



| EUROPE AND EURASIA





We have witnessed some improvements in human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in many European and some Eurasian countries, though serious problems remain in others. Across the region, even in countries where non-governmental and political-opposition groups have been the targets of government repression, civil society continues to develop. In Europe, progress has been made on regional conflicts and refugee/internally displaced persons (IDP) returns. The international community, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the United Nations, has played a major role in achieving these results. However, the conflict in Chechnya and associated violations of human rights and international humanitarian law continue, with little meaningful accountability. Progress on other regional conflicts and refugee/IDP returns in Eurasia also remains to be made.

International observers considered 2002 elections in Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia, Macedonia and Albania free and fair, while recent elections in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia have been flawed. Upcoming elections across the region will be important barometers of democratic development. We are urging governments, particularly those in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Russia, to take adequate measures to assure elections and campaigns that meet OSCE standards.

Other challenges remain, too. The continued involvement of the international community continues to be crucial to overcoming remaining conflict and post-conflict issues and the development of democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Significant rule of law reform is needed to ensure equal protection under the law for all citizens. Media freedom remains a concern throughout much of the Eurasia region. Government efforts to restrict media freedom procedurally, e.g., through denying licenses, through pressure on broadcasting or newspaper management or by harassing journalists is a problem throughout the region. Lack of accountability for the murders of journalists in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia and opposition figures in Belarus continues. Torture -- a problem in much of Eurasia -- remains of particular concern in Uzbekistan, where we continue to receive reports of death in detention. We are waiting to see progress on recommendations made by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. Violence against religious minorities must be addressed in Georgia, and religious freedom also is limited in several other Eurasian countries. Several key indicted war criminals remain at large in the Balkans.

*"The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values, because stable and free nations do not breed the ideologies of murder. They encourage the peaceful pursuit of a better life."*

President Bush  
Speech at American Enterprise  
Institute, February 26, 2003

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U.S. strategy for promoting democracy and human rights employs a combination of consistent, high-level diplomacy and assistance programs. We are funding 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. We use 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.

## HUMAN RIGHTS NGO RESOURCE CENTERS IN UZBEKISTAN

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In Uzbekistan, Freedom House opened the first human rights non-governmental organization (NGO) resource center in Tashkent in October 2002. The center experiences a high volume of human rights defenders using the resources available at the center including computers and Internet access, and local human rights defenders use the center to hold regular meetings and press conferences. Freedom House has received numerous requests to open other resource centers in other parts of the country. Freedom House has begun hosting round table discussions on specific human rights topics, including torture, the death penalty, and the International Helsinki Federation Charter. The U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan has requested that USAID begin a similar program in Kazakhstan.

## ALBANIA

The human rights situation in Albania continues to improve, but remains poor in many areas. These problems stem primarily from political instability, a weak judiciary and widespread corruption. To address Albania's human rights and democracy weaknesses, the 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Albania stresses the promotion of democracy and civil society, combating corruption, developing a free and responsible press, providing assistance on police reform, encouraging freedom of religion and assisting victims of human trafficking.

The U.S. Embassy in Tirana worked with civil society groups, the Albanian government and the international community to promote participatory democracy, electoral reform and the development of independent oversight agencies in the Albania government. The Ambassador raised the issue of electoral reform repeatedly with Albanian political leaders, encouraging constructive political dialogue and discouraging efforts to weaken independent government agencies. U.S. assistance programs totaling \$7.3 million addressed voter registration, political party building, parliamentary assistance, government decentralization and NGO development. Embassy Democracy Commission grants were directed toward organizations addressing civic education and community development, resulting in elected officials now routinely facing demands of the citizenry.

Corruption continues to be a debilitating force in Albanian democracy. The United States has consistently raised the need to

fight corruption in public statements and in meetings with Albanian officials. These efforts were factors in the dismissals and pending prosecutions of several high level political and law enforcement figures, including a deputy minister and several police officials. Several judges have also been dismissed for corruption. Corruption is now recognized as a serious political issue. The U.S. Government supports the Office of the People's Advocate, the Government of



PHOTO: USAID

Albania's ombudsman and a key check on government corruption, through training, collaboration and participation in the international community's "Friends of the People's Advocate" committee. USAID spent \$3.375 million to establish the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption and the Citizen's Advisory Office, an NGO offering legal assistance in corruption cases. These programs have produced cooperation between government and civil society. USAID-funded technical assistance and Embassy advocacy also led directly to the drafting and recent passage of a financial disclosure law, which requires an annual declaration of assets from government officials – including members of parliament, police chiefs, military commanders, and directorate heads. Democracy Commission and Department of Justice programs have helped build the capacity of the Albanian National Police's Office of Internal Control, which is working to curb corruption and build a more professional police force, run human rights awareness programs for police, and reduce corruption among prosecutors and judges.

The U.S. Government condemned incidents of press irresponsibility, while closely monitoring reports of press intimidation by politicians. USAID's \$1.39 million Professional Media Program is working to provide Internet access for the entire journalism community. The project led to the creation of "Heros of Albania," a television series highlighting citizens' participation in community improvements, as well as a successful investigative journalism training program.

U.S. officials continued to press for the rights of women and minorities. The visit of a prominent Greek-American activist was utilized to highlight the issue of minority rights with the Government of Albania, including treatment of such disenfranchised communities as Roma and Egyptians. The U.S. Government ran programs on the rights of Roma and on education for children with disabilities.

Embassy officials raised the issue of religious intolerance in specific cases with law enforcement officials, leading to effective legal action. The U.S. Government continues to raise the issue of restoration of religious properties seized by the former communist regime.

USAID focused \$300,000 on the prevention of human trafficking and on assisting victims of trafficking. In addition to the continuation of a shelter for third country trafficking victims, USAID efforts included creation of a reintegration support network for Albanian victims.

The Embassy organized International Visitors Programs for Government officials involved in the fight against organized crime and corruption.

## ARMENIA

Armenia's human rights record is poor. To pursue its 2002-2003 human rights and democracy strategy for Armenia, U.S. officials work with international and domestic human rights groups, as well as with Armenian government agencies, to encourage the Government to guarantee democratic electoral processes, freedom of the media, assembly, and religion, more respect for the rights of prisoners, women, children and persons with disabilities and to reform the judicial process and increase government transparency at all levels. U.S. assistance to support this strategy in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 totaled approximately \$12 million.

The Embassy has used its Democracy Small Grants Program to work with Armenian organizations in the areas of local democracy, media freedom, and awareness of and respect for human rights. The Defense Attache office and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) have provided human rights training, often a problem area, for military and law enforcement officers. The Ambassador and other embassy officers met with government officials to protest detentions without due process of those detained in connection with demonstrations to protest the conduct of the 2003 presidential election. Embassy officers attended the court cases of many detainees to convey U.S. concern at the treatment of the detainees.

Recent elections have not met OSCE standards. Since 2002-03 are election years in Armenia (local in October 2002, presidential in February and March

2003, and legislative in May 2003), the U.S. human rights strategy has focused heavily on the need for fair, open, and transparent elections. USAID has worked with the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to train election observers and proxies, establishing Voter List Advisory Committees (VLACs) to correct and update voter lists, and publish 10,000 copies of the electoral code for use by local election officials, media, and NGOs. The American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) has trained judges on election adjudication. In addition, USAID donated workstations and other office equipment to Territorial Election Commissions (TECs).

In the first round of the presidential elections (February 19) and the second round (March 5), more than 20 Embassy officers and family members worked as part of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) monitoring effort, visiting precincts across the country and following the vote count. An even larger number of Embassy staff assisted the OSCE/ODIHR effort as translators and drivers. A similar effort is planned for the legislative elections May 25. For months before and during the presidential campaign, the Ambassador and Embassy officials used press conferences, media interviews, and meetings with presidential candidates (including the President), politicians, and the head of the Central Election Commission (CEC) to press the

need for fair, honest, and transparent voting procedures and vote counting and for timely dissemination of results. This effort won considerable favorable publicity in the Armenian media. The Secretary of State sent a letter to President Kocharian on the need for the presidential election to meet OSCE standards and made the same point to the Armenian Foreign Minister. Following both election rounds, the Department of State issued press statements; the final statement concluded that “Armenia’s leadership missed an important opportunity to advance democratization by holding a credible election.”

Linked to the human rights focus on elections is an emphasis on professionalism, openness, and equal access in the media, sometimes a significant problem area in Armenia, especially during the pre-election period in 2003. USAID worked with the International Research and Exchanges (IREX) Board/ProMedia to publish election information supplements for insert in newspapers and to conduct training classes on election coverage. A USAID grantee, Internews, organized a seminar for local journalists on election reporting and journalistic ethics, and another grantee helped organize candidate debates. Internews generally assists media outlets to become politically independent, increases citizens’ access to unbiased information, and advances a fair legal environment for media. After the independent television station “A-One Plus” lost its frequency, the Embassy demarched the Government on restrictions of press freedom and the Ambassador stressed to Armenian officials the necessity for the opposition to be guaranteed equal access to air time.

USAID supported the Eurasia Foundation in financing a private printing press for newspapers as an alternative to the state-operated facility, and worked with Junior Achievement of Armenia to continue a civic education program in secondary schools. The Embassy continues its effort to establish “Internet classrooms” in Armenian secondary schools to give children access to a broad range of opinions and ideas; by the end of 2002 the program included 120 schools and will be expanded in 2003.

In the area of religious rights, only the Armenian Apostolic Church has the right to proselytize since Armenian law imposes a number of restrictions on all other religious groups. However, both the Government and minority religious groups say that these restrictions are not enforced. The only religious group with restrictions currently being tried in the Armenian courts is the Jehovah’s Witnesses (JW). The Embassy has worked closely with local and international JW officials to raise their concerns with the Government about registration problems and prisoners convicted of conscientious objection. The Embassy observes JW trials for proselytizing.

According to JW, as of April 28<sup>th</sup>, there were 20 prisoners being held for conscientious objections in Armenia. Several had their sentences lengthened upon appeal, and higher courts upheld those sentences. This harsh treatment continues despite Armenia’s membership in the Council of Europe (COE), and obligations to which it agreed upon acceding to the COE.

In the area of worker rights, such as collective bargaining and the ratification of ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor, U.S. officials continue to press the Government directly and through international institutions to remedy deficiencies in the enforcement of these rights.

Trafficking in persons has become a growing area for our human rights efforts. With State Department funding, the Embassy is working with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and domestic NGOs to establish public awareness programs and to break down prejudice towards victims of trafficking among law enforcement officials and the population in general. The Embassy works with ABA/CEELI to assist the Government to write fair and comprehensive laws covering trafficking in persons. Two International Visitors programs have been reserved to send Government officials and NGO members to the U.S. for training on American anti-trafficking programs and legal structure.

Finally, any account of American aid must mention the efforts of the Peace Corps Volunteers, who have been working in Armenia since 1994. Their efforts on the local scene in the fields of education, awareness of legal rights, and other areas have been enormous, have had a significant local impact, and have won immense and justified gratitude from the Armenian people.

## AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan's human rights record remains poor. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Azerbaijan addresses a wide range of critical issues, including respect for human rights and the rule of law, support for democratic processes, civil society, media and religious freedom, and anti-trafficking efforts. U.S. assistance in support of this strategy totaled approximately \$8 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002.

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 in support of our strategy. A senior Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) official traveled to Azerbaijan in 2002 to reinforce support for our objectives.

In support of freedom of assembly, U.S. officials repeatedly encouraged Azerbaijan officials to peacefully resolve tensions





with the villagers of Nardaran. Embassy officials also attended the trial of the Nardaran defendants to encourage Azeri authorities to conduct a trial in accordance with international standards.

To promote the rule of law, the U.S. has funded the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) to enhance 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.

Recent elections have not met Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) standards. In advance of an important constitutional referendum and upcoming presidential election, the primary focus of our human rights and democracy effort therefore was advancing democratic political processes. The U.S. maintained an intensive dialogue with

government authorities on necessary reforms. The U.S. also worked closely with political parties. For example, the U.S. funded the National Democratic Institute's (NDI's) and the International Republican Institute's (IRI's) activities, which included political party-building and election-monitor training. In the months leading up to the August 24, 2002, referendum on the government's proposed Constitutional amendments, U.S. officials urged Azerbaijani government officials to adopt specific reforms. The Embassy co-sponsored the first-ever nationally televised roundtable debates between government officials and representatives of opposition parties and civil society on the amendments. The Embassy fielded 30 observers to monitor the Constitutional referendum. When serious irregularities marred its conduct, the U.S. raised concerns both with senior Azerbaijani officials, and at the Permanent Council of the OSCE. We urged the Government to put in place effective mechanisms to ensure a fair and impartial electoral process for the future, noting that "reforms are essential for the electoral system and the results it produces to be judged credible by the citizens of Azerbaijan as well as by the international community."

In preparation for the 2003 presidential election, the Embassy established an Election Strategy Team that includes non-governmental organization (NGO) representation to coordinate the international community's efforts to promote an election that meets OSCE standards. The Ambassador and visiting Department of State officials have urged senior Azerbaijani officials to adopt specific reforms to enhance the fairness and



PHOTO: USAID

transparency of the election. The U.S. is funding the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) to provide technical election assistance to the Central Election Commission and the Precinct Election Commissions. The Embassy used Democracy Commission resources to encourage the development of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan. For example, grants enabled local NGOs to host seminars on democracy.

A strong civil society is integral to democracy. The U.S. therefore continues to support the development of civil society in Azerbaijan. For example, in 2002 the U.S. launched 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 support for the 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. In 2002 the Embassy gave the new Ombudsman's office a grant to help her improve the Government's role in resolving complaints about human rights violations.

Another focus of U.S. efforts was the development of a free and responsible media. U.S. funding through the NGO Internews supported the professional development of journalists and advocacy for media rights. U.S. funding enabled Internews to produce three weekly television programs, and to provide extensive ongoing technical and programming sup-

port to several independent television stations. Democracy Commission grants have supported newspaper production and trained journalists in how to avoid and defend themselves against libel charges. The Ambassador, other Embassy officials, and visiting U.S. officials also repeatedly urged the Government of Azerbaijan to respect media freedom.

The U.S. has worked actively to encourage respect for religious freedom. The Embassy and officials in Washington maintained close connections with the local religious community and met frequently with government officials to stress the importance of respecting religious freedom. Intervention by the Ambassador helped a local religious bookstore obtain permission to import religious books, including Bibles. Embassy and Department officials met with Azerbaijani officials and participated in an OSCE conference on religious freedom that was held in Baku.

The U.S. also has used programs to encourage greater religious tolerance and respect for religious freedom. In spring 2002 the Embassy organized a very successful visit by Imam Hendi of Georgetown University to Azerbaijan, where he spoke about Islam in America. The State Department hosted an International Visitors Program for the chairman of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations. The Embassy actively spread the message about religious tolerance and Islam in America throughout the year, including at an Iftar dinner hosted by the Ambassador in November. In the fall, embassy officers visited numerous Azerbaijani universities

to talk about religious tolerance and U.S.-Azerbaijani relations, and to distribute literature on the subject.

Trafficking in persons is a problem. The U.S. therefore 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 U.S. 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 visitors programs on trafficking, and to the Department's anti-trafficking conference in Washington.

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## BELARUS

The Lukashenko regime's human rights record remains very poor. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Belarus addresses a wide range of critical issues, including respect for human rights, accountability for the disappearance of well-known opposition political figures and a journalist, the rule of law, the development of a democratic political and electoral process, support for civil society, media and religious freedom, worker rights, and anti-trafficking efforts. U.S. assistance in support of this strategy totaled approximately \$7.5 million in Fiscal Year 2002.

U.S. Government assistance to the Government of Belarus (GOB) continued to be subject to a policy of "selective engagement," under which no bilateral assistance is provided directly to the GOB. Exceptions to this policy include

humanitarian aid and academic exchange programs. Other exceptions for exchanges involving government officials can be made on a case-by-case basis if such exceptions contribute to the U.S. strategy in Belarus.

State Department and Embassy officials regularly meet with a range of human rights and democracy activists, representatives of pro-reform political parties, and religious representatives. U.S. officials advocate for human rights observance and adoption of democratic principles in meetings with government leaders, through press statements, and in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). Embassy officers also attend the trials of human rights activists, journalists and political leaders. Embassy staff regularly monitors demonstrations.

Throughout 2002, the U.S. worked in close cooperation with the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Belarus, and pressed hard for the regime to maintain an OSCE presence in the country. The regime effectively shut down the OSCE AMG office by refusing to extend visas for OSCE international staff. In concert with the European Union, the U.S. instituted visa restrictions that convinced the regime to agree to a new OSCE Office in Minsk. The U.S. also encouraged Russia to address the need for political reform in Belarus.

To focus international attention on the disappearances, the U.S. sponsored a resolution on Belarus at this year's Commission on Human Rights (CHR).

The resolution also called attention to other human rights concerns and won approval 23-14-16 on April 17.

The judiciary is not independent. The U.S. therefore continued to provide rule of law assistance in 2002. For example, a staff attorney from the American Bar Association worked with legal experts from a non-governmental organization (NGO) to train 26 attorneys from over 20 legal advice centers on how to represent human rights cases, with special attention to cases of disappearances, in national and international courts.

Recent elections have not met OSCE standards. The U.S. therefore provided training and technical assistance to dem-

ocratic political parties. USAID's implementing partners on the political process strengthening program worked closely with reform-oriented parties. They conducted training on election campaigning for representatives of a range of pro-democracy parties before the recent local elections. They also began work with Partnership, an organization dedicated to nonpartisan civic education and election monitoring work. The International Visitor Program sent Belarusians to the U.S. in FY 2002 for professional training on the role of election commissions in democracy building and the U.S. political system. In FY 2003, the U.S. organized five International Visitor Programs focusing on elections and democratic political processes.



PHOTO: IFES

Civil society is integral to democracy. The U.S. therefore continued to provide support to Belarusian civil society in 2002, including technical assistance or grants to local NGOs for human rights monitoring and educational programs, and support for youth and women's groups. Grants helped local NGOs and the independent media to explain the principles of democracy, such as election fairness, to Belarusian citizens and mobilized independent opinion and action at the community level. In FY 2003, an International Visitor Program addressed NGO Management.

Restrictions on freedom of the media continue. The U.S. therefore provided support for the development of independent media in 2002. This included technical assistance and grants to independent print and electronic media. In FY 2003, the U.S. organized International Visitor Programs on newspaper distribution, radio station management, and print journalism. Embassy officers also visited independent journalists jailed for doing their jobs.

Prior to passage of a restrictive religion law in 2002, the Embassy met with government officials early in the legislative process to discuss the law's problems and treatment of unpopular religious groups. After the law's passage, Department officers met in Minsk with religious leaders and religious freedom NGO advocates. (Officials of the Government's Religious Affairs Committee refused to meet with the Department officials.) A Department official held a press conference in Minsk; the Department issued a press statement and made a statement at an OSCE meeting decrying the law. In FY 2003, USAID

partners hosted a roundtable on the law's legal and constitutional implications and organized a press-club session on religious freedom issues raised by the law.

Restrictions on worker rights continue. The U.S. therefore supported pro-reform labor union activists via a \$500,000 grant providing technical assistance and sub-grants to independent union publications, and a FY 2003 International Visitor Program on independent trade unions. The U.S. continues suspension of Belarus' eligibility for Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) because of the regime's failure to accord internationally recognized worker rights.

Trafficking in persons remains a problem. The U.S. therefore promoted anti-trafficking measures through meetings with GOB officials, a \$300,000 grant for an anti-trafficking media campaign, meetings with NGOs, international training for experts, a conference for women, and an International Visitor Program.

## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Since the signing of the 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Dayton Accords), human rights abuses have diminished. However, the country still needs considerable help recovering from the violence, ethnic strife, and other atrocities that occurred during the war, and in preventing further incidents. It also needs help in creating the structures of a civil society. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) focuses on a wide range of issues, including democracy and

the rule of law; war-related problems such as missing persons, demining, and refugees; ensuring free and fair elections; promoting the free flow of information; and helping to combat trafficking and to assist victims of trafficking in persons.

The legal system in BiH has been unable to protect the rights of either victims or criminal defendants adequately because of its inefficient criminal procedure codes and ineffective trial procedures.

Furthermore, the judiciary has been subject to influence by political parties. In order to strengthen the rule of law, the Embassy encouraged passage of legislation that established a BiH State Court, which is empowered to adjudicate claims involving State laws and may include a war crimes chamber to adjudicate cases transferred from the ICTY. The U.S. Government provided funding to help establish this institution

— along with \$1 million for Criminal Code training, \$500,000 for training in Criminal Law, and \$200,000 in support for Prosecutors — and provided seconded staff for advisory positions. In addition, the U.S. Government provided \$1 million to the Independent Judicial Commission and the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils (HJPCs), which are responsible for restructuring the judiciary at both the State and entity levels. The Embassy also provided \$500,000 to the BiH Constitutional Court. Other U.S. Government contributions to the BiH legal system include: \$1.5 million to the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program; \$700,000 to IRIS (reform of the Administrative Legal System in BiH); and approximately \$200,000 to the American Bar

Association Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative.

In its efforts to build a civil society, the U.S. Government provided financial support (\$386,000) and political support to advance the goals of and improve the effectiveness of the BiH, Federation, and RS Human Rights Ombudsmen, as well as continuing to financially support the BiH Human Rights Chamber (\$800,000). As part of its CIVITAS civic education program, the Embassy assisted in developing a democracy and human rights course that is now taught in all secondary schools in the country. Four thousand teachers attended a 5-day seminar on how to teach this course, and the course is included in all teacher-training faculties. The U.S. Government donated \$475,000 to this program, as well as 100,000 democracy and human rights textbooks to elementary schools, high schools and universities nationwide.



PHOTO: IFES

Finally, the U.S. Government provided \$3.3 million from Support for East European Democracy (SEED) funds to PADCO, Inc, for Northeastern Bosnia Local Government Support Activity; and \$555,536 to America's Development Foundation, to enhance the sustainability of BiH NGOs.

The U.S. continued to fund (\$2 million) activities of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) in Bosnia, which uses DNA technology, along with other methods, to help identify the remains of missing persons from the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia.



PHOTO: USAID

The U.S. Government also provided \$1 million, as well as political support, to the Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial and Cemetery Project, where the victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre will be buried. The Ambassador is a member of the Executive Board of the Foundation for this project.

The U.S. Government provided over \$3.5 million to demining programs in BiH. The assistance went to both commercial and NGO demining operations and included programs for mine victim assistance.

The Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration funded 25 percent of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees budget and 22 percent of the International Committee for the Red Cross budget. In addition, the Embassy sponsored approximately 10 housecleaning projects throughout the country, in which the Ambassador and Embassy staff cleared debris and removed destroyed portions of houses so that they could be reconstructed.

The U.S. Government provided significant financial support for the conduct of the October general elections. Some of the programs funded by the Embassy included voter education and civic organizing programs in rural Bosnian communities (\$250,000), ballot production, supporting the get-out-the-vote campaign of the local NGO OTPOR in the Republika Srpska (\$215,680), and publication of a get-out-the-vote letter from the High Representative to all citizens of BiH. Twenty observer teams of Embassy personnel also deployed to polling stations throughout the country on election

day. Partly as a result of the Embassy's work, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) election officials reported that the elections were free and fair. The U.S. Government has contributed \$584,527 to the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs political party and parliamentary development program.

The Embassy conducted a workshop on investigative reporting for radio journalists that covered techniques for reporting on issues of crime, corruption, and official management of public resources. The U.S. Government also funded an International Visitors Program to assist government spokespersons of the BiH Presidency, parliament and various ministries to provide public information and transparency in the institutions they represented.

New legislation has been enacted addressing the legal status of religions and registration procedures in Bosnia. The Embassy is monitoring implementation and religious community acceptance of this new law since religious issues often go hand in hand with ethnic differences and can impact stability

The U.S. funded programs aimed at ending trafficking in persons and providing assistance to trafficking victims. The U.S. Government's contribution to anti-trafficking efforts has been \$345,000. Embassy staff from several U.S. law enforcement agencies provided training and support to an interagency task force investigating trafficking and illegal migration. The Embassy provided a

grant for a public information campaign and hotline to warn women of the dangers of trafficking.

## GEORGIA

Georgia's human rights record remains poor; although there have been a few improvements, serious problems remain. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Georgia addresses a wide range of critical issues, including respect for human rights and the rule of law, democratic elections, broadening public participation in political life, media and religious freedom, and combating trafficking in persons. U.S. assistance in support of this strategy totaled approximately \$ 13.5 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002.

Members of the security forces continue to commit serious human rights abuses, including torture or beatings to extract confessions or money. The U.S. is attempting to address this problem through a five-year plan to develop and equip an independent forensic laboratory and train its management and staff as part of an effort to increase the overall effectiveness of law enforcement agencies and decrease the tendency of these agencies to rely on forced confessions. To address pervasive corruption in law enforcement agencies, the U.S. works in conjunction with the European Union to aid Georgian officials in reforming the "power ministries", which include the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of State Security and the Procuracy.

Judicial independence does not yet exist. In order to strengthen the rule of law in Georgia, the U.S. continued to provide



assistance in 2002. This supported judicial reform, ethics training for judges, and administration of judicial qualification exams through Department of Justice and USAID programs. The U.S. supported implementation of the Law on the Bar through the development of a new national bar association, including bar examinations, and assistance in drafting a Code of Ethics for advocates. With U.S. funding, the American Bar Association provided training to judges and the criminal prosecution and defense bar on the provisions and application of a projected new Code of Criminal Procedure. U.S. activities in support of the implementation of a variety of laws including the Law on Freedom of Speech increased civic awareness of legal rights. U.S. programs also enhanced Georgian citizens' knowledge of their rights as well as their access to legal counsel by supporting legal clinics and legal service centers across Georgia.

Georgia's elections have been criticized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other observers. U.S. assistance therefore continued to support the development of a democratic electoral process in Georgia. Such assistance supported efforts to increase voter education and participation by young voters, and assistance to the election administration. The U.S. also supports political party development and candidate training. The Ambassador has been an active participant in the Ambassadorial Working Group on Elections, which has repeatedly encouraged the highest levels of the Government to ensure elections that meet OSCE standards. The Ambassador and his staff also regularly meet with

party leaders and non-governmental organization (NGO) observers.

A strong civil society is integral to democracy. The U.S. therefore continued to provide support to Georgia's civil society. For example, the "Citizens Advocate!" program strengthened local NGO and community organizational skills, with an emphasis on expanding the constituency base and developing sustainable financial support. With U.S. assistance, local organizations raised public awareness of governmental and societal roots of corruption and encouraged wider understanding and proper application of the Administrative Code to curtail abuse by government officials.

The U.S. continued to support development of independent media. The U.S. brought four professional media trainers to Georgia for 2-6 weeks each in the areas of radio network management, professional press spokespersons and television newsroom management. The U.S. brought a Georgian state television crew and print journalist to the U.S. to enhance reporting on freedom of religion, human rights and the global war on terrorism. The U.S. supported a program to improve media professionalism and financial viability. The program supported training for print and broadcast media, including basic business management skills. It also supported improvements in Georgia's regulatory and legal framework to allow independent media to operate with fewer impediments.

In the United States, perhaps the highest profile issue concerning Georgia has been the Georgian government's continued failure to curb discrimination, harass-

ment, and violence toward religious minorities and secular religious freedom advocates. Our Embassy in Tbilisi has met many times with Georgian officials to protest such violence, as have senior Department officials in their conversations with the highest levels of the Georgian government. The Department of State sent an officer to meet with government officials and members of the faith-based and human rights advocacy communities, and to promote accountability for violence against religious minorities. The human rights officer from Embassy Tbilisi has been attending the trial of one of the primary perpetrators of such violence. Embassy officials have frequent meetings with members of religious minorities and human rights advocacy groups. A Georgian recipient of a U.S.

grant organized a conference for religious leaders seeking to promote tolerance, freedom of religion and peace in the Caucasus. International Visitor Programs brought together several members of the Government of Georgia, NGOs, religious communities and academia to focus on the issues of religious tolerance.

Georgia is both a source and transit country for trafficked persons. The U.S. therefore promoted anti-trafficking measures in meetings with government officials and through an International Visitor Program. Supported by the U.S., the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative participated in a working group to draft new anti-trafficking amendments to the Criminal Code. Parliament began consideration of these



PHOTO: DRL

amendments in spring of 2003. The Embassy regularly meets with NGOs active on the issue.

## KAZAKHSTAN

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In 2002 and early 2003 the U.S. Government focused its human rights and democracy strategy on countering the Government of Kazakhstan's clamp-down on the independent media and political expression as well as on continuing the long-term goal of building an active civil society. Efforts to promote human rights and democracy efforts included repeated demarches to the Government of Kazakhstan on cases of human rights abuse and selective prosecution of opposition voices, which included the arrest and conviction of two leading opposition members and the arrest of a prominent independent journalist. The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials have also presented concrete proposals to the Government of Kazakhstan on ways to improve Kazakhstan's human rights record. Other efforts included outreach to the human rights community and independent media and assistance programs designed to support independent media, legal reform, local government, political party development and to combat trafficking. U.S. assistance to support this strategy in Fiscal Year 2002 totaled approximately \$8 million.

The U.S. Government advocated throughout the year for improvements in the country's judicial systems, including prison conditions and the right to a fair public trial. On prison reform, the Embassy conducted one exchange program with prison officials and non-governmental organization (NGO) activists,

encouraged government-led human rights training seminars for prison officials, and included this key area in direct small grant support, through two grants to support supplementary educational campaigns among prison guards on the rights of prisoners (over \$18,000). By promoting alternatives to confinement such as parole and community service through these programs and public statements, the U.S. played a large role in the passage in December of legislation further humanizing the criminal justice system.

The U.S. Embassy was the only foreign mission to send observers to every day of three politically motivated trials during the year. In conjunction with repeated demarches, the Ambassador raised all three cases at the highest levels of government. The Embassy publicly criticized the process in each case and continued forceful advocacy on behalf of the three convicted individuals, including repeated requests to the Government to monitor the conditions of their confinement.

U.S. officials worked throughout the year to encourage the Government to increase political freedom, which suffered a setback with the passage of restrictive political party legislation. U.S.-funded assistance programs made possible multi-party training workshops for several political parties that focused on organizational, strategic, and message development. This helped each party to produce a multi-year organizational development plan, and also helped educate them on multi-party democracy. This assistance helped counteract the restrictive political party legislation and resulted in many more parties competing for re-registra-

tion than had been expected at the time of the law's passage. In December 2002, the Embassy's Democracy Commission was able to award quickly two grants to NGOs conducting election monitoring and exit polling in parliamentary by-elections that had been called shortly before and took place at the end of that month. These NGOs documented widespread instances of fraud and other voting irregularities, and publicized their findings throughout the country, holding the Central Election Commission accountable for following the law and its own rules.

The long-term goals of the U.S. assistance strategy —building civil society and educating the next generation — continued through the turbulent year and into 2003. A small public affairs grant went to “Daur” Publishing House to publish 6,675 copies of a civics textbook “Introduction to Civic Education,” in both the Russian and Kazakh languages. This project built on USAID programs aimed at students and teachers of civics courses at secondary schools throughout Kazakhstan. These efforts (textbooks, democracy summer camps, debate clubs and student local government days) enabled more than 30,000 young people to learn civic responsibility, tolerance, and respect for human rights.

To promote freedom of speech and show strong support for the activities of independent media in Kazakhstan, the Embassy's Democracy Commission awarded a grant to the media monitoring NGO Adil Soz, to participate in a government-sponsored working group on proposed new media legislation in Astana. Through this approach the Embassy was able to forestall the likelihood that more

restrictions to freedom of speech would quickly be enacted. Several exchange programs and USG funding for two media assistance programs enabled journalists to increase their professionalism and media outlets to develop sustainable strategies for financial independence. These approaches, reinforced by messages to the Government by the Ambassador and other senior USG officials, all helped send the message to the Government that a vital independent media must exist.

On religious freedom, the Embassy repeatedly demarched senior government officials on restrictive religious legislation, resulting in the defeat of the bill in the Constitutional Council. The Embassy also supported religious tolerance with appearances and speeches by the Ambassador at events of religious minorities and exchange programs to foster understanding in the Muslim community.

There was also intensive U.S. engagement on the issue of refugee rights. Through repeated demarches by the Ambassador, close coordination with Washington, and cooperation with international organizations, the Government was successfully persuaded to take the unprecedented step of not deporting a prominent dissident back to another country in the former Soviet Union. The U.S. has maintained the pressure to pass implementing legislation, as required by its accession to 1951 Refugee Convention, in order to formalize the Government's international obligation to those fearing persecution.

## KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

During 2002 and early 2003, the situation of human rights and democracy in the Kyrgyz Republic was mixed at best. Key problems were the politically motivated arrest of a top opposition figure as well as continuing harassment of the independent media and political opposition; a major setback was the killing of five unarmed protesters in March 2002. The U.S. strategy to promote democracy and human rights was aimed at redressing these issues and included efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, increase observance of human rights, and promote the development of independent media. U.S. assistance to support this strategy in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 totaled approximately \$10 million.

The U.S. Government was highly engaged on rule of law issues, such as arbitrary arrest and excessive use of force. The Embassy raised with the Government objections to the politically motivated nature of the January 5, 2002, arrest of opposition parliamentarian Azimbek Beknazarov. Embassy officials also met with Beknazarov supporters who launched a hunger strike in Bishkek.

Following the shooting deaths of five protesters by security forces on March 17, 2002, in Aksy district, the Ambassador pressed Government officials to ensure that the perpetrators of the shootings be brought to justice and to address causes of civil discontent. Following police harassment and detention of protesters in Bishkek in mid-November, the Embassy released a public statement expressing support for Kyrgyz citizens'

constitutional right to freedom of expression. The Ambassador met with the Bishkek mayor to urge respect for citizens' right to hold public meetings.

Through participation in the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, Kyrgyz military officers were provided with training that reinforced military reform initiatives aimed at creating a more professional and democratic force.

To promote democracy, the Embassy maintains close contacts with independent and opposition politicians and encourages dialogue between the Government, the opposition, and civil society. The Ambassador and visiting senior U.S. government officials meet frequently with reform-minded parliamentarians and human rights activists to solicit their views. During a visit to Bishkek, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner and the Ambassador were able to meet with imprisoned opposition leader Felix Kulov.

U.S.-funded technical assistance and grants in the areas of civil society, rule of law, and media worked to strengthen democratic culture among citizens and institutions. NGOs who had received USAID-sponsored advocacy training launched a combined advocacy campaign that exerted pressure on the Government to repeal Decree 20. More than 800 NGOs and other civil society actors participated in the campaign. A high school civics textbook developed by U.S. implementing partners was used by approximately 170 schools, and more than 7,500 students participated in a U.S.-sponsored

civic education course. 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. also promoted the use of public hearings at the local government level; in FY 2002, 18 local governments held a total of 42 public hearings. U.S. funding also supported a \$550,000 project creating Information Centers for Democracy that provide 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. The Ambassador met several times with government officials to express objections to the passage in January of "Decree 20," a government regulation that severely restricted all forms of publishing. The decree was cancelled in May 2002. When the independent newspaper Moya Stolitsa was unable to print from January to May because of a dispute with the state-controlled printing house Uchkun, the Ambassador raised this issue several times with the Government. U.S. support for media helped independent media outlets to continue operating.

Following numerous demarches and conversations with Government officials, the Ambassador gained Government agreement to a U.S.-funded project for \$800,000 project to establish the country's first independent printing press. The Media Support Center, the umbrella foundation that will open and operate the press as well as sponsor training programs for journalists, was registered with

the Ministry of Justice on December 30. The first meeting of the international board took place on May 1, and the newly hired staff has been trained.

The U.S. remained engaged on the issue of freedom of religion. Embassy officials maintained regular contacts with representatives of various religious communities, and the Ambassador hosted an annual Iftar dinner for Muslim leaders.

On numerous occasions, Embassy officials discussed with government officials measures to improve the country's efforts to combat international trafficking in persons. Anti-trafficking was an important component of the U.S. "Information Initiative," and its implementing partner the International Organization for Migration (IOM) worked with the Government to prepare legislation to provide criminal penalties for traffickers.

The Embassy used public diplomacy funds to sponsor International Visitor Programs focused on the issues of trafficking in persons, human rights/conflict prevention, and Islam in America. These programs brought together individuals representing the Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious communities, and academia, building connections between participants and enhancing skills they could apply in their own organizations and communities.

The Embassy-based Democracy Commission funded 22 grants to local NGOs in support of independent media outlets, journalism training, civic and legal education in the southern and rural areas, information dissemination, and seminars on trafficking and extremism.

One Democracy Commission grantee organized leadership and critical-thinking training programs in the remote Batken region. In rural Talas Oblast, an NGO grantee established an information resource center on women's and children's issues, land reform, and civic activism.

## MACEDONIA, FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF

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Working to restore stability and long-term peace to Macedonia in the wake of the 2001 internal conflict, the U.S. Government provided assistance aimed at supporting the peace treaty that ended the conflict, the Ohrid Framework Agreement (FWA), and at supporting the FWA's stipulations granting equal rights for all of Macedonia's citizens. Respect for the human rights of all citizens, but especially ethnic minorities, as well as promoting a strong democracy, was a key component of the strategy. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives began operations in Skopje in October 2001 and disbursed \$11 million via 450 grants to support conflict mitigation at the community level throughout Macedonia.

The Ambassador on several occasions delivered demarches to the previous VMRO-DPMNE-led Government of Macedonia condemning police killings. During VMRO-DPMNE's tenure in the governing coalition (until September 2002), both police and the Public Prosecutor continued to inappropriately detain and/or arrest ex-combatants of the 2001 conflict in violation of the amnesty agreement that helped end the conflict and a subsequent amnesty law passed in 2001. On several occasions before the

new Government was elected, the Ambassador demarched the Public Prosecutor, who was replaced after elections, and secured the release of persons arrested in violation of the amnesty law. The Government that took power after the September 2002 elections has cooperated more with the international community regarding human rights policy.

The U.S. Government engaged in direct human rights advocacy. In August, the Ambassador led a successful international effort to free five ethnic Macedonians who had been kidnapped by ethnic Albanian radicals. In July, Embassy officials successfully defused an armed standoff near the town of Zelino that threatened to rekindle hostilities. The U.S. also provided \$120,000 to the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) to establish a presence in the country and to begin working on the issue of missing persons resulting from the armed conflict of 2001.

The Embassy worked with the Government of Macedonia, with American non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and contractors, and with local civil society groups to ensure that the constitutional changes mandated by the FWA passed Parliament and that relevant laws on a variety of human rights issues were subsequently drafted and passed. Among the laws affected by the FWA were several pertaining to decentralization of powers, which put more rights in the hands of citizens. USAID contractors provided expert advice to Macedonia's association of mayors, helping them to lobby for their rights to the central Government drafters of these new laws. Expert advisors funded by USAID

worked via the American Bar Association’s Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative with government drafters to improve the quality of the Ombudsman law — one of the laws affected by the FWA — and ensure that it met international standards. They also advised courts on ways to modernize their activities and laws. USAID provided the Court Modernization Project, which was implemented by Development Alternatives, Inc, with \$1.65 million.

U.S. funds supported the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which in September oversaw parliamentary elections that were deemed “free and fair” and were widely considered the best that Macedonia has experienced in its ten-year history as an independent country. The Embassy fielded 40 teams to monitor the elections. USAID funded 12 local NGOs to conduct non-partisan voter education and voter motivation activities. The U.S. gave \$635,000 to the International Republican Institute (IRI), which worked with a local NGO to conduct the country’s first legitimate exit poll, and gave \$860,000 to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which developed an electoral code of conduct and obtained signatures and a commitment to comply from all political parties. Another USAID-funded local NGO conducted a parallel vote count and election monitoring to boost public confidence in the election outcome. Finally, the U.S. Government provided \$800,000 to the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) for an election reform project and \$2.5 million to Democratic Alternatives, Inc., for a local government reform project.

A national census, called for in the FWA, was carried out in November. Through USAID, the U.S. Bureau of the Census offered expert assistance to Macedonia’s State Statistical Office that helped ensure the most professional and fair census in the state’s history. The census enumeration, which met international standards, was accepted by all significant local groups. An accurate census will ensure more democratic elections and less voter fraud.

The U.S. worked to support comprehensive and systematic training to improve the journalistic skills of local media, including efforts to enhance diversity and minority reporting and hiring. Via the International Research Exchanges (IREX) Board, the U.S. Government provided \$1 million for a Professional Media Program and \$250,000 for children’s educational, multi-ethnic television programming. On a parallel track, Embassy officials regularly distributed information on human rights to key contacts in the media, NGOs, think tanks, and other local groups.

The U.S. Government prioritized human rights as a key policy goal in Macedonia. Several important initiatives directly supported a variety of human rights activities, many in association with the Embassy’s support for the FWA, but also in relation to support for gender equality and for marginalized minorities such as the Roma. Nearly 70 percent of the Democracy Commission program was dedicated to organizations that actively promote, develop, and enhance human rights. Funding was dispersed nationwide, and rural towns and villages throughout the country received priority.



A Community Self-Help Initiative implemented by the Louis Berger Group received \$4.3 million, and a Democracy Network Program implemented by the Institute for Sustainable Communities received \$176,000.

To help improve workers' rights, the U.S. Government provided \$500,000 to allow the American Center for International Labor Solidarity to implement a labor union education and outreach program.

U.S. Government anti-trafficking in persons efforts addressed various aspects of the problem. The Department of Justice provided a series of anti-trafficking training sessions that for the first time brought together public prosecutors and police to address common problems. The U.S. worked with the OSCE on additional training, and via the International Organization on Migration assisted in operating a trafficking shelter for victims. The Ambassador successfully lobbied the new Minister of Interior, elected in September, to move quickly to conduct a series of raids against Macedonia's illegal brothels and to arrest traffickers.

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## MOLDOVA

The Government generally respects the human rights of its citizens; however, there are problems in some areas. The human rights record of the separatist authorities in Transnistria, which the Moldovan government does not control, remains poor. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Moldova focuses on raising awareness of human rights, fostering democratic elections, supporting an emerging civil society, and promoting anti-trafficking meas-

ures. U.S. assistance to support this strategy in Fiscal Year 2002 totaled approximately \$6 million.

Through interactions with local representatives and officials and funding, U.S. officials worked toward improving protection and awareness of human rights in the country. The U.S. Government gave grants for the establishment of a Human Rights Center in Bender, located in the separatist Transnistria region where the human rights situation is worse and the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector weaker than in the rest of Moldova, and to the League for the Defense of Human Rights Center for human rights training, roundtables, seminars, a bulletin, and legal counseling. It also supported Amnesty International Moldova for seminars to raise students' awareness of human rights and promote their participation in public life.

The U.S. Government continues to encourage elections that meet OSCE standards, both diplomatically and programmatically. In order to promote transparency and electoral fairness, the Embassy awarded a Democracy Fund grant to organize training seminars for 70 independent observers to monitor the election for governor of the autonomous Gagauz region in October. The Embassy awarded a discretionary grant to an NGO to organize a conference on "The Electoral Process and Civic Participation," which dealt with issues related to the May 2003 local elections and funded another NGO with a Democracy Fund grant to conduct get-out-the-vote activities and poll worker training. Embassy personnel also

observed the local election in Gagauzia in October 2002 and will participate in the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission in May 2003.

To foster human rights and democracy, the U.S. Government supported efforts to build democratic institutions and accountability in the country. For example, USAID's local government reform program supported transparency and accountability, as well as capacity building, in local government. Public hearings and outreach were integral parts of local strategic planning.

The U.S. Government continued to monitor religious freedom and to report on the recent proposed draft Law on Religion.

Trafficking in persons (TIP) has been a very serious problem in Moldova. This problem has begun to receive greater attention from the Moldovan government. The U.S. has given considerable attention to this problem and obligated \$263,922 in FY 2002 to work with Moldovan authorities and NGOs to rehabilitate trafficking victims and prevent trafficking. The Ambassador initiated an ongoing series of coordination meetings between donor countries and intergovernmental organizations, to guarantee that international efforts are effective and non-duplicative. The U.S. Government funded a rehabilitation shelter and other programs for repatriated trafficking victims that provided medical tests and treatment, psychological support, lodging, meals, and parental education and job training. Through a grant to the Center for the Prevention of Trafficking in Women, the Embassy funded an anti-

trafficking informational campaign, a hotline for legal and psychological assistance, along with seminars for social workers, prosecutors, police officers, border guards, and customs officials. The Center opened a branch office in Ungheni in July 2002. USAID also completed an anti-trafficking assessment, which led to the design of a new program to prevent trafficking, drawing on the experience of existing job creation programs. To assist women vulnerable to trafficking, the U.S. Government also funded a program to provide women's empowerment courses, crisis hotline assistance, support and training for female entrepreneurs, and job skills training and support.





PHOTO: Kristen Michener

## RUSSIA

To support Russia's development of political, civil, and legal institutions that respect human rights and adhere to democratic procedures, as well as a civil society that encourages tolerance and facilitates the free exchange of ideas, the U.S. is working to:

Promote awareness of and respect for human rights, religious freedom and tolerance in Russia through public and quiet diplomacy as well as direct and indirect support for non-governmental organizations (NGOs); encourage development of a fair and impartial judicial and criminal justice system and fair and professional law enforcement bodies through criminal justice reform, professional training and exchanges; protect citizen's rights by encouraging implementation of the new Code of Criminal Procedure; develop human rights educational programs for the judiciary, military and law enforcement; promote anti-trafficking measures;

Promote an open, transparent, and representative democratic political system in Russia through diplomatic and programmatic support for the formation and development of democratic attitudes, processes and institutions, including parties, citizens' organizations, and governmental institutions; and

Promote the development and functioning of a vibrant civil society, including an independent and diverse press and electronic media, widespread access to the Internet, independent citizens' groups, and labor unions.

U.S. assistance in support of this strategy totaled approximately \$40 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002.

The conflict in Chechnya remains the gravest human rights issue for Russia. The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials regularly express concern and continue their dialogue with Russian political and military leaders and Russian and American NGOs, on the conduct of the Russian military in Chechnya. In this connection, U.S. officials have stressed that human rights violations committed by Russian forces in Chechnya need to be curtailed and abusers held accountable, and that the broader conflict in Chechnya cannot be resolved militarily and instead requires a political solution. For example, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky raised Chechnya human rights concerns with Deputy Foreign Minister Fedotov, and the Ambassador and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs raised concerns with Presidential aide Yastrzhembskiy this year. To convey our continuing concern, the U.S. voted for the

EU resolution on Chechnya at the 2003 U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The U.S. pressed the Russians, who did not agree, to extend the mandate of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission in Chechnya — including its human rights monitoring function -- at the end of 2002. The U.S., in calling for an end to terrorist acts and violence against civilians, has called on the Chechen leadership to repudiate terrorism in word and deed and to cut all ties to Chechen and international terrorists.

The U.S. has supported human rights through a variety of technical assistance projects. For example, in FYs 2002 and 2003, the U.S. supported efforts by Russian human rights activists to build demand for respect for human rights. The project is funding the collection of data on Russian citizens' attitudes towards democratic practices, a variety of human rights, and various aspects of the war in Chechnya. The project is also funding the training of human rights activists in the use of data and other social marketing techniques in order to mount public awareness campaigns in the regions on human rights. U.S. FY 2003 programs support an increase in the role and capacity of regional NGOs and human rights ombudsmen and commissions.

The U.S. provided expert advice to legislators, prosecutors, judicial and law enforcement officials to facilitate the development and functioning of a modern, independent judiciary and a fair, impartial criminal justice system and provided training and exchange opportunities in FY 2002. The Embassy contin-

ues to monitor and assist in the implementation of the new Criminal Procedure Code. The 2001 Criminal Procedure Code is turning the rights promised in Russia's constitution into practical law, with arrest and detention authority transferred from prosecutor to courts on July 1, 2002, and the defense placed on equal footing with the state. Phased implementation of the new Code was supported by U.S.-funded expert advice and logistical assistance, and training for judges, prosecutors, attorneys, law enforcement officials, legislators, and the remaining 80 regions preparing for jury trials.

Through participation in International Military Education and Training (IMET), Russian military and law enforcement personnel were provided with training to observe the rights of citizens by adhering to the new Code of Criminal Procedure and in human rights awareness. The Russian Leadership/Open World Program expands ties in part between the Russian judiciary, procuracy and defense bar and their U.S. counterparts.

USAID implementing partners are training local electoral officials and party poll watchers for the upcoming 2003 Duma and 2004 presidential elections. The U.S. supports and closely coordinates with U.S. NGOs, such as the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, that are engaged in training and other development activities with Russian political parties and citizens groups.

A strong civil society is integral to democracy. To assist Russia's civil society, the U.S. supports thousands of NGOs through NGO Resource Centers, direct grants and technical assistance.

The U.S. has been concerned by continued government pressure on the independent media, an important component of civil society. The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials have raised concerns about press freedom with Russian government officials on several occasions. U.S. programs provide training and exchange opportunities to professional journalists and students, and have expanded public access Internet sites.

The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials maintain a dialogue on ongoing concerns about freedom of religion and belief, and on religious and ethnic tolerance, with Russian government officials, religious denominations, and NGOs that promote religious freedom and ethnic tolerance. The Ambassador and DCM have been actively engaged on these issues, highlighting USG concerns about religious freedom, hosting a series of lunches and receptions, and encouraging GOR officials to meet with visiting delegations. The Embassy actively supported the visit of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, securing ministerial-level meetings for the Commission delegation and facilitating public and media outreach opportunities. The U.S. continues to monitor crucial court cases and visa issues affecting religious workers. An International Visitor (IV) Program focused on Islam in America. U.S. officials co-chaired a May 2002 Roundtable on Religious Freedom in Russia and Eurasia on the Hill.

To address worker rights concerns, the U.S. supports NGOs active on these issues through the Solidarity Center, includes trade union and labor officials in IV and other exchange programs, and the Embassy engages in dialogue with the Russian government on implementation of new Labor Code. When Russian officials denied the Solidarity Center's longtime Russia director reentry to the country in December, senior U.S. officials including the Ambassador raised her case with their Russian counterparts, and continued to seek her re-entry in 2003.

Trafficking in persons is a serious problem for Russia. U.S. officials have raised this issue with their Russian counterparts, and the U.S. obligated over \$3 million in FY 2002 in support of anti-trafficking projects. These projects targeted prevention, law enforcement and victim assistance. The U.S. also assisted the DUMA legislative working group in its efforts to draft comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation. The U.S. supports organizations devoted to the prevention of domestic violence, a major problem in Russia.

## TAJIKISTAN

During 2002 and early 2003, the U.S. Government sought to take advantage of the improved regional security situation by working with the Government of Tajikistan, as well as international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to address a wide range of human rights concerns in the country. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Tajikistan focuses on law enforcement and judicial reform; development, training, and registration of

opposition political parties; and promotion of non-governmental organization (NGO) development and registration. In addition, U.S. officials encouraged increasing media and religious freedom through legislative reform and licensing of independent media and registering religious communities. They also cooperated with the Tajik Government to address trafficking in persons and to prevent deportation of refugees. U.S. democracy assistance to support this strategy in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 totaled approximately \$5.4 million.

The U.S. Government advocated throughout the year for improvements in the country's law enforcement and judicial systems, including prisons. Embassy officials increased engagement with the Interior and Justice Ministries and distributed materials on international human rights norms. The Embassy launched several bilateral assistance programs in the areas of nonproliferation, military-to-military assistance, and law enforcement. At year's end, U.S. officials secured Government approval of a Letter of Agreement on International Law Enforcement and Narcotics Control assistance, which included binding provisions regarding accountability for gross violators of human rights and was signed in January 2003.

U.S. officials worked throughout the year to encourage the Government to increase political freedom. Following U.S. engagement, the Ministry of Justice registered a new opposition party at year's end, the first since 1999. Embassy representatives met regularly with the leadership of all political parties to urge them to participate fully in the political process while

embracing democratic ideals and sent monitors to observe several parliamentary by-elections during the year. In December, Parliament held its first-ever public hearing on a bill, following advocacy and liaison work by the U.S.-funded Dushanbe office of the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI). The International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), whose Tajikistan operations are also U.S.-funded, carried out training sessions for political parties and televised debates as well as a national conference in October on international electoral standards that included participants from the parliamentary leadership, the President's office, the Central Election Commission, and political parties. The U.S. Government urged the President to be more proactive in fostering public awareness and more responsive to citizens' requests and problems, such as through the visits of four mayors and deputy mayors to the U.S. as part of an International Visitors Program on local public administration.

In December 2002 President Rahmonov visited the U.S. and signed a joint statement with President Bush committing to cooperation on economic and political reform in Tajikistan, with the aim of more fully integrating it into the global economy and raising the standard of living and respect for human rights. During this visit Secretary Powell pressed President Rahmonov for further economic and political reforms.

The U.S. supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage the development of civil society. U.S. officials encouraged the simplification of the registration process

for NGOs, and the Ministry of Justice announced several measures in this vein. In June 2002, the Government worked with Counterpart International's USAID-funded Civil Society Support Initiative to organize a conference recognizing the efforts of NGOs in Tajikistan. The Embassy-administered Democracy Commission Small Grants Program supported a number of NGO projects aimed at fostering dialogue among different segments of society and improving women's status in society, among other goals. U.S. funding supported the opening of an ABA/CEELI office in the northern city of Khojand to provide legal support services.

U.S. officials, including the Ambassador and a visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, urged the Government to increase media freedom through reform of the national media law and licensing of independent media outlets. They urged the Government to reverse an earlier decision to deny a license to Dushanbe's first independent radio station, which subsequently was licensed along with two other independent stations. The U.S. provided material assistance to the first station for a generator to combat electrical shortages common in Tajikistan. Other media projects supported through Democracy Commission Small Grants include the foundation of an independent newspaper and the purchase of computer equipment for a journalists' Internet access center. The Embassy also sent a total of nine journalists to the U.S. on International Visitors Programs. The U.S. Government funded the Tajikistan operations of the Internews Network, which provided technical and profession-

al training to independent journalists as well as legal support.

The U.S. Government worked throughout the year to encourage religious tolerance and freedom, including regular consultations with the head of the State Committee on Religious Affairs (SCRA). Embassy officials urged the Government to complete its investigation into the murder of two Dushanbe Baha'is in 2001 and another Baha'i in 1999; the Government filed charges in these cases in November. The Embassy worked with Baha'i representatives in Northern Tajikistan and the SCRA to resolve the Baha'i community's local registration problems, after which the SCRA intervened to secure the registration. The U.S. Government also supported religious tolerance through an International Visitors Program that sent six prominent representatives from different faiths to the U.S., where among other places they met with officials from the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom.

Following the country's designation as having a significant problem with regard to trafficking in persons (TIP), the U.S. Government worked with Tajik officials and international organizations to develop a plan of action to address the problem, which contributed to the country's ratification during the year of the UN Convention on Transnational and Organized Crime (Palermo Convention) and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and to the creation of an interagency commission and an expert working group on anti-TIP efforts and legislation. After consultations with

the Ambassador, the President raised the TIP issue at several all-Government meetings, designating it a high-priority issue. Following these steps, international organizations and international and domestic NGOs working on the issue noted an increased level of cooperation in this area, including the first TIP-related prosecutions and convictions in the country.

Embassy officials demarched the Government on several occasions following the deportation of Afghan refugees, in one case coordinating a multilateral demarche by eight embassies and international organizations in Dushanbe. Embassy officials worked with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to encourage the Government to prevent deportations and resume Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures to address the documentation problems that were generally the root cause of the deportations. The Government resumed RSD procedures in July and by year's end had completed the process, with some cases still pending based on court appeals.

## TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan's human rights record remains extremely poor; the human rights situation significantly deteriorated after an armed attack against President Niyazov's motorcade on November 25. The Government's unwillingness to engage on human rights or democracy issues undermined efforts to pursue macro-level reform initiatives. Because avenues for macro-level reform are limited by the Government, the U.S. has primarily focused on grassroots efforts to

promote human rights and democracy, working to inculcate future civil society, political and business leaders with universal human rights and democratic values. U.S. assistance to support this strategy in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 totaled approximately \$2.4 million.

The Embassy played a critical human rights outreach role during the particularly difficult period of November-December 2002. Embassy officers maintained contact with families of those implicated in the November attack, who were themselves targets of harassment by the Government, and maintained a detailed record of violations committed by government authorities. The Ambassador and other Embassy officers regularly raised concerns about abuses committed by government authorities, including frequent and forceful interventions with President Niyazov and the Foreign Minister. The Embassy also worked closely with other missions and the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on these issues. The Ambassador worked closely with the UN leadership, OSCE Chairman-in-Office and other senior officials to craft a unified message on human rights. She has used media such as Radio Liberty to underscore U.S. support for democratic norms. Active U.S. intervention helped win the release of a civil society activist in April. U.S. leadership on human rights issues led to passage of an unprecedented resolution criticizing Turkmenistan at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

The Ambassador has met with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the country and hosted NGOs



and civil society activists in December at the Embassy Residence in honor of International Human Rights Day. Despite a March 2002 commitment from President Niyazov to work with the U.S. Government on the registration and unhindered operation of NGOs, the Government failed to follow through on this priority U.S. goal. Moreover, on the eve of a USAID-supported conference in November 2002 on NGO registration, the Government rescinded permission to hold the event at a local hotel. The conference was instead held at the Embassy and was well attended. USAID has a robust civil society development program focusing on grassroots community development and community advocacy. The Embassy awarded 16 small grants totaling \$100,000 in 2002, the third year of its Democracy Funds program. Projects supported by the Democracy Commission focused on civic education, Internet access and free flow of information, community self-help, women's and human rights issues. Civil Society Support Centers have been opened in three of the country's five administrative regions to provide community-based resources.

Training programs are implemented in the centers to build management capacity and strengthen understanding of the NGO sector's importance. NGOs that advocate and support human rights causes are supported by the initiative. In an effort to prevent conflict and extremism, the Community Action Investment Program (CAIP) was started in the Lebap region. Communities are brought together to define common priorities in a participatory, democratic style; the program provides partial funding for small community-based projects that emerge from this process.

Working with young lawyers and law students is an important aspect of promoting basic rights in Turkmenistan. Under the auspices of the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI), a public legal resource center was opened at Turkmenistan State University in 2002 to provide basic legal resource materials for the general public. A legal clinic will be added in the near future, giving students practical experience and providing needed legal services for Turkmen otherwise unable to afford and/or access them. A successful street law initiative was also inaugurated under CEELI auspices in 2002. In November 2002, 20 law students and 10 high school teachers were trained as street law instructors. Law students and secondary school teachers received training on how to educate high school students about their legal rights to help ensure that those rights are respected.



PHOTO: USAID

In the interest of fostering independent media, journalists from Turkmenistan participate in a U.S.-sponsored regional

program to train journalists to report on human rights and assist them in disseminating their reporting. The Ambassador held a media roundtable to mark International Press Freedom Day. Access to information sources and the Internet is extremely limited in Turkmenistan. Three Internet Access and Training Program (IATP) sites in the cities of Ashgabat and Dashoguz provide training and free Internet access for all exchange program alumni. IATP sites represent a critical link to the outside world, offering vital access to nonofficial sources of information. In 2002 IATP celebrated the official opening of its second Public Access Center at the National Library in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, which recently registered its 900th registered user. IATP opened a new Public Access Center in Dashoguz later in 2002, in partnership with the British Embassy and the Dashoguz Youth Organization. The center has registered over 100 users since opening.

The U.S. has also sought to broaden avenues of information dissemination, and exchanges and visitor programs

remain one of the most effective vehicles to promote human rights and democracy. In 2002 approximately 140 participants traveled to the U.S. on a broad range of academic and exchange programs. In 2002, 17 of 30 International Visitor Program (IVP) participants went to the U.S. on civil society or democracy-related programs; in 2003, plans call for 24 of 30 IVP participants to visit the United States through such programs. The Embassy will also inaugurate a scholarship program for Turkmen to attend the American University in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, the Embassy in partnership with the American Council for Collaboration in Education and Language Study (ACCLES) adopted a plan in 2002 to establish American Corners in three cities in Turkmenistan. The Dashoguz American Corner opened in November 2002, prompting a 37% increase in the number of people applying for the FLEX secondary school exchange program. TEA alumni have held five methodology training seminars at the center for regional teachers, more than 150 prospective students have received information about studying in the U.S., and the Center has been designated an Educational Advising Center.



PHOTO: USAID/CAR

## UKRAINE

Despite progress in some areas, Ukraine has had a poor human rights record in recent years. Interference by the authorities in the electoral process, a weak judiciary, and intimidation of the media were areas of concern. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Ukraine increases emphasis on democracy and media freedom, especially in the run-up to the 2004 presidential election. The U.S. strategy addresses these concerns through the promotion of the rule of law, support for free and transparent elections, improved human rights advocacy, as well as freedom of the press and association, and programs addressing the problem of trafficking in persons. The approach to human rights promotion taken by the United States incorporates financial and technical assistance to non-governmental bodies and technical assistance to governmental bodies, diplomatic advocacy, extensive reporting and collaboration with donors and members of the international community. The Ambassador, Embassy officers and senior U.S. officials meet regularly with relevant officials to press for respect of Ukrainian law and the rights of all citizens. U.S. assistance to support this strategy in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 totaled approximately \$19 million.

USAID provided assistance to promote judicial reform, resulting in the passage of the Law on the Judiciary in February 2002. The law paved the way for the restructuring of the court system. A USAID grant provided legal aid and advo-

cacy to citizens and funded a case flow management system in two local courts and one oblast court to address the backlog of cases.

U.S. officials raise the importance of human rights in conversations with Ukrainian officials at all levels. This includes the importance of holding elections that meet standards of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). High-level U.S. Government officials and public figures traveled to Ukraine last year to stress the importance of democratic parliamentary elections, freedom of speech and association, and civil society.

USAID, the Embassy, and United States Government partners work extensively with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Rada (parliament) members, and the election administrators at the national and local levels on long and short-term elections monitoring, voter information, and development of sound election laws and administration. With USAID support, Ukraine benefited from first ever civic, long-term pre-election monitoring. Without these programs, it is unlikely that the international community would have noted improvements in successive national elections. We also financed exit polling during recent elections, which greatly helped verify the outcome of the balloting. Senior Embassy and Department officials have continued to repeatedly raise the issue of registration of International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) projects supporting political party development at all levels of the Government.

Through the Democracy Commission Small Grants Program and the Media Development Fund, the Embassy has helped establish a network of NGOs that advocate human rights and media freedoms. The Embassy provided 45 grants to organizations that monitor and report on human rights abuses, monitor elections, and help develop the NGO sector. In addition, 14 elections monitoring projects and 121 NGO sector development projects balanced out these programs that have created an independent voice for citizens. Embassy officers have also participated in human rights training seminars for military officers.

The Embassy has been a vocal proponent of freedom of speech. In response to government attempts to control media reporting, the Embassy worked with other members of the international community, including the OSCE, to press the Government to abide by its international obligations. Senior U.S. officials continued to stress the importance of conducting a thorough and transparent investigation into the murder of independent journalists such as Heorhiy Gongadze, and sent a team of FBI experts in homicide investigations to try to assist Ukrainian officials in advancing the investigation.

Unfortunately, Ukrainian law enforcement officials asserted that Ukrainian law prohibits sharing any information that is not in the public domain and said they were unable to discuss any aspects of the case, share evidence or conduct a joint site investigation. USAID and Media Development Fund grants are tailored to assist and develop independent media to become financially sustainable and report balanced news. USAID also funds legal assistance programs for media outlets.

The U.S. provided extensive grants and training to civil society organizations (CSOs) in an effort to foster civic activism and promote freedom of association. During 2002, USAID funding provided over 150 grants. With USG help, over 1,000 journalists received training and legal aid over the past year. Consequently, fledgling industry associations have emerged as strong advocates of free speech. A network of U.S.-supported pro bono legal clinics protected citizens' rights. More than 3,500 clients received assistance by the end of 2002, a 20 percent increase over 2001.

Religious freedom continues to improve, but some registration difficulties and property restitution issues remain. The U.S. has actively worked with the Government of Ukraine to protect religious sites that were neglected or mistreated during the Soviet era. We have also actively encouraged the Government to return properties and religious edifices to the respective communities and will continue to encourage the Ukrainian government to pursue its ongoing efforts to return properties to all religious communities.

Eliminating trafficking in persons and assisting victims are a priority. USAID and the Embassy have hosted international conferences that have raised awareness about the problem. The U.S. funds a number of well-respected organizations that assist victims of trafficking and work to prevent trafficking through educational programs and information hotlines. We also financed a variety of domestic violence and anti-trafficking programs. Over 52,000 people have consulted the various hotlines to date. In part due to U.S.

efforts, the Government has increased its collaboration with NGOs in anti-trafficking programs. The Ombudsman has publicly praised the U.S. for its consistent and energetic support of anti-trafficking efforts.

## UZBEKISTAN

In 2002 Uzbekistan remained an authoritarian regime where the primary human rights and democracy issues were torture, police corruption, and restrictions on the participation in civil society. Human rights and political reform were addressed through vigorous bilateral dialogue, direct government-to-government human rights training, legal reform assistance, assistance to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), legal aid assistance and active dialogue with human rights activists and opposition figures. U.S. advocacy resulted in a number of positive steps by the Government of Uzbekistan, as well as some improvement in the human rights situation. However, the Government's failure to address openly four deaths in custody in the summer and fall of 2002 and two reported deaths in May 2003 was a significant problem. U.S. government programs to strengthen human rights NGOs achieved remarkable success in 2002. U.S. assistance to support this strategy in Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 totaled approximately \$10 million.

The U.S. and the Government of Uzbekistan on March 12, 2002, signed the Declaration of Strategic Partnership, which formalized the close strategic relationship between the U.S. and Uzbekistan that developed following the events of September 11, 2001. As a part of the

Declaration, the Government of Uzbekistan explicitly committed itself to institutional political reform, including the observance of human rights and the promotion of political pluralism.

The deepening of U.S.-Uzbek strategic cooperation also brought with it a broadening of relations. The Ambassador and visiting senior U.S. Government officials met, at various times throughout the year, with leading officials from the Uzbek agencies charged with law enforcement issues, including the Ministries of Interior and Justice, Office of the Prosecutor General, and the National Security Service. Human rights and political reform were almost always on the agenda.

In addition, numerous U.S. Senators and Representatives visited during the year. Most met with President Karimov and high-level Uzbek officials. All Congressional delegations raised human rights and political reform, and several delegations met with local human rights activists. The Secretaries of Defense and Treasury and numerous other high-ranking executive branch officials visited. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner visited three times during the year. Many officials, including Secretary of State Powell and President Bush, met in Washington with Uzbek officials and raised these issues. President Bush personally raised his concerns with President Karimov, as did Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Beth Jones.

This intensive and constructive U.S. engagement has been successful in working with the Government of Uzbekistan to bring about positive changes in the human rights situation. U.S. efforts were critical in obtaining the invitation of for the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture, the registration of two human rights groups, and this year's amnesty of political prisoners.

In terms of the problem of widespread torture and human rights abuses by law enforcement personnel, the U.S. provided numerous courses to Uzbek police and security services designed to improve the Government's investigation and prosecution practices, thus lessening its reliance on such dubious forms of evidence as coerced confessions. Additionally, U.S. officials worked actively with the relevant Uzbek executive agencies, judicial authorities and NGOs on judicial reform. These efforts have been designed to create and implement legislation resulting in increased judicial independence and greater respect for human rights norms.

Also in 2002, the U.S. provided \$500,000 to the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Legal Initiative (ABA/CEELI) to create a human rights clinical program at Tashkent State Law Institute. The program formally opened in November 2002 and began training law students in the fundamentals of international human rights law and relevant Uzbek law. These students also operate a Human Rights Legal Aid Clinic that began providing free consultations in February.

As part of its efforts to promote democracy and political reform, the Embassy fre-

quently met with both religious and secular opposition figures. The U.S. funded a proposal for \$300,000 by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) to conduct a program working with opposition groups and civil society groups in order to increase political participation and political pluralism in Uzbekistan. The U.S. also awarded \$300,000 to the International Republican Institute (IRI) to carry out complementary political reform work.

In order to strengthen the capacity of human rights groups, the U.S. awarded Freedom House \$1.095 million to open offices in Uzbekistan. Freedom House trains human rights defenders and offers resources and a secure meeting place. As a result, the local human rights community has become increasingly effective at coordinating their trial monitoring and other human rights activities. Embassy officials participate in Freedom House's biweekly meetings with local human rights activists. Begun in late 2002, these meetings attract from 15 to 30 participants and provide a highly effective way for embassy officers to hear from representatives of Uzbekistan's increasingly active human rights community. The meetings draw in activists with whom the embassy previously had little contact, as well as those with whom they have had long and close relations.

The U.S. has addressed issues of religious freedom and intolerance by engaging with high-level Uzbek officials and by initiating a number of programs. Embassy Tashkent and officials from Washington have raised on numerous occasions the harassment of minority religions, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelical churches, as well as the imprisonment

and torture of numerous Muslims who have been unfairly accused of extremism. In order to foster greater religious tolerance, the U.S. sponsored a delegation of imams on a religion in America program and is using \$2.3 million in supplemental money to fund a university partnership program in religious studies and an exchange program for community leaders to promote interfaith dialogue.

In order to promote women's rights, the U.S. funded a Women's Integrated Legal Literacy Project implemented by Winrock International. Designed to increase public awareness of women's legal rights under both Uzbek and international law, Winrock worked with NGOs and individuals in all regions of Uzbekistan. The program resulted in enhanced NGO advocacy skills and facilitated cooperation between NGOs and local authorities. As of September 30, 2002, 16,805 women and 1,785 men had participated in the program's training sessions.

In 2002, the Embassy's Democracy Commission awarded a total of \$166,000 to local NGOs for 28 projects focusing on democratization, human rights, independent press, civil society and other issues the Commission felt served the broader purpose of advancing political reform and human rights. Several of the best known Uzbek human rights groups relied on these funds to compile research, travel within the country, and pay for operating expenses. The first Uzbek NGO solely dedicated to studying the problem of trafficking in persons and to aiding victims received a start up grant.