addition, the Embassy helped organize a working group of more than 20 embassies to monitor the campaign and elections to ensure that any irregularities are recorded.

The United States is working extensively with NGOs, parliamentarians and election administrators at the national and local levels on long and short-term election monitoring, voter education and the development of sound election laws and administration. With U.S. support, the Committee of Voters of Ukraine conducted the first civic, long-term pre-election monitoring for the 2002 parliamentary elections, as well as for by-elections in 2003. The results were widely disseminated and published on the Internet. Another program will focus on increasing the effectiveness of civic organizations observing and monitoring elections for compliance with international standards. Additionally, the program will improve public access to information helping voters to make informed choices and raise voters' and candidates' awareness of their electoral rights and responsibilities.

The United States continues to promote media freedom in a variety of ways. In response to Government attempts to restrict media freedom, the United States worked with other members of the international community, including the OSCE, to press the Government to uphold its international commitments to media freedom. The United States consistently emphasizes the fundamental right of journalists to report in an objective manner without fear of reprisal. Senior U.S. officials continue to urge the Government to conduct full and transparent investigations of murdered journalists Heorhiy Gongadze and Ihor Aleksandrov and to hold those responsible accountable.

The United States also supports free and independent media in Ukraine by providing a wide range of support to Ukrainian journalists, media organizations and other NGOs, with the aim of improving the financial sustainability of outlets and supporting the production of balanced news. Projects focus on improving the legal, administrative and fiscal environment for Ukrainian media, expanding Internet use, improving professional journalist standards, providing legal assistance and increasing the operating capacity of independent media. Sixty-three percent of the journalists who received legal assistance under these programs won their cases. Training for journalists and technical assistance to 16 media outlets helped improve media quality and quantity. Consequently, fledgling media associations have emerged as strong free speech advocates.

The United States provided extensive grants and training to civil society organizations (CSOs) in an effort to foster civic activism and promote freedom of association. During 2003, the United States funded grants to CSOs in more than 15 oblasts to support advocacy and legislative reform, private enterprise development, improved public administration and training. These CSOs helped develop a national network of pro bono advocacy centers and student legal clinics that defend a broad spectrum of citizens' rights. More than 4,000 clients received assistance by the end

of 2003. Senior U.S. officials repeatedly pressed the Government to register the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute so they could carry out projects supporting political party development; they were registered in September 2003.

To help eliminate human rights abuses committed by security forces, the Embassy continues 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 will continue to send two mobile training teams to provide instruction on human rights issues. To ensure that the United States trains individuals who have not violated human rights, the United States uses a vetting procedure in accordance with the Leahy amendment.

Religious freedom continues to improve, but some registration difficulties and property restitution issues remain. The United States actively works with the Government to protect religious sites neglected or mistreated during the Soviet era. The United States also actively encouraged

the Government to return religious properties and edifices to their rightful owners. The United States requested that the Government register religious groups who have requested registration and permit religious groups, including minority and non-native faiths, to practice freely.

The United States supports the labor movement in its efforts to obtain full government recognition as well as freedom to associate and bargain collectively. The Embassy supported NGO-administered seminars, maintained ongoing contact with union representatives and regularly reported on workers' rights issues. The U.S. Department of Labor funds a number of technical assistance programs in Ukraine to promote basic rights of workers.

Eliminating trafficking in persons and assisting victims are priorities. The United States hosted international conferences in Ukraine to raise awareness about trafficking. The United States funds a number of well-respected organizations that assist trafficking victims and works to prevent trafficking through educational programs and information hotlines. More than 52,000 people have consulted the various hotlines to date.



Partly due to U.S. efforts, the Government increased its collaboration with anti-trafficking NGOs. The Ukrainian Ombudsman publicly praised the United States for its consistent, energetic support of anti-trafficking efforts.

UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan is an authoritarian country with limited civil and political rights. During 2003 and early 2004 the Government's human rights record remained very poor, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses. Torture is endemic, prison conditions are extremely harsh, and independent journalists, opposition politicians and human rights activists are subject to harassment. There were at least four suspicious deaths in custody, possibly due to physical mistreatment on the part of the security forces in 2003. At year's end, the number of persons in prison for political or religious reasons, primarily individuals the Government believed were associated with extremist Islamic political groups, was estimated to be between 5,300 and 5,800. 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. Following a January 2002 referendum, which multilateral organizations and foreign embassies refused to observe because they did not believe the foundations for free and fair elections existed, President Karimov's term was extended from five to seven years. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2004, but to date, no opposition parties have been registered.

The United States would like to see the Government of Uzbekistan achieve greater institutional progress, particularly in the area of democratic reform. The U.S. approach – intensive discussions on human rights and democratization at all levels of government, direct government-to-government human rights training and legal reform assistance, support to local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and active collaboration with Uzbek human rights activists – has produced positive results for civil society. U.S. engagement both in Washington, D.C., and in

Tashkent has been key in producing these results. Although no independent political parties were registered by year's end, with the assistance of the U.S.-funded National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI), opposition parties were able to conduct grass-roots activities and convene organizing congresses. Local human rights advocacy and monitoring groups operate in cooperation with international human rights organizations such as U.S.-funded Freedom House. Following the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Government drafted an Action Plan to implement the Special Rapporteur's recommendations. The International Committee of the Red Cross continues to enjoy satisfactory access to Uzbekistan's prisons. Working with Embassy Tashkent and local NGOs, the Government has been intensively engaged in combating trafficking in persons.

The U.S. strategy has been to engage with Uzbekistan on two levels. The first includes work with NGOs and committed individuals to expand civil society, develop the foundations of a free press and create space for human rights activism and independent political expression. The United States has also devoted considerable attention on exchanges and training, with a view to providing the next generation with the tools necessary to move Uzbekistan's politics and society out of the shadow of its Soviet past. In Fiscal Year 2003, U.S. democracy assistance programs in Uzbekistan totaled \$15.9 million, of which \$6.3 million was allocated for U.S.-based training and exchange programs.

The second level of the U.S. strategy focuses on engaging in a vigorous bilateral dialogue with the Government on a host of issues, from democratization to religious tolerance, from legal and penitentiary reform to advocacy on behalf of specific prisoners of conscience. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Beth Jones and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner visited Uzbekistan in November to highlight U.S. human rights and democracy concerns.

The following month, for the first time, President Bush did not certify Uzbekistan as making progress under the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program human rights criteria. At approximately the same time, the Government of Uzbekistan issued a Cabinet decree that would have placed restrictive and burdensome registration and reporting requirements on U.S. implementing partners. After extensive discussions at the highest levels, including during a February visit by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the Government agreed in early March to abide by the terms of the 1994 Bilateral Agreement which will enable U.S. NGOs and grantees to continue their activities unrestricted.

The continuing prevalence of torture was consistently at the top of the human rights agenda. In 2003, four suspicious deaths in custody drew international attention. The Ambassador and his staff raised these and other cases continually with their counterparts at all levels of government, as did a stream of visitors, ranging from high-level State Department officials to influential Members of Congress. At the urging of embassy and State Department officials, the General Prosecutor is pursuing charges against law-enforcement officers associated with one death and has reopened its investigation into another. The United States works with victims' family members, local human rights activists and international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch to actively investigate allegations of torture and raise them with officials in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice, National Security Service and Internal Affairs (MVD).

In addressing the problem of torture, the United States has placed great emphasis on the findings of UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Theo Van Boven. Van Boven's final report, issued in February 2003, concluded that "torture or similar ill-treatment is systematic" and issued a series of recommendations. The United States encouraged the Government to take these seriously, and in May, an inter-ministerial working group was convened to develop a response. The product, a draft

Action Plan to combat torture, was released at the end of August at a meeting of foreign embassies and local and international human rights NGOs and was to be finalized in November. Although the document has not yet been formally adopted, the United States is working with the Government to enact some of the plan's important provisions. In cooperation with the U.S.-funded American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI), for example, the Government introduced new legislation in its criminal code dealing with torture. Draft habeas corpus legislation written with ABA/CEELI support, which the Government has pledged to introduce in the Spring 2004 parliamentary session, is currently under review. The United States is also urging Uzbekistan to finalize the Draft Action Plan and to appoint a high-level official to be responsible for a swifter implementation.

Because much of the most serious abuse occurs in detention, the United States has focused considerable attention on training police and prison officers. The Departments of State and Justice have provided courses on greater professionalization of law enforcement personnel. A U.S.-funded Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) initiative instructs prison officials on international standards of human rights practice and trains local NGOs on the basics of prison monitoring. As mandated by the Leahy amendment, all Uzbek participants in U.S. security service training programs are subject to strict human rights vetting.

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 community. In 2003, the United States inaugurated a three-year program to develop civil society in Uzbekistan by supporting a national network of seven NGO resource centers. A related civic advocacy support program helps NGOs become more involved in public policy issues. In an effort to cultivate new groups, the Embassy's

Democracy Commission awarded grants to independent NGOs that are in the vanguard of developing civil society in Uzbekistan. Largely through these micro-grants a number of human rights activists have been able to do valuable reporting and advocacy work in the regions.

Freedom House and ABA/CEELI are key components of U.S. strategy. Funded jointly through the U.S. Agency for International Development and the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Freedom House offers a secure environment for human rights activists to network and organize, and its resource center provides 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. Freedom House opened a branch in the Fergana Valley in June. Under ABA/CEELI's supervision, the United States has funded a human rights law clinic at the Tashkent State Law Institute, designed to train young lawyers in human rights law by giving them practical experience on providing con-

sultations. A second clinic is being organized at Namangan State University. Graduates of the clinics are forming a law firm specializing in human rights cases, with U.S. funds and ABA/CEELI guidance.

Under the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework Agreement, the Government committed itself to moving toward a multi-party democracy. Despite consistent calls from the United States for political reform, the record has been mixed, and there has not been the type of progress the Agreement envisages. No opposition party was registered by year's end, and opposition politicians, Erk Party members especially, are still subject to harassment. The U.S. message on political reform has been clearly articulated to the highest levels of the Uzbek Government by U.S. officials in Tashkent and Washington, D.C.

The U.S.-funded NDI and IRI worked actively with Uzbekistan's opposition parties, providing guidance on grassroots organizing, press relations, and the drafting of party platforms. NDI and IRI training programs helped the Party of



Agrarians and Entrepreneurs, the Free Farmers Party and Birlık to organize and develop the skills necessary to hold regional and national congresses and to submit registration applications. While the Government continues to deny these parties registration, these political activities, unprecedented in Uzbekistan, reached thousands of people throughout the country, providing an invaluable education in how party politics works at the local level. U.S. efforts have resulted in more citizens being willing to risk harassment and engage in political expression than has been seen in years.

Fundamental to democratic governance is the rule of law. Drawing from successes in Turkey, the Embassy's Resident Legal Advisor initiated a program that identified key members of the Uzbek judiciary and Prosecutor's Office for a series of exchanges; U.S. participants included federal judges and prosecutors. U.S. grantees have conducted numerous seminars and study tours designed to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and to promote judicial ethics. In an effort to expand access to competent legal assistance, ABA/CEELI operates Public Defender Centers in Nukus and Fergana and will be opening another three in 2004. Another U.S.-supported project, the Women's Integrated Legal Literacy Project, has reached more than 35,000 people on the subject of women's legal rights.

Official censorship of the press ended on May 8, 2002. Nevertheless, self-censorship remains a concern because new legislation holds editors and publishers responsible for the content of articles that appear in their publications. Still, over the past year, some journalists have attempted to push the envelope, and a number of critical pieces have appeared in print and on the air addressing such themes as corruption, trafficking in persons and deteriorating economic conditions.

Broadening access to objective information and supporting the efforts of those journalists willing to test the limits continues to be a priority. U.S.-funded training programs have helped expose

promising print and broadcast journalists to modern, independent journalistic practices. In spite of government harassment, the U.S.-funded Institute for War and Peace Reporting has conducted trainings designed to expand coverage of human rights issues in Uzbekistan. 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 production 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) opened two additional sites in Kokand and Chirchik, bringing the total to 18 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.

Uzbek government policy severely restricted religious freedom. A continuing campaign against political groups that the Government suspects are involved in extremist Islamic activity, primarily the banned Hizb ut-Tahrir, has tended to constrain religious practice. Some observant Muslims, particularly young men, 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; proselytism is illegal, as is private religious instruction. The United States is engaged actively in monitoring religious freedom issues and maintains active 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 Ministry of Justice, 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. The Community Connections program has brought local Islamic leaders to the United States, exposing them to the diversity of religious practice in America. A three-year Comparative Religious Studies Program, funded by the United States, arranges exchanges of experts and professors from five local universities, a major goal of which 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.

Trafficking in persons remained a problem, but with U.S. assistance, the Government began to take serious steps to combat it in 2003. Working together, the United States, local NGOs and the Uzbek Government developed a number of innovative campaigns designed to educate the public, prevent trafficking and ensure prosecution of traf-

fickers. The key NGO in this effort was funded by a U.S. Democracy Commission grant. Throughout the year, the United States supported trainings designed to teach Uzbek consular officials techniques to assist trafficking victims. Additional training programs focused on enhancing the ability of law enforcement and the Office of the General Prosecutor to combat trafficking rings. In September, the United States sponsored an OSCE event in which key Uzbek officials from the General Prosecutor's office, MVD and the National Security Service met their Ukrainian counterparts and trafficking-in-persons NGO representatives in Kiev to discuss methods for combating trafficking. As a result of these joint efforts, regular articles on trafficking have appeared in Uzbek newspapers, and several radio and television shows have addressed the subject. The MVD has trained approximately 300 district-level officers from the four largest districts of Tashkent, who in turn conducted training in 150 neighborhoods – reaching more than 11,000 Tashkent residents, and cases of suspected trafficking are being vigorously prosecuted.



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