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February 17, 2006**U.S. Investing \$5 Million to Support Reform in Syria**

To support freedom and democracy in Syria, the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) announced today it will award \$5 million in grants to accelerate the work of reformers in Syria.

The grants, which are expected to range from \$100,000 to \$1,000,000, will build up Syrian civil society and support organizations promoting democratic practices such as the rule of law; government accountability; access to independent sources of information; freedom of association and speech; and free, fair and competitive elections.

"The United States stands firmly with courageous men and women struggling for their freedom across the Middle East, including in Syria," said Elizabeth Cheney, principal deputy assistant secretary of state in the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau. "The people of Syria deserve the opportunity to build a better future and to live in freedom."

President George W. Bush launched MEPI in 2002 to promote positive reform in the Middle East and North Africa. The initiative has received more than \$293 million to support more than 350 programs in 14 countries and the Palestinian territories.

To see the request for grant applications for Syria, go to www.mepi.state.gov and click on Current Opportunities and Syria Democracy Program Announcement. The deadline for concept papers is March 30.

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Released on February 17, 2006

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