



## Brunei

### Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports - [2008](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
May 23, 2008

#### Part 1

Brunei Darussalam is an absolute monarchy, ruled by the same family for more than 600 years. Although the government exercised its emergency authority less frequently than in the past, the threat of action cast a long shadow on public debate and political activity (emergency powers have been renewed every two years since the Sultan first invoked an article of the constitution, which allows assumption of such powers, in 1962). All government ministers and all but five of 29 legislative council members were appointed by the Sultan. Village-level governments were elected, but candidates were screened by the government and often only one candidate competed.

#### Part 2

The U.S. government seeks to promote the development of a more accountable and transparent government institutional framework that ultimately allows popular participation in an open political process. To encourage popular participation in the political process, U.S. government officials share the benefits of the U.S. democratic system and political openness with Brunei government officials, military officers, private citizens, civil society representatives, NGOs, and student groups to look for ways to promote Brunei's move toward a more participatory government. This includes expansion of people-to-people exchanges and increasing the number of Bruneians visiting or studying in the United States.

#### Part 3

A primary focus of U.S. diplomatic strategy is to encourage Brunei to progress on the path toward an effective and more representative legislative council, through advocacy for the principles of transparent governance, the direct popular election of some council members, strengthened independent political parties, and termination of the long-standing state of emergency.

To help foster development of a well-informed and involved civil society, the United States continues to promote freedom of expression, improve local journalism skills, and expand public debate through outreach and educational exchange programs. These programs also serve to widen the range and improve the quality of information about the United States available to Bruneians. U.S. officials also use these programs to introduce rule of law and human rights values consistent with international best practices to Bruneian professionals, public employees, and law enforcement officers.

The United States targets its exchange programs to support these priorities. Each year the U.S. Government provides funding to send from Brunei to the United States--one Fulbright scholar, two International Visitor Leadership Program participants, one Edward R. Murrow journalism fellow, and at least five Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies fellows. The United States also sends at least 25 students to the U.S.-supported International Law Enforcement Academy in Bangkok. The United States also works with the Ministry of Defense to increase the number of mid-level and senior-level military professionals attending training at the U.S. Naval Post Graduate School and other U.S. military institutions.

#### Part 4

The embassy delivers extensive information about the United States to a broad spectrum of the Brunei public, making use of the Internet, with an increasing focus on younger audiences. U.S. officials regularly speak to local high schools, the Islamic College, and the Islamic Dakwah (proselytizing) Center. The embassy also shares speakers through digital video conferencing, frequently partnering with other U.S. embassies, including embassies in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

U.S. officials are working with the Ministry of Education to create partnering relationships for student and faculty exchanges between U.S. universities and the University of Brunei Darussalam in a broad range of subject areas. The embassy fosters formal and informal linkages between U.S. Islamic Studies programs and the newly opened Islamic University of Brunei, which is expected to attract Muslim students from throughout the region.

To create opportunities for current and future decision makers to have personal experience of the United States, the embassy is working successfully to increase the number of Bruneian students studying in the United States. This effort includes promoting the use of Brunei government scholarships at U.S. universities--the prestigious Ministry of Defense "Supreme Commander Scholarship" is now used for study in the United States--plus current efforts to increase availability of Ministry of Education scholarships for use in the United States.





## Burma

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#### Part 1

Burma is ruled by a highly authoritarian military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which enforces its firm grip on power through a pervasive security apparatus, relying on fear, repression, censorship, and violence to maintain control. The government's human rights record continued to deteriorate, and although political activists, ethnic and religious minorities fare the worst, all Burmese citizens suffer under the regime's pervasive surveillance, corruption, and abuse of power. Government security forces killed at least 30 demonstrators during their suppression of prodemocracy protests in September 2007, and additional custodial deaths occurred among the estimated 3,000 individuals arrested as a result of these protests. An estimated 1,150 political prisoners held prior to the protests, including National League for Democracy (NLD) General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi, also remain in custody. In September 2007 the regime concluded its National Convention after 14 years and shortly thereafter convened a constitutional drafting committee, composed of 54 hand-picked delegates, to prepare a draft constitution. In February the regime announced it would hold a referendum on the draft constitution in May. The army also continued to attack ethnic minority villages, using rape, torture, and landmines to drive ethnic minorities from their traditional lands.

#### Part 2

Support for human rights and democracy remains the United States' top priority. The United States continues to press the regime for a time bound and meaningful dialogue with democratic and ethnic minority groups that will pave the way for a transition to a democratic government that fully respects the rights of its diverse population. The U.S. government's human rights and democracy goals also include the unconditional and immediate release of Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and more than 2,000 other political prisoners, an immediate end to military attacks on ethnic minorities, unrestricted access throughout the country for humanitarian organizations, and a constitutional referendum that adheres to international standards for a free and fair election.

The United States works aggressively and multilaterally to press for change in Burma. Such efforts included support for the UN process led by UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari, as well as for the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights. With strong support from the United States, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a Presidential Statement in October 2007 that deplored the use of violence against protestors and called for the release of political prisoners and dialogue with leaders of the democracy movement.

#### Part 3

The United States provides space for political activists, educators, professionals, and university students to interact and gather information freely, and uses speaker and exchange programs to discuss democracy, human rights, and other related issues. The United States works closely with prodemocracy and ethnic groups to encourage them to find common ground and work together toward a democratic Burma. The United States operates a library in Rangoon with over 23,000 members, and provides Burmese citizens with access to the Internet, uncensored news, and books on a wide variety of subjects including culture, politics, international relations, journalism, and psychology. Additionally, the United States supports training for teachers and librarians throughout the country and recently established a program to facilitate private donations of over 18,000 books to 80 libraries across the country.

The United States supports journalist training, civil society development, and scholarship programs inside the country and among exile communities to prepare citizens to assume leadership roles during a political transition. Over 1,300 students attend English-language courses at the American Center that foster discussions of current events, civics, and good governance issues to improve students' language skills.

In order to heighten awareness of democratic practices, the United States organized viewings of U.S. presidential candidate debates and primary elections to foster discussion of the processes and principles of free and fair democratic elections. The United States continues to make use of Fulbright Scholarships, Humphrey Fellowships, International Visitor Leadership Program grants, and other exchanges to identify the country's future leaders and develop their understanding of democratic values.

#### Part 4

The United States continues to press the regime to respect workers' rights and to end its use of forced labor. The United States actively supports the work of the International Labor Organization liaison office in Rangoon, which sought to bring the regime into compliance with its international labor obligations and end the use of forced labor and the recruitment of child soldiers. At the November 2007 ILO Governing Board meeting, the United States supported consideration of further actions to address the regime's lack of progress on the development of an adequate mechanism to address forced labor complaints.

To combat the serious problem of trafficking in persons, the United States funds local NGO antitrafficking programs. The United States also presses the regime to improve enforcement of its antitrafficking law and to cooperate with NGOs and UN agencies.

No U.S. funding or humanitarian and democracy-related assistance inside the country benefits the military regime.

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## Cambodia

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May 23, 2008

#### Part 1

Cambodia is a constitutional monarchy with an elected government. The Cambodian People's Party and the royalist National United Front for a Neutral, Peaceful, Cooperative, and Independent Cambodia Party formed a coalition government in 2004. However, the Cambodian People's Party continues to dominate the government, with most power concentrated in the hands of Prime Minister Hun Sen. The government's human rights record remained poor in 2007 due to the lack of political will to enforce the rule of law; the abuse of detainees; the continuing problem of land disputes and forced evictions; restrictions on freedom of speech and press through the use of defamation and disinformation suits; trafficking in persons; and endemic corruption. However, the government took some positive steps during the year, such as when the Khmer Rouge Tribunal charged five senior Khmer Rouge officials with crimes against humanity. Currently all are in detention awaiting trial.

#### Part 2

Strengthening Cambodia's democratic system, supporting rule of law, reducing corruption, and reinforcing protection of human rights are key priorities of the U.S. government. As U.S. officials continue promoting enhanced democratic systems, supporting political and legal rights groups remain fundamental activities. The U.S. government is urging free and fair national elections in July 2008, with a government that is formed consistent with constitutional requirements. The U.S. government encourages openness in public political discourse, political pluralism, and civic participation and responsibility. In addition, U.S. officials and U.S.-supported NGOs address the issues of land reform, use of restraint during legal evictions, and efforts to fight corruption.

The U.S. government seeks to strengthen NGOs that monitor and investigate human rights abuses and that advocate, support, and monitor legal and political rights. The U.S. government supports the Cambodian government's goal of eliminating trafficking in persons. The U.S. government works to protect worker rights and combat the worst forms of child labor. U.S.-sponsored programs promote freedom of the press and encourage educational and economic opportunities for the country's Muslim community.

#### Part 3

U.S. embassy officials use public fora and press events to deliver remarks on a range of topics related to good governance, including the passage of an anticorruption law that meets international standards; the need for judicial reform and independence; government transparency; and respect for a free press. U.S. officials have an ongoing strategy to discuss good governance and human rights concerns with numerous ministers and government officials including Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Minister of Interior.

The U.S. government promotes democratic, free, and fair 2008 national elections that are open to all parties. The U.S. embassy registered 12 officials as long-term monitors for the July 2008 election. Monitors reviewed voter registration and the voter deletion list process. The U.S. government supports programs that are organizing more than 30 multiparty candidate debates. U.S. officials successfully pushed for the debates to be televised nationally. The United States is sponsoring activities to encourage more women to be active in politics and to participate as major political party candidates. Another U.S.-sponsored program broadens youth participation in political life by providing training to more than 35,000 youth.

U.S. embassy officials continue to press for strengthening the rule of law and judicial independence. In 2007, a U.S.-funded program, together with the Royal University of Law and Economics, launched the first national mock court trial competition in Cambodia. The same U.S.-sponsored program facilitated government passage of the judicial ethics code during the year. U.S.-sponsored programs to increase the quality of legal professionals contribute to judicial reform and anticorruption efforts. The U.S. government sponsors a pilot program at the Kandal province court to improve court transparency. To aid in bringing Khmer Rouge leaders and those most responsible for the atrocities to justice, the United States continues to support Cambodia's only independent NGO devoted to documenting the crimes against humanity committed by the former Khmer Rouge regime.

#### Part 4

U.S. government officials promote the opening of political space by supporting human rights groups that focus on access to political and legal rights. The United States provides funding for, engages with, and promotes local NGOs that investigate hundreds of alleged human rights abuses and provide direct intervention and legal services to individuals. A U.S.-funded Cambodian legal defense NGO continues to provide legal aid services for the poor. Another U.S. program uses class action cases on behalf of communities involved in land disputes. One U.S.-supported program trains persons in human rights promotion and protection, and gender-based violence prevention programs. The United States funds the International Labor Organization and other programs to protect worker rights through monitoring labor conditions in garment factories, supporting a labor arbitration mechanism, and combating the worst forms of child labor.

U.S. embassy officials encourage greater freedom of assembly by direct advocacy with the government. For example, U.S. officials successfully urged the government to permit a December 10, 2007 Human Rights Day march and rally and an April 6, 2008 opposition party rally in Phnom Penh. U.S. efforts to promote media freedom are centered on programs to educate journalists about their role in a democratic society and to improve the quality of reporting. The U.S. government supports a program that trains Cambodian journalists on how to cover court proceedings—including the Khmer Rouge Tribunal—elections, and anticorruption cases. The United States continues to address the threat of radical Islam by promoting democracy education and support for the Muslim community through a combination of outreach programs and small grants. The U.S. government distributes Khmer-language and Cham-language copies of "Muslim Life in America" during visits to mosques and Muslim community centers. With U.S. support, a local NGO broadcast continues a weekly Cham-language news and information program, the only program in the country to engage Cham Muslims in their own language.

Combating trafficking in persons is a vital component of the U.S. strategy to promote human rights. The U.S. government supports government efforts to coordinate counter-trafficking in persons activities in partnership with NGOs and government ministries and agencies.





## China (includes Tibet)

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#### Part 1

The government continued to deny its citizens basic democratic rights, and law enforcement authorities suppressed those perceived to threaten the legitimacy or authority of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Against a backdrop of hardening government policies towards ethnic minorities, Tibetans engaged in widespread protests and riots in March and April 2008, with more than 200 civilian deaths reported. Smaller scale protests by Muslim Uighurs in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region also occurred in March 2008. There continued to be numerous high-profile cases involving the monitoring, harassment, detention, arrest, and imprisonment of journalists, writers, activists, and defense lawyers, many of whom were seeking to exercise their rights under the law. The government tightened restrictions on freedom of speech and the press, including increased efforts to control and censor the Internet and foreign media access to sensitive areas of the country. The government used vague criminal and administrative provisions to justify detentions based on participation in peaceful social, political, or religious activities and prevented groups from organizing or acting independently of the government or the CCP. Authorities interfered frequently with legal proceedings, intimidating attorneys or witnesses in politically sensitive cases, including by threatening to charge attorneys or witnesses with crimes.

#### Part 2

The United States promotes human rights, democracy, and the rule of law by advocating key human rights priorities at all levels. Key programmatic elements are aimed at strengthening China's judicial system, promoting the rule of law, improving public participation and transparency in governance, and bolstering civil society. A U.S. federal prosecutor serving as Resident Legal Advisor and numerous U.S. officials emphasize how the impartial application of an objective body of law, without political interference, can help create a more just and stable society. U.S. officials urge the government to seize the opportunity of the 2008 Beijing Olympics to put its best face forward and fulfill its Olympic bid commitments to increase access to information and expand freedom of the press, as well as take positive steps to address international and domestic concerns about its record on human rights and religious freedom.

The United States employs multiple diplomatic and public diplomacy strategies to promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, making clear that progress in these areas would enhance the country's stability. In public statements and private diplomacy, U.S. officials urge the government to bring its human rights practices into compliance with international standards, to make systemic reforms, and to release prisoners of conscience. The United States presses the government to strengthen the country's judicial system and strengthen the rule of law; encourage democratic political reform; promote freedom of religion and the press; protect human rights, including the rights of workers and women; improve transparency in governance; and strengthen civil society. U.S. officials also work with the government, domestic and foreign NGOs, and others to identify areas of particular concern and encourage systemic reforms.

#### Part 3

Through the U.S. International Visitor Leadership Program, U.S. speakers travel to China to discuss rule of law issues. Nearly half of all Chinese citizens sent to the United States to participate in various programs worked in democracy and rights-related fields or in areas related to religious freedom. Both the Fulbright and the Humphrey Fellowship exchange programs devote significant resources to rule of law subjects. For example, the Fulbright Visiting Research Scholar Program includes opportunities for established scholars in the field of law to undertake independent advanced research at U.S. universities, and U.S. professors serve in residence at top Chinese law schools and lecture at leading legal training institutions.

The U.S. government supports seminars and training on international standards for free expression, reaching out to journalists, lawyers, judges, and lawmakers. Visiting officials discuss the need for greater Internet and press freedom, especially in light of increasing international attention on the 2008 Beijing Olympics and expectations that over 20,000 accredited and 10,000 unaccredited journalists will cover the Games. The president, the secretary of state, the ambassador, and other U.S. officials also repeatedly raise the cases of detained journalists and Internet writers in public remarks and in private meetings with senior government officials. U.S. officials work with Internet portals and media organizations to expand the nature and quality of discussion on many topics including trade issues, clean energy development, and the U.S. electoral process.

The United States supports programs aimed at increasing popular participation in government and fostering the development of local elections for village assemblies, local people's congresses, and urban community residential committees in certain cities. U.S. programs support grassroots democratization efforts through training for elected village officials and deputies to local legislatures. U.S. officials and NGOs participate in election observation missions. The U.S. government encourages the development of civil society by supporting projects that increase the capacity of independent NGOs to address societal needs, expand access for marginalized citizens to legal services, and enable citizens to provide individually or collectively input into public decisions. U.S. officials frequently raise concerns with the government over restrictions on NGOs, emphasizing the important contributions NGOs can make in addressing pressing social issues.

The United States works to promote legal reform, urge progress on rule of law, and encourage judicial independence. The United States funds projects designed to provide legal technical assistance, assist efforts to reform the country's criminal law, strengthen legal education, support judicial independence, and enable average citizens to find the information necessary to seek protection under the law. For example, one U.S.-supported project provides training for prosecutors on trial skills consistent with international standards, and complementary projects focus on techniques for defense attorneys. Another program allows a U.S. federal prosecutor to encourage criminal justice reform through interaction with the country's academic community and the government. This U.S. official lectures at government training institutions and universities on issues ranging from search and seizure to compelling witness testimony at trial, and participates in international and domestic anticorruption conferences. In addition, U.S. officials coordinate programs for federal and state judges and other legal experts to discuss trial and criminal procedure reform, discovery and evidence rules, prison reform, and other rule of law issues with judges, lawyers, officials, and academics.

#### Part 4

The United States urges the government to put an end to its coercive birth limitation program. The United States publicly and privately urges the government not to use the war on terrorism as a justification for cracking down on Uighurs expressing peaceful political dissent. U.S. officials also pressed the government not to repatriate forcibly North Koreans and to allow the UN High Commission for Refugees access to this vulnerable population, as required by international conventions to which the country is a party.

The president and other senior U.S. officials consistently call upon the government to respect international standards for religious freedom for people of all faiths. U.S. officials regularly raise religious freedom issues with Chinese leaders, including calling for the release of religious prisoners, the reform of restrictive registration laws, and more freedom for religious groups to practice their faith.

The United States promotes compliance with international labor standards. U.S. officials monitor compliance with the 1992 U.S.-China Memorandum of Understanding and 1994 Statement of Cooperation on Prison Labor and investigate allegations of forced child labor but receive almost no cooperation from the government. The United States supports programs to combat human trafficking and promote HIV/AIDS education in the workplace. The United States and the government conduct exchanges on coal mine safety, occupational safety and health, wage and hour administration, and administration of private pension programs. The United States funds programs that support technical cooperation on dispute resolution and help develop the capacity of local organizations involved in rights protection and legal aid for workers.

#### **TIBET**

The poor human rights situation in Tibet dramatically deteriorated beginning in March 2008, when interactions between security forces and initially peaceful protesters in Lhasa turned violent, resulting in the deaths of both Tibetan and Han Chinese citizens. Unrest spread to other Tibetan areas, prompting a major security deployment and a virtual media blackout in the affected areas. Since the unrest, the United States has urged the government to exercise restraint, calling upon all sides to refrain from violence, and has continued to advocate vigorously for improvements in human rights conditions in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas of China. The United States consistently presses for unfettered access to Tibet by journalists, diplomats, and other international observers, and calls for the release of all those detained for peacefully expressing their political or religious views and for the proper treatment of all detainees. In addition, U.S. officials, including the U.S. special envoy for Tibet, and under secretary for democracy and global affairs, continue publicly to urge China to engage in substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama and to end repressive policies that are blamed for triggering the recent unrest. In October 2007, during a ceremony to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the Dalai Lama, President Bush called on China's leaders to respect religious freedom and to welcome the Dalai Lama to China. U.S. government officials at all levels continue to raise individual human rights cases involving Tibetans, including the status of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama.

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## Fiji

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May 23, 2008

#### Part 1

The Fiji constitution provides for an elected parliament and a prime minister chosen by parliament. However, in December 2006 armed forces commander Bainimarama overthrew the democratically elected government. A month later, Bainimarama installed a nominally civilian interim government headed by himself as prime minister. Thereafter, the military and police arbitrarily detained and sometimes abused individuals, resulting in three deaths. They conducted searches without warrants; engaged in intimidation of the media; and restricted the right to assemble peacefully. Other problems during 2007 included attacks against religious facilities, particularly Hindu temples; government corruption; deep divisions between majority indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians; violence and discrimination against women; and sexual exploitation of children. A state of emergency in effect for half of 2007 significantly restricted constitutional provisions for freedom of expression, movement, and assembly, and subjected the right to privacy to the military's interpretation without recourse to the courts.

#### Part 2

The U.S. government makes the protection and fostering of democratic institutions and human rights top priorities. All embassy work and programs related to democratic values or human rights are harmonized with these key objectives. Immediate priorities are to encourage the return of Fiji to democratic rule via free and fair elections no later than March 2009, to strengthen human rights protections, and to promote a free and robust media.

#### Part 3

The U.S. government has joined with representatives of like-minded foreign missions and multilateral organizations to engage the interim government as it prepares for the March 2009 elections. We have encouraged the interim government to solidify its timeline to create the conditions for a free and fair electoral environment in the run-up to and during the March 2009 elections. The U.S. government plays an integral role in a donor panel, working with interim government authorities to identify and address any electoral process shortcomings. The U.S. government maintains a regular dialogue with prodemocracy NGOs on the government's preparations for polls. U.S. officials also highlight concerns and press interim government leaders to maintain the commitment to the election timetable.

In response to the coup and related, ongoing human rights violations, the Embassy has intensified its outreach to and public support for human rights NGOs. The U.S. government uses the Secretary of State's annual "Women of Courage" awards and other such opportunities to raise public awareness of Fiji's human rights champions. Reporters, human rights activists, and even government auditors, whose job is to underpin good governance and anticorruption efforts, participate in the International Visitor Leadership Program. The U.S. government has repeatedly met with human rights activists to underscore U.S. support and facilitate NGO outreach. Similarly, U.S. senior-level meetings with members of the interim government invariably accent deep U.S. displeasure with human rights violations since the coup.

Through a newly opened regional public affairs office, the U.S. government reaches out to local journalists and media organizations with increased intensity, emphasizing U.S. support for human rights, media freedom, good governance, due process, and rule of law. U.S. statements publicly condemn the coup, express support for a rapid return to a democratically elected government, and call on the military to withdraw from all political involvement.

#### Part 4

The coup constrains our traditional engagement with the military, but the U.S. government continues to make clear its position on the military's proper role in a democracy and about the damage the coup has done to the military's once-proud reputation in the world's peacekeeping-operations community. In its annual engagement with Fiji's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on UN General Assembly voting, the United States has consistently urged Fiji to vote in accordance with respect for human rights and democratic values in a broad, international context. The U.S. government maintains its outreach to women's and children's rights organizations concerning child prostitution in order to better assess the extent of the problem and discuss ways to address it.

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## Korea, Democratic People's Republic of

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May 23, 2008

### Part 1

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) remains a repressive country. The country, a closed and highly militarized society, is a dictatorship under the absolute rule of Kim Jong Il, General Secretary of the Korean Workers' Party. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 persons are believed to be held in political prison camps. Defectors report that many prisoners died from torture, starvation, disease, exposure, or a combination of these causes. North Korean officials reportedly prohibited live births in prison, and forced abortions were performed, particularly in detention centers holding women repatriated from China. The regime controlled many aspects of citizens' lives, denying freedom of speech, religion, the press, assembly, and association. A number of repatriated North Koreans faced severe punishment upon their return, including possible execution. The regime also severely restricted freedom of movement and worker rights. There were widespread reports of North Korean women and girls being trafficked in China.

### Part 2

The United States consistently works to raise international awareness about the DPRK's human rights abuses and to identify concrete ways to improve human rights conditions. The United States seeks to improve North Koreans' access to outside sources of information and to provide opportunities to increase their engagement with and exposure to the outside world.

### Part 3

The U.S. Special Envoy on Human Rights in North Korea, a position created by the 2004 North Korean Human Rights Act, has worked to raise international awareness of North Korea's human rights abuses. U.S. programs provide funding to NGOs that raise international awareness about DPRK human rights and document abuses. In addition, the U.S. government continues to expand efforts to increase the flow of independent information into North Korea, primarily by supporting radio broadcasts into the DPRK. The United States also takes a leading role in urging other countries to undertake efforts to address the DPRK's abuses, including through cosponsoring resolutions on the North Korean human rights situation at the UN General Assembly and supporting requests from the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK for access to the country.

U.S. officials raise awareness of the country's human rights abuses with the international community in both bilateral and multilateral fora. U.S. officials also urge other governments to call for improvements in North Korean human rights as an important component of their bilateral relations with the country.

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## Laos

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May 23, 2008

#### Part 1

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is an authoritarian one-party state ruled by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. The central government's overall human rights record improved somewhat during the year, but violations occurred regularly at the provincial, district, and local levels. The government continued to deny citizens the right to change the government. Prison conditions were harsh and at times life-threatening. Corruption in the police and judiciary persisted. The government infringed on citizens' right to privacy and did not respect the right to freedom of speech, press, assembly, or association. There were no domestic nongovernmental human rights organizations. Trafficking in persons, especially women and girls for prostitution, remained a problem as did discrimination against minority groups such as the Hmong. Workers' rights were restricted. The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, authorities, particularly at the local level, interfered with this right.

#### Part 2

Through diplomatic engagement, public diplomacy efforts, and assistance programs, the U.S. government urges the government to promote rule of law and good governance, including the protection of rights of all ethnic and religious groups in Laos. Specifically this includes pressing the government of Laos for increased transparency regarding the resettlement of ethnic Hmong from Thailand and remote areas in the country; visiting resettled Hmong villagers to assess their well-being; traveling to provinces in order to assess conditions on the ground, including the human rights situation; and meeting regularly with other members of the international community to discuss the human rights situation.

The Embassy supports 17 libraries and institutions in Laos with periodicals and books, giving citizens access to international news and western media. Internet traffic on the Embassy website, which includes links to U.S. Department of State reports and other U.S. government information, is up 160 percent from 2006. The embassy provided information in English and Lao on international practices and norms in the areas of human rights and democracy to university students and the general public. To mark World Press Freedom Day 2007, U.S. officials discussed media freedom in the United States, including press freedom guarantees enshrined in the First Amendment, with a group of college students at the Lao-American Center on May 2. U.S. officials used the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) to promote human rights, sponsoring Lao officials' visits to the United States in 2007 to study aspects of the U.S. judicial system and investigative journalism, among other topics. The embassy prioritizes IVLP candidates for programs in U.S. foreign policy, human rights issues, and anti-trafficking programs. The embassy hosted a series of workshops to teach employees of the Lao government, the National Assembly, the National University, and research institutes to conduct research on legal and judicial issues using the Internet.

#### Part 3

A former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom visited the country to raise a broad range of human rights and religious freedom concerns directly with key senior government leaders during a January 14-17 visit. The former ambassador-at-large also highlighted the need to expand protection of religious freedom to rural areas when speaking to a large group of officials in a presentation at the Institute of Foreign Affairs. Staff delegations from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate Budget Committee also raised human rights issues, as well as the need for greater government transparency during their visit. Two U.S. political science professors visited the country in October and led a program focused on "Human Rights Institutions and Comparative Government." The professors spoke to approximately 60 officials from various ministries and institutes, 70 National University of Laos students at the Institute of Foreign Affairs, and senior representatives of several government ministries about international human rights institutions and the different government structures in nations around the world. One of the presentations focused on "Institutions of Human Rights: A Comparison of Tribunal Justice." During their visit, the two professors also conducted a roundtable discussion on human rights institutions, tribunal justice, and the legal frameworks in Laos with officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Faculty of Law, Public Prosecutor's Office, Supreme People's Court, and the National Assembly. The professors' presentations are available on the embassy's website for subsequent access by a broader Lao audience.

#### Part 4

The embassy, in collaboration with the Secretariat to the Lao National Steering Committee on Human Trafficking, hosted an important program June 11-20 on Trafficking in Persons in the country. A U.S. professor led a series of workshops, lectures, and roundtable discussions on human trafficking issues for audiences totaling more than 150 government officials, NGO leaders, and students. At the workshops, the professor reviewed the internationally-accepted definitions of trafficking and described the dynamics, causes, and impact of human trafficking on individuals and communities. Workshops in Vientiane and in Savannakhet attracted audiences from the Lao National Steering Committee; the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Public Security, and Labor and Social Welfare; the Lao Women's Union; the Lao Youth Union; and other organizations.

The United States consistently presses the government to allow the development of domestic associations and NGOs. In 2007, the embassy undertook a major program to translate Lao laws into English and international laws from both English and French into Lao. This greater access to a broad range of international laws is designed to help government officials, members of the National Assembly, and members of the Lao Bar Association and domestic legal institutions better understand international legal norms. Promoting good governance is an important element of the U.S. government's efforts to support democracy and human rights. The U.S. government funds a program that is working to strengthen women's political leadership by encouraging public awareness of the value women bring to government, pressing the need to promote decision making that is responsive and accountable to women, and providing training to improve women's capacity to shape policy processes and outcomes. Another U.S. government-sponsored project seeks to improve the livelihood of women in three northern provinces and also attempts to expand the role of women in community decision making.

The U.S. government presses the Lao Front for National Construction, the government body overseeing religious issues, to resolve cases of religious intolerance by local officials. U.S. officials used their working relations with provincial and central government officials to bring these cases to the attention of authorities, which often results in a more expeditious resolution of problems. The United States raises the need for the government to allow international monitoring of the prison system. U.S. officials meet frequently with members of international organizations and with other concerned embassies to discuss strategies for convincing the government to open its prison system to outside monitoring. The U.S. government also closely follows the cases of known political prisoners, using official meetings to raise its concerns with the government.

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## Malaysia

### Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports - 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
May 23, 2008

#### Part 1

Malaysia is a federal constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government headed by a prime minister selected through periodic, multiparty elections. The National Front, a coalition of political parties dominated by the United Malays National Organization, has held power since independence in 1957. The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. The government abridged the citizens' right to change their government: opposition parties faced significant restrictions on freedom of assembly and access to the media in the most recent national elections in March 2008 but nevertheless made significant gains at the national and state levels. No independent body investigated deaths that occurred during apprehension by police or while in police custody. Other problems included police abuse of detainees, overcrowded prisons, use of four statutes to arrest and detain persons without charge or trial, and persistent questions about the impartiality and independence of the judiciary. The government continued to restrict freedoms of the press, association, and assembly and placed some restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Although the government passed antitrafficking legislation during the year, the country was a destination and transit point for trafficking in women and girls for the purposes of prostitution and domestic servitude. Court backlogs and limitations on the right to organize unions in some industries impeded workers' rights.

#### Part 2

A more open and democratic Malaysia that protects human rights will be a more effective partner in security and economic arenas. The U.S. government focuses on fostering a more vibrant civil society and a freer media, promoting strong and accountable democratic institutions, and combating trafficking in persons. Long-term success depends on incremental improvement in the application of the rule of law, a more independent judiciary, and the diffusion of checks and balances in society through stronger protections for freedoms of the press, assembly, and expression and a more robust civil society. There is still much to be done, including encouragement of the adoption of key international covenants such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Additional training and assistance should accelerate these positive trends and assist the government in enforcing the new anti-trafficking in persons law.

#### Part 3

U.S. officials use bilateral meetings, speeches, and interviews to highlight the importance of enhanced democratic institutions. The United States supports civil society activities related to democracy, including the role of the media in the democratic process. Other democracy programming includes nonpartisan projects that promote political participation among urban youths and engagement in the electoral process. The U.S. government also used the International Visitor Leadership Program to focus on women's participation in the electoral process, citizen participation in a democracy, and the rule of law for state and local government.

U.S. efforts to promote media freedom center on the availability and flow of public information. The U.S. government supports an NGO that worked to promote open discourse on legislative and governmental matters. Another program focuses on strengthening independent media. In 2007 the U.S. government brought a journalist from the United States to conduct media training for approximately 800 journalists and journalism students.

#### Part 4

U.S. officials use bilateral meetings and speeches to promote greater respect for human rights. The U.S. government uses meetings with the government, civil society, and international organizations to increase the protection for vulnerable groups such as refugees and victims of trafficking in persons. The U.S. government collaborates with NGOs and international organizations to assist with the health and education needs of refugees in Malaysia and to resettle refugees into the United States. The United States works with the government, international NGOs, and civil society to combat problems of trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation and labor. The U.S. government shares information on international best practices for combating trafficking in persons with the Royal Malaysian Police. The U.S. government funds law enforcement training that included components for combating trafficking in persons. The U.S. government also uses the IVLP to enhance the capacity for law enforcement, civil society, and local NGOs to combat trafficking in persons.

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## Papua New Guinea

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May 23, 2008

### Part 1

Papua New Guinea is a constitutional federal multiparty parliamentary democracy. The most recent general elections were held June 30 through July 10, 2007; there were localized instances of voter intimidation, election-related violence, and influence peddling. A coalition government, led by Prime Minister Michael Somare, was formed following the election. While civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, there were some instances in which elements of the security forces acted independently. The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, abuses were documented, including arbitrary or unlawful killings by police; police abuse of detainees, including children; poor prison conditions; lengthy pretrial detention; infringement of citizens' privacy rights; government corruption; violence and discrimination against women and children; discrimination against persons with disabilities; and intertribal violence.

### Part 2

In cooperation with the federal and local governments and NGOs, the U.S. government seeks to promote democratic principles, practices, values, and human rights in its engagement in Papua New Guinea.

### Part 3

U.S. officials continue to work through the International Visitor Leadership Program to provide journalists and future leaders exposure to democratic systems and values. The United States continues to provide training that emphasizes respect for human rights to defense personnel through the International Military Education and Training program, Title X military conferences, and the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. A series of Joint Combined Exercise Training programs in basic soldiering skills will enhance the overall competence of the defense force.

The U.S. government encourages other diplomatic missions to channel additional assistance to the country's transnational crime units and to help police enhance their understanding of human rights and responsible policing. The results are reflected in more positive media coverage and public commentary about the police. Police cooperate with the Embassy on external security and investigations.

The U.S. government also focuses significant attention to promoting civil rights, including the rights of women, and encouraging a free and fair political process. U.S. officials have teamed with local universities, NGOs, and think tanks and delivered topical addresses and presentations throughout the nation on these issues.



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## Philippines

### Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports - 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
May 23, 2008

#### Part 1

The Republic of the Philippines has a long tradition of democracy, but it remains vulnerable to political turmoil; recurring attempts to use extra-constitutional means to resolve leadership crises; human rights abuses; and concerns about credibility of elections. Corruption and weak rule of law continue to be underlying factors exacerbating this vulnerability. High voter turnout in the 2007 national and local elections demonstrated the country's continuing commitment to the democratic process as 99 percent of the 17,000 seats available nationwide were filled without controversy. Elections were marred by violence and fraud, as in past years, but civil society monitoring groups played an active role as poll watchers to ensure fairer election counts. The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there continued to be serious problems in certain areas, particularly extrajudicial killings (EJKs) and forced disappearances. In 2007 the government intensified its efforts to investigate and prosecute these cases, and there has been a significant decrease in the number of killings and disappearances.

#### Part 2

Advancing democratic values and strengthening democratic institutions are top priorities for the United States. U.S. democracy and human rights promotion efforts in the country support free and fair elections; assist the government and civil society groups in improving adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights; and strengthen good governance while combating corruption with transparent and accountable institutions. The U.S. government addresses these issues by providing development assistance programs for government and civil society partners to develop the policies and tools necessary for a freer, fairer, and more democratic system set within the framework of the rule of law and respect for human rights.

#### Part 3

U.S. efforts are broad-based and support initiatives that boost confidence in the democratic process. Programs at both the local and national level promote equity, transparency, and popular participation--all key factors for the healthy functioning of a democracy.

Elections are generally free and fair but have historically included numerous killings of campaign workers and even candidates, as well as recurrent fraud allegations. To counter these problems, U.S.-funded programs currently support civil society initiatives that monitor election tabulation; allow NGOs to monitor campaign finance in selected electoral contests and media reporting; and assist electoral modernization efforts in preparation for local and national elections. The U.S. embassy coordinated and deployed a multi-agency team of 86 U.S. officials to observe the May 2007 national elections. This initiative clearly demonstrated to the Philippine electorate the U.S. government's strong support of a free and fair democratic process.

The Philippines has struggled with EJKs and forced disappearances for most of its modern history. U.S. government officials use every opportunity to convey the message that these killings and disappearances must cease and must be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted. In support of this priority, assistance programs are underway to build the capacity of journalists to report credibly, accurately, and professionally on human rights violations; to strengthen the justice sector's effectiveness in prosecuting cases of EJKs and disappearances; and to professionalize security forces. The U.S. government also provides assistance to law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, and the courts to investigate, prosecute, and convict human rights abusers and to devise strategies to prevent future abuses.

#### Part 4

The United States continues to provide the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, along with several human rights NGOs, with computer software support and training to improve efficiency and security in documenting, storing, and reporting of human rights abuses. The U.S. government sponsored a seven-day seminar on the investigation and prosecution of EJKs and co-sponsored the Supreme Court's July 2007 National Consultative Summit on Extrajudicial Killings and Forced Disappearances. Positive public response to recommendations made as a result of the summit provided momentum to the effort to counter abuses, including subsequent supreme court action that allowed for the legal remedy of the writ of amparo now used in the investigation of EJKs and forced disappearances. U.S. officials are working with the supreme court to develop materials that will easily convey the legal procedures involved in securing a writ of amparo.

To encourage respect for due process among members of the armed forces, various U.S. military assistance programs help to strengthen the professionalism, commitment to human rights, and discipline of the Philippine military. Each year, thousands of soldiers receive some form of human rights training from U.S. military personnel. Graduates of these programs populate top ranks of the armed forces; helping to ensure that command responsibility is understood at all levels of leadership. In 2007 the U.S. government provided ethics or human rights training to 500 police officers. An additional 1,000 police officers received U.S.-funded training that included a human rights component. The U.S., in collaboration with the Philippine National Police (PNP) Human Rights Affairs Office, supports the delivery of the PNP's in-house human rights training.

Efforts to strengthen good governance, prosecute corrupt officials, and institute anticorruption measures continue to be supported by U.S. government initiatives. U.S. assistance and training are helping the Anti-Graft Court develop a computerized case management information system. U.S. efforts also are facilitating implementation of a continuous trial process, permitting judges to gauge the reliability of witnesses and rule effectively. Assessments of selected government agencies' vulnerability to corruption were also conducted to improve the capacities of the offices of the ombudsman, internal revenue, and customs.





## Singapore

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### Part 1

Singapore is a parliamentary republic with elections taking place at regular, constitutionally mandated intervals. The voting and vote counting systems are fair and free from tampering; however, the Peoples' Action Party placed formidable obstacles in the path of political opponents. The government has broad powers to limit citizens' rights and to handicap political opposition, and it used these powers frequently by placing restrictions on freedoms of speech, the press, assembly, and association. The government also placed some restrictions on freedom of religion.

### Part 2

The United States supports liberalizing trends in Singapore and takes every opportunity to advance democracy and freedom, promoting democratic principles, practices, and values and human rights.

### Part 3

In support of democratic principles, U.S. officials speak at multiple venues using the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign to explain the electoral process and the important role of the press in covering candidates and election issues in the United States. This approach allows audiences to draw comparisons with the country's more restrictive system. U.S. officials regularly meet with exchange visitors, and recently hosted the first-ever reception for alumni of the U.S.-funded International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP).

The embassy recently hosted a luncheon with the leaders of the main opposition parties and all of the opposition members of parliament. In addition, the embassy gave opposition leaders the opportunity to meet with executive and legislative branch visitors from the United States.

The United States conducts a range of programs and activities to heighten government sensitivity to human rights. U.S. officials maintained active communications with the government, political parties, human rights organizations, and civil society representatives. U.S. officials urged Singapore, as the chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to lead ASEAN in setting a high human rights standard during the drafting of the new ASEAN charter.

### Part 4

The embassy makes it a priority to engage extensively with the country's Malay Muslim community and maintains strong relations with representatives of the various religious communities. The United States conducts a comprehensive program of outreach to local audiences through the media and the Internet and employs exchange, speaker, and information programs to help government officials and key local audiences gain an enhanced understanding of the democratic process and the value of human rights. The embassy utilized the IVLP to send several key journalists to the United States, where they acquired an increased awareness of the challenges and benefits of the role and responsibilities of the press and media in a free and open society.

The embassy expanded its speaker program to inform a broader and younger audience about U.S. society and foreign policy. The program has been used to encourage liberalizing trends through discussion of freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. U.S.-supported exchange programs focus on foreign policy, military, regional security, journalism, and global issues. The embassy enlisted the support of the U.S. business community, alumni of U.S.-sponsored exchanges, and U.S. university alumni to expand outreach.

The United States continues to engage the government to raise awareness and press for concrete steps to combat trafficking in persons. U.S. efforts helped convince the government to pass revisions to the penal code to criminalize commercial sex with any minor less than 18 years of age.





## Solomon Islands

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### Part 1

The Solomon Islands is a constitutional multiparty parliamentary democracy with a population of approximately 566,000. Parliamentary elections held in April 2006 were considered generally free and fair, although there were incidents of vote buying. Following a vote of no confidence in December 2007, the Solomon Islands Parliament elected a new Prime Minister in a peaceful manner and in line with its constitution. The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, but there were problems in some areas including lengthy pretrial detention, government corruption, and violence and discrimination against women and minorities.

### Part 2

Promotion of democratic principles, practices, values, and human rights is the guiding theme of U.S. government engagement in the country.

### Part 3

The U.S. government supports multilateral programs to rebuild failed police and government institutions. The U.S. government actively advocates for the rights of and political participation of women through the International Women of Courage Program and International Visitor Leadership Program.

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## Thailand

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May 23, 2008

### Part 1

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, with a democratically elected coalition government led by Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej's People's Power Party (PPP). The PPP took office following the December 2007 national elections, ending nearly 17 months of governance by a government established by leaders of the September 2006 military coup d'etat. In an August 2007 national referendum, voters approved a new constitution drafted by an assembly established by the coup leaders. The constitution contains provisions that appear designed to prevent the monopolization of political power, which some commentators have characterized as undemocratic. The security forces continued to use excessive force against criminal suspects and committed or were connected to dozens of extrajudicial, arbitrary, and unlawful killings. The police reportedly tortured, beat, and otherwise abused detainees and prisoners, many of whom were held in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. The longstanding practice of bringing defamation suits encouraged self censorship by the media and NGOs. Human rights workers, particularly those focusing on the violence in the South, reported harassment and intimidation.

### Part 2

Support for democracy remains one of the U.S. government's top priorities in Thailand. The United States conducts outreach programs to strengthen democratic processes and independent institutions, and to assist organizations and groups that promote respect for the civil and political rights of ethnic and religious minority communities. The United States implements training and outreach programs to judicial, law enforcement, and civil society groups to encourage legal transparency, good governance, rule of law, and civic participation. The United States promotes press freedom by supporting local organizations to help the media professionalize and develop investigative reporting skills to perform its role as a political watchdog. The United States supports freedom of expression through cooperative outreach and capacity building programs with media organizations and community radio networks. The United States also provides infrastructure and educational material support for local high schools and universities in conflict-affected southern Thailand.

The United States continues to focus on human rights in southern Thailand, pressing the government to prevent extrajudicial killings; to investigate thoroughly and transparently allegations of present and past human rights abuses by Thai security forces; and to punish adequately officials guilty of offenses in order to address widespread concerns about impunity and access to justice among southern Thais. U.S. officials maintain close contact with the many domestic and international NGOs in the country that work to promote human rights in Thailand. The United States continues to encourage government officials to establish and maintain a professional military, competent law enforcement capacity, and a government bureaucracy that respects and protects individuals, human rights, and the rule of law.

### Part 3

The United States was at the forefront in calling for a prompt return to an elected government following the September 2006 coup. The United States funds programs aimed at strengthening democratic governance and the rule of law, including technical assistance in the analysis of the new constitution and activities to educate NGOs and officials on vote buying. The United States also provides support for domestic monitoring of the constitutional referendum and voter education activities. The United States urged the post-coup interim government at its highest level to rapidly restore civil liberties, remove restrictions on political activities, and lift martial law. Following the coup, U.S. programs supported a return to civilian rule by bringing legal experts from the United States to address constitutional concerns, funding local NGOs to observe the constitutional referendum, providing legal guidance to draft new elections laws, and dispatching observers throughout the country during the December 2007 parliamentary elections. The United States continues to facilitate speaker programs to address ethics in government, constitutional systems, free and fair elections and referenda, the role of women in the political process, the influence of money in the political process, and civilian control of the military.

The United States regularly raises concerns over the lack of progress in prosecuting those responsible for human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances. The United States presses the government to investigate the possible extrajudicial killings of at least 1,300 people during the 2003 "war on drugs" campaign, end practices that allow security forces to operate with impunity, and bring to justice officials responsible for abuses. To support democratic institution building among a diverse audience, the U.S. government sends citizens, including Muslims and women, to the United States to learn about democracy, multiculturalism, and religious tolerance. U.S. officials give speeches on U.S. human rights policy, democracy, religious tolerance, diversity, and freedom of expression during visits to universities. As part of its outreach to Muslim communities in the South, the United States sends students and teachers to the United States to participate in workshops on the promotion of democracy and human rights.

The United States awarded a grant for a Thai press organization to publish a handbook on management and production challenges for community radio operators, as well as a grant to a media organization to build the capacity of community radios. The United States promotes media freedom and freedom of speech, particularly broadcast press and the Internet, by offering training for media professionals. The United States facilitated a digital video conference exchange between a former chief operating officer of the Public Broadcasting Service and an audience of fifty broadcast journalists and policy makers on key considerations for establishing and sustaining a public television service. The United States also sent a team of Thai journalists to the United States to learn about democracy during the 2008 presidential primaries.

### Part 4

The United States, in conjunction with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other international organizations, maintains close contacts with Burmese refugees, political activists, and NGOs in the country. U.S. officials also work closely with the government to advocate for and monitor the conditions of Burmese refugees and other vulnerable groups within Thailand's borders. U.S. officials frequently visit camps along the Thai-Burma border to report on the living conditions of those who have fled Burma. The United States also provides funding for the High Commissioner's operations in East Asia that includes protection of Burmese refugees in the country. The United States advocates for the humanitarian treatment of ethnic Hmong from Laos living in the country. The United States also provides funding to NGOs assisting thousands of Hmong in long-term detention in an army camp and immigration jail. U.S. officials continue to urge the government to allow the UN access to the Hmong to determine whether any have valid refugee claims. The United States also continues its large-scale program to resettle Burmese refugees living with unofficial status in the country.

The U.S. helps enhance the legal, professional, and technical capabilities of government institutions. U.S. officials developed and participated in many seminars dealing with intellectual property enforcement, witness protection, plea bargaining, modernizing the judiciary, public corruption, and obstruction of justice issues. The U.S. supports the development of rule of law by continuing for a second year a grant to the American Bar Association Asia-Initiative project in Bangkok that sponsors workshops and seminars with Thai and U.S. officials and judicial experts aimed at improving ethics codes for lawyers, prosecutors, and judges. This project organized and funded conferences on combating judicial corruption. The United States and the government continued to fund and manage jointly the International Law Enforcement Academy, a regional training center for police, immigration, customs, and other law enforcement officials. The academy's curriculum incorporates support for democratic institutions, impartiality and integrity in criminal law enforcement, and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. To optimize the institutional effect of this training, the U.S. government also funds and receives Thai law enforcement officers for advanced training, professional conferences and career development, which



includes material on U.S. and international standards for human rights as related to law enforcement.

The United States supported more than a dozen government agencies and NGOs involved in combating trafficking in persons for commercial sexual exploitation and labor, including programs to enhance law enforcement and prosecution, legal assistance, protection for victims, and reintegration assistance. The United States provides funding to the International Organization for Migration for return and reintegration assistance for victims trafficked among countries of the Mekong region.



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## Timor-Leste

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May 23, 2008

#### Part 1

Timor-Leste is a multiparty parliamentary republic with a population of approximately 1.1 million. The country held presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007 that were generally considered free and fair. Former Prime Minister Jose Ramos-Horta was elected president, and former president Xanana Gusmao, as head of a four-party coalition of former opposition parties, became prime minister. The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, some human rights abuses persisted as the country recovered from the political and security crisis of 2006 that led to intervention by the Australian-led International Stabilization Force and establishment of a new UN mission to restore order. Serious problems included: politically motivated and extrajudicial killings; police abuse of authority; and inefficient and understaffed courts that deprived citizens of due process and an expeditious fair trial. Other problems included weak oversight of administration of justice by civil society and a lack of reliable information about government and public policy.

#### Part 2

As part of an ongoing effort to support democracy in Timor-Leste since the crisis of 2006, U.S. government programs seek to strengthen the justice system, foster the development of civil society, and assist the government in holding free and fair elections. U.S. priorities are based in part on the findings of a November 2006 Conflict Vulnerability Assessment, which identified serious inadequacies in the justice system as well as weak oversight of government as root causes of the 2006 unrest. By promoting the development of a functioning justice system and strengthening the independence and professionalism of the media, U.S. programs aim to assist in resolving the crisis and, at the same time, lay a foundation for good governance in the country.

#### Part 3

The U.S. government supports the Office of the Provedor, an independent state body in its second year of operation, which serves as an ombudsman for handling complaints regarding corruption, poor administration, and human rights violations. In 2007, the Provedor investigated 24 cases, referring seven of these to the Prosecutor's Office. In June 2007 the first class of Timorese judges, prosecutors, and defenders, one-third of whom were women, graduated from the U.S.-supported Legal Training Center. The U.S. government also finances an international judicial inspector to assist the body that provides oversight of the courts. U.S. assistance expands local access to legal aid by supporting legal aid centers that encourage resolution of disputes through mediation within the community in the local language. Legal aid centers also raise public awareness of laws and citizens' rights and responsibilities.

U.S. government programs to develop civil society emphasize the strengthening of independent media and expanding access to reliable news and information on current affairs outside of the capital city. U.S. programs increased access to news and information during the critical period leading up to the elections in 2007 by making use of the broader reach of TV for video programs and expanding radio coverage and programming. U.S. government assistance provided practical training to 90 journalists to research and develop in-depth stories, and provided orientation to journalists on particular topics such as the court system, new laws, environmental issues, and elections. One U.S. government-supported media program enabled Timorese journalist associations to join forces and advocate for a seat at the table in drafting media laws.

#### Part 4

The United States supported the 2007 elections, which were the country's first national elections fully administered by the government. Specifically, U.S. government training programs encompassed political party training, voter education, domestic election monitoring, and support to the election management bodies. Promotion of women's political participation is a priority of all programs. Acting on the recommendations of the Conflict Vulnerability Assessment, electoral training also focused on minimizing election-related violence. Despite some logistical difficulties, the elections proceeded in a peaceful atmosphere and with citizen participation of approximately 80 percent.

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## Tonga

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May 23, 2008

#### Part 1

The Kingdom of Tonga is a constitutional monarchy, and political life is dominated by the king, the nobility, and a few prominent commoners. Citizens lacked the ability to effectively change their government, as only nine representatives were elected by popular vote in the April 2008 legislative assembly elections; nine additional representatives were elected by 33 noble families. The 14 members of the cabinet, who are appointed by the king, also joined the assembly as voting members. In May 2007 there were reports that security forces physically abused detainees in the weeks following November 2006 riots. The riots, which left eight people dead, were a culmination of large-scale protests related to the pace of political reforms. The government at times restricted the freedom of the media to cover political topics. Government corruption and discrimination against women are continuing problems.

#### Part 2

The protection of human rights, the fostering of democratic institutions, and promoting peace and security in Tonga are top priorities of the U.S. government. The United States maintains dialogue with all political factions in Tonga, including the prodemocracy movement, with the goal of encouraging progress on political and electoral reforms. The United States also focuses on building the capacity of prodemocracy NGOs and nascent political parties to ensure the successful implementation of these reforms. In the wake of the 2006 riots, the United States is working to promote political reconciliation and dialogue between prodemocracy and conservative forces.

#### Part 3

U.S. officials frequently engage senior officials, journalists, media organizations, and other civil society activists to underscore the importance of democratic reforms, human rights, rule of law, and good governance. The United States funds local NGOs to hold voter education workshops. Through the U.S. International Visitor Leadership Program, media representatives, and democracy and human rights activists travel to the United States to learn about grassroots democracy, the media's role in a democracy, and the U.S. electoral system.

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## Vietnam

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May 23, 2008

#### Part 1

The Government of Vietnam (GVN) is a one-party state in which citizens cannot change their government, and the government prohibits political opposition groups. The government arbitrarily detains individuals calling for regime change and denies them the right to fair and expeditious trials. Despite a general loosening of control over many aspects of life for most Vietnamese, the government still limits citizens' freedom of speech, assembly, movement, and association. The GVN also limits workers' rights, especially to organize independently. While the government restricts the organized activities of religious groups, Vietnamese citizens are generally free to practice their religion, and the government continues to legalize many religious congregations.

#### Part 2

Persuading Vietnam to adopt internationally accepted norms in respecting human rights and religious freedom is at the top of the embassy's agenda. The U.S. ambassador continues to urge the government to eliminate limitations on fundamental freedoms and advocates in cases where the government has infringed on the human rights of individuals. The U.S. government focuses on four main areas of human rights: promotion and protection of individual human rights, including releasing political prisoners; freedom of all religious denominations to organize and worship; growth of civil society, including promoting a free press, strong legal institutions, and empowering the NGO sector; and countering trafficking in persons (TIP). The U.S. government uses diplomatic influence; targeted dialogue with government officials on the benefits to Vietnam of expanded freedoms and an improved human rights environment; public diplomacy efforts aimed at educating key decision makers, future leaders, and the general public; and formal dialogue with the government on human rights and labor issues. The U.S. government works closely with like-minded diplomatic missions in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to coordinate efforts on human rights.

#### Part 3

In his calls on leading government officials and in his statements to the local and international media, the U.S. ambassador continues to explain that the promotion of human rights is among his top priorities during his tenure. He calls for the government to improve the human rights situation, to release prisoners of conscience, and to enhance further religious freedom. The U.S. ambassador has reiterated President Bush's message to President Nguyen Minh Triet in June 2007 that, in order for the United States-Vietnam relationship to progress, the country will need to do more to respect human rights.

Specifically, the ambassador meets with top officials of the Ministry of Public Security to press for the release of prisoners of conscience and calls for embassy access to certain prisoners to ascertain their conditions. In addition, the ambassador meets with other officials, including the ministers of justice and communication and information, to press for the institution of rule of law and an allowance for greater Internet and press freedom. In this context, the U.S. calls for reforming Vietnam's criminal code and granting of greater operating rights for foreign news bureaus in Vietnam.

In his meetings with the Vietnamese community in the United States as well as a wide range of U.S.-based groups, the ambassador listens to specific human rights concerns and explains his approach to foster change in Vietnam. The U.S. ambassador also meets with top religious leaders to assess the religious freedom situation and the difficulties religious groups may encounter under the country's legal regime on religion. The ambassador regularly raises these concerns in meetings with the chairman of the government's committee on religious affairs and other senior government leaders. Other embassy officials regularly reinforce these messages.

In February 2006 the United States resumed its annual Human Rights Dialogue (HRD) with Vietnam. After the April 2007 HRD, the government released additional prisoners, increased legalizations of religious organizations, and demonstrated a more cooperative response to United States entreaties in areas of judicial reform and governance. In addition, in the 2006 bilateral labor dialogue, the United States and Vietnam signed a letter of understanding to renew labor cooperation in such areas as improving labor inspection and enforcement and preventing and eliminating exploitative child labor and TIP in Vietnam. Both sides continued to discuss labor issues in the October 2007 bilateral labor dialogue. Ongoing U.S. government labor and TIP advocacy resulted in the government's 2007 ratification of International Labor Organization Convention No. 29 outlawing forced labor and the establishment of new antitrafficking and antichild sex tourism units within the police department. Human resource development, industrial relations, expanded labor rights, and occupational health and safety are other important areas of the embassy's ongoing labor dialogue.

#### Part 4

The embassy participates regularly in an international donor dialogue with the government on anticorruption, sponsored by the Central Steering Committee on Anticorruption. On press freedom, the embassy supports the professionalization of the media by regularly bringing Vietnamese journalists to the United States for training through the International Visitor Leadership Program. On civil society, the U.S. embassy actively facilitates the capacity building of civil institutions and NGOs. The U.S. government's TIP report on Vietnam has served as an entry point for engaging the government's National Steering Committee on antitrafficking and discussing its antitrafficking National Program of Action and the role of civil society. The U.S. embassy also continues to engage the government on many women's-related issues through active grant programs on the prevention of domestic violence and the promotion of women's political participation, among others, in support of the U.S. government's human rights agenda.

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