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*“The government of my country, by denying civil rights to the citizens,  
is denying to the Cuban people the right of self-determination.”*

**– Oswaldo Payá Sardinás, winner of the Sakharov Prize in 2002**



Democratic institutions and civil society continue to face serious challenges in several countries in the Western Hemisphere. During the year, endemic corruption and inefficiency, internal violence and rising polarization threatened democratic stability in Bolivia and Haiti. In both countries, the elected presidents resigned from office followed by a constitutional transfer of power to their respective successors. Protection of fundamental human rights, including core labor rights, needs continued strengthening, especially in the 15 Latin American countries highlighted in this report. Weak judicial and political systems in the region often fail to enforce the rule of law equitably and protect the fundamental human rights of all citizens. Reconciliation and accountability for past abuses, including support to human rights investigations of abuses during military dictatorships and other non-democratic governments, remain critical issues. The rights and political inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable populations in the region, including the indigenous, Afro-Latinos, women and children vulnerable to labor and sexual exploitation continued to be a primary concern for the United States.

In 2003 and 2004, the United States continued to focus on consolidating democratic institutions, including the democratization and decentralization of political processes, and on promoting transparency and respect for human rights in the Western Hemisphere. U.S. assistance to the region included coordinated projects to strengthen labor systems and markets through the promotion of freedom of association, collective bargaining and protection of core labor standards in Central America as well as regional political party development programs that incorporated internal party reforms with democratization and expanded outreach to constituents. An integrated SOUTHCOM human rights initiative included regional military conferences on Human Rights Consensus Document Implementation and programs bringing military and civilian authorities together with human rights organizations to implement standards for fostering a culture of respect for human rights and international humanitarian law within the military and public security forces.

The United States is buttressing regional efforts to resolve conflicts and strengthen rule of law, free media and civil society. Building upon the Community of Democracies, democratic nations from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean gathered in Miami in June 2003 for a “Dialogue on Democracy,” to exchange experiences and develop inter- and intra-regional dialogues, institutions and strategies to strengthen the global framework of democracy.

Outreach to indigenous communities and other marginalized populations, including Afro-Latinos and women, was strengthened and expanded in the region, with particular emphasis in Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. Among other outreach and inclusion initiatives, the Embassy in La Paz hired indigenous advisors and supported the development of original radio programming and publications on democracy and other key issues in indigenous languages. U.S. Agency for International Development-supported programs throughout the region worked to support grassroots democratization, transparency and efficiency in municipal governments and the political and economic inclusion of traditionally marginalized populations.

In support of UN Security Council Resolution 1529 and the CARICOM Prior Action Plan for Haiti, the United States quickly established an interagency coordinating group to support the reconstruction of democracy (including key institutions such as the criminal justice system), promote the rule of law and respect for human rights, strengthen and restructure local government and promote reconciliation and social reintegration. Mediation and conflict resolution programs in Venezuela sought to encourage peaceful and democratic dialogue among polarized groups in that country and to promote a constitutional solution to the political impasse. Additional U.S. programs worked to help children affected by the civil conflict in Colombia, including the reintegration and emotional recovery of more than 1,000 child soldiers. Other programs in the hemisphere identified and helped combat the worst forms of child labor including sexual exploitation. In Brazil, the United States is working through civil society and governmental networks to expand access and assistance for child victims of trafficking, while anti-trafficking educational and assistance programs in Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala, Belize, Haiti and other countries support research, training and the development of remedial legislation.

## COLOMBIA CHILD SOLDIERS

Colombia's internal conflict has had a devastating impact on Colombian children. Among other human rights violations inflicted on children, illegal terrorist groups, including the United Self-Defense Forces (AUC), the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), forcibly recruit young children and use them to serve as combatants, informants, sex slaves, spies and messengers. The Colombian Family Welfare Institute (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar or ICBF) estimates that between 12,000 and 15,000 children are members of these terrorist groups. Child soldier deserters report that local terrorist group commanders threaten to kill their families if they desert or attempt to do so. In 1999, the ICBF opened the first center for the specialized treatment of ex-combatant children. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) expanded and strengthened ICBF's program to reintegrate child soldiers in 2000. When USAID began working with ICBF, the Institute had only four special attention centers caring for 80 child ex-combatants. At the end of 2003, the program had helped open five Transit Homes, 16 new Specialized Attention Centers, six Half-Way Houses and two Reference Centers in eight cities throughout the country, benefiting approximately 1,375 ex-combatant children. In addition, 181 child ex-combatants from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have been assisted in their communities and 9,234 children at risk of being recruited by illegal armed groups have benefited from prevention activities.

## ARGENTINA

While the Government of Argentina generally respected the human rights of its citizens, there were some allegations of extrajudicial killings and other abuses by police, security forces or prison officials. These abuses were often linked to corruption within the police and security forces. There were clear signs that some of the judiciary was both subject to political pressure and exerted political pressure, and corruption was also a problem. Prison overcrowding continued, in part due to lengthy pre-trial detention stemming from a slow judicial process. Discrimination against minorities continued to be an underreported and largely unrecognized problem, as was trafficking in persons, including cases of child sexual exploitation.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy aims to combat corruption and human rights abuses and encourage more responsive and sustainable democratic institutions, laws and economic and political practices in Argentina. U.S. efforts included projects to enhance the efficiency of the Argentine judicial system, promote greater public participation in policy making, assist minorities and combat the worst forms of child labor and trafficking in persons. Throughout the year, embassy officials, including the Ambassador, maintained a continuing dialogue with Argentine policy and opinion makers on human rights issues, including issues discussed in multilateral forums.

Supporting improvements in the justice system was a priority. The Embassy worked to support efforts at strengthening the rule of law in general, addressing corruption and ending impunity for past human rights violations and preventing them in the future. The United States has long worked to address such judicial reform and the rule of law, raising the issue regularly in its contacts with government and judicial authorities. In 2003, the Embassy brought the Justice Ministry, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society organizations together for an ongoing

cooperation project called “Justice Undergoing Change.” In addition, the United States supported eight speaker programs and one voluntary visitor program for Argentine judges, prosecutors, NGOs and members of the press. This visitor program covered issues including case management, juvenile justice, training of judges, working with the media, alternative dispute resolution, court administration, public participation and access to justice, and victims’ rights. The province of Chaco and the city of Buenos Aires are currently implementing pilot projects on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in the judiciary as a direct result of this program, and NGO participants prepared a proposal that served as the basis for government decrees in 2003 on public consultation procedures for naming Supreme Court Justices and other judges and made that system significantly more transparent. These judicial reform efforts were so well received and effective that similar projects on related topics will be implemented through the current and coming year.

The United States has also long sought to enhance transparency and public participation in the policy process by hosting International Visitor program trips, publishing material, hosting World Net conferences and organizing speaker tours. A member of the Anti-Corruption Office participated in an International Visitor program on accountability in government and business, and NGOs have increased their capacity by participating in similar U.S. programs. This effort continues in close cooperation with the Anti-Corruption Office, through initiatives such as a U.S. speaker to discuss the U.S. Freedom of Information Act as Argentina contemplates a similar law. The United States also continued to provide technical assistance to the judiciary on corruption-related cases, while U.S.-funded institutes (the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute) provided assistance to Argentine institutions, including non-partisan work to strengthen democratization and transparency in the nation’s political parties and democratic processes.

The United States works closely with the Government, through a continuous dialogue with the Foreign Ministry Human Rights office regarding the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) and the State Department's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, to coordinate Argentine support for democratic principles and improved human rights practices throughout the world. As part of that effort, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Michael Kozak visited Buenos Aires in 2003 to discuss with Argentine authorities ways in which to make the UNCHR a more effective advocate of fundamental human rights.

The Embassy raised specific human rights cases noted in the Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Argentina with national and provincial government officials, including legislators, the Secretariat of Human Rights for Buenos Aires Province, and the Buenos Aires Provincial Security Minister. The Government subsequently acted to dismiss 69 officials of the Federal Penitentiary Service suspected of corruption and dismissed a number of Federal Police officials suspected of corruption. The Province of Buenos Aires also examined the financial disclosure statements of provincial police chiefs and implemented a torture prevention program aimed to reduce abuses in the province. Finally, the Government revoked a decree preventing extraditions for human rights violations committed during the country's "dirty war" and sought and achieved the nullification of de-facto amnesty laws for dirty war violations.

The Embassy routinely vetted military training participants for compliance with Leahy legislative requirements, and human rights training was integrated into all U.S.-supported military exercises and operational training carried out in Argentina. The United States has also made improving civil-military relationships a priority in the training of local military and defense civilians. The consular section refused visitor visas under pertinent statutes to two ex-military offi-

cers implicated in torture and other human rights violations during Argentina's dirty war.

The United States directly and regularly raised concerns regarding the Government's ongoing efforts to achieve justice for the 1994 AMIA Jewish community center bombing in which 85 people were killed. The Embassy continued to provide technical assistance directly to the judiciary in this case, while closely monitoring the ongoing trial of those accused as accomplices in that terrorist attack. To further combat religious discrimination and promote tolerance, the Embassy sponsored two experts to attend Holocaust Education training courses in the United States.

Anti-discrimination programs were also supported through a U.S. donation of two used computers to a local foundation providing vocational training to people with disabilities and sponsorship of a series of well-received speaker programs on the economic development of indigenous communities. The latter program complemented an initiative by the Government, an exemplary public consultation and coordination process to develop a National Plan Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Other Forms of Intolerance.

The Ambassador regularly raised U.S. concerns about the worst forms of child labor and trafficking in persons with the Labor and Foreign Ministers, as part of an active effort to gather information and enhance high-level awareness of these issues. Two local activists, selected to participate in the International Forum on Trafficking in Persons in February 2003, continued to investigate and promote efforts to assist victims and raise public awareness. Their efforts were strengthened through the Government's hosting of a day-long seminar on trafficking in persons for government, international and civil society participants and through Argentine participation in an international training conference on forced child labor and links to child pornography.

## BELIZE

Belize is a parliamentary democracy. Human rights and democratic processes were largely respected in Belize. Although there were significant improvements in the prison system and awareness of trafficking in persons, corrupt practices and gaps in infrastructure, budget and social services contributed to abuses in areas such as police brutality and child labor.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy aims to strengthen the rule of law, improve prison conditions and combat child labor and trafficking in persons. This strategy complements Government of Belize efforts with training, resources and infrastructure assistance. Embassy officials maintain an active dialogue with government officials, non-governmental organizations and private sector individuals and organizations to identify areas of concern, confirm reported problems and assert U.S. positions. Following the 2003 Trafficking in Persons Report determination that Belize was a Tier III (non-compliant) nation, the Embassy focused the majority of its human rights efforts on combating trafficking. However, U.S. officials continued to dedicate time and resources supporting human rights and rule of law programs for the military, judiciary and prisons to ensure continued progress in these arenas.

To strengthen the judiciary and better prepare law enforcement officials, prosecutors and the courts to conduct criminal proceedings efficiently and fairly, the Embassy assisted with infrastructure development and training. The United States provided training for prosecutors in utilizing forensic evidence and secured donations for the first-ever forensics laboratory in Belize. In addition, the United States provided \$22,900 to the Magistrate's Court to replace and network all of its computer equipment, which was lost in a fire in 2002. Another \$17,200 was allocated to upgrade and network the computer systems at the office of the public prosecutor and \$14,000 was used for computer upgrades at the Supreme Court.

The Ambassador visited Belize's only prison on several occasions to demonstrate U.S. support for government efforts to improve prison conditions through privatization. Embassy officers regularly visited the prison, monitored conditions and donated books and magazines to the prison literacy program.

Responding to the threat corruption poses to stable democratic practices, embassy officials placed increasing emphasis on anti-corruption programs. In April, the United States funded an anti-corruption seminar attended by representatives from all Belizean law enforcement agencies. The consular section, following a directive from the Secretary of State, cancelled the diplomatic U.S. visa of a corrupt cabinet minister in February 2003. The minister's involvement in the 2002 illegal sale of thousands of Belizean citizenship documents and passports (including some to suspected terrorists and traffickers in persons and narcotics) was well documented. The media's coverage of the story provoked widespread calls for a crackdown on corruption in Belize and provided embassy officials a platform to encourage anti-corruption efforts. To ensure that the passport system can no longer be manipulated to facilitate issuance of Belizean passports to unknown persons without accountability, the United States provided \$985,000 to implement an automated, machine-readable passport issuance system that is expected to be operational in late 2004.

The U.S. Department of Labor allocated \$105,000 for a comprehensive study of child labor practices in Belize, the first such research in four years. The study, conducted by the International Labor Organization and released in December, indicated an increase in child labor abuses in Belize, particularly in the agricultural sector. U.S. officials worked with government social services to analyze the contents of the report and plan to study the issue more closely in the coming year.



The Embassy capitalized on the high-profile release of the State Department's 2003 Trafficking in Persons Report to bring more attention to anti-trafficking efforts. The Embassy provided the Government with copies of model anti-trafficking legislation, developed in consultation with the U.S. Department of Justice, and the Government of Belize adopted and enacted the legislation in June with only minor changes. The Embassy consulted with Belizean officials to develop a multifaceted action plan to combat trafficking, and at the request of the Belizean Government, an embassy official participated in a newly created task force to combat human trafficking. The Embassy coordinated with the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement to conduct intensive anti-trafficking training for more than 350 police, prosecutors and social services and immigration personnel. Further training was planned for 2004. At least six persons were charged with trafficking offenses during the last half of 2003, and prosecutors continued to develop their cases at year's end. Embassy officials worked closely with social services to ensure that protections were in place for any identified victims.

Trafficking issues merited widespread coverage in local media. Television and newspapers reported passage of the anti-trafficking legislation as well as subsequent arrests, and reporters generally contacted embassy officials for statements. Anti-trafficking advertisements ran in newspapers and on television, and several major radio talk shows featured trafficking discussions and included speakers at high levels, including the Chargé d'Affaires, the Belizean foreign minister and a Belizean ambassador.

## BOLIVIA

Bolivia is a multiparty democracy with an elected president and bicameral legislature. The year 2003 was marked by major episodes of social unrest. In October, protestors forced President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who had been elected in free and fair elections in August 2002, to resign from office and flee the country. After a vote in Congress, Vice President Carlos Mesa Gisbert, a former journalist, historian and human rights activist, assumed office and restored order.

There was wide expectation that the new Government would place great emphasis on human rights, given that then-Vice President Mesa had publicly broken with the Sanchez de Lozada administration over its handling of this issue. The new Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, though serious problems remained, due in large part to weak institutions, pervasive corruption, a violent opposition and limited resources. In the previous Government, there were credible reports of abuses by security forces, including use of excessive force, extortion, arbitrary arrest and detention, and mistreatment of military conscripts. Prison conditions remained harsh, and violence in prisons and prolonged pre-trial detentions were problems. Other problems included pervasive domestic violence and discrimination against women, the abuse of children and widespread child labor, discrimination against and abuse of indigenous people, discrimination against Afro-Bolivians, brutal working conditions in the mining industry and trafficking in persons.

The highest priorities of the United States in Bolivia are to promote political and social stability and to ensure that the police and military are respecting human rights and cooperating with investigations and prosecutions of alleged violations of human rights. The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy works to strengthen the judicial system and the rule of law, promote indigenous, workers and women's rights and combat corruption, child labor and potential traf-

ficking in persons. U.S. officials routinely and publicly highlight the need to improve Bolivia's justice system and to make the political system more inclusive. In private, the Ambassador and other embassy officials work with government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other organizations to identify areas of particular human rights concern and encourage needed reforms. To build international support for the new Government, Secretary of State Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage hosted a January 2004 Bolivia Support Group meeting in Washington, with the participation of 19 countries and six international organizations.

To strengthen its capacity for monitoring and acting on cases of alleged human rights abuses, such as torture and extrajudicial killings, the Embassy has hired a Bolivian attorney to work exclusively on human rights issues. This attorney works with the Bolivian military, police, judiciary and other officials to track human rights cases and investigations for the embassy database and reporting, and to support diplomatic outreach on this critical issue.

The United States continued financial support to the Chimore Center for Justice and Human Rights (CCJHR) in the conflictive Chapare coca-growing region. The Center reported its findings to the



Vice Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, disseminated human rights information, accepted and kept records of complaints of abuses, reviewed these complaints with the support of a medical forensic expert and an investigative staff, and referred credible complaints to the Public Ministry. The Embassy plans to expand justice services at the CCJHR and to establish similar multiple-service justice centers in the city of El Alto and the coca-growing zone of Los Yungas.

In response to the violence in February 2003, the United States contributed the services of professional law enforcement, forensic and ballistic experts as well as equipment to an investigation by the Organization of American States. This eventually resulted in an objective official report and 11 indictments by the Attorney General.

Because many of the human rights abuses occurred within the justice system, the Embassy has focused major human rights and democracy efforts in that sector. The Mesa government continued to implement a new Public Ministry Law adapting the prosecutorial function of the judicial system to the requirements of the Code of Criminal Procedures (CCP), one of the reforms supported by the United States in recent years. To date, more than 1,000 police, lawyers, law students, prosecutors, judges and NGO representatives have received training on the new CCP. The Embassy has also provided technical assistance to initiatives undertaken by the Office of the Presidential Delegate to combat public sector corruption and has supported implementation of a Carter Center access-to-information program.

The United States works to support democratic order and social stability in Bolivia in a variety of ways, including U.S. Agency for International Development programs to increase efficacy, accessibility, transparency and the rule of law in municipal government, legislative development, political party reform and anti-corruption. The participation of women and indigenous people is stressed in these programs, and the Embassy is hiring native language-speaking indigenous advi-

sors to help it better understand and broaden links with this large and under-represented segment of the population. As part of the U.S. outreach to the indigenous program, the Embassy has sent various members from the indigenous community and officials to participate in 2003 International Visitor programs on topics such as democracy and civic education. The Embassy has also invited guest speakers and published op-ed pieces on supporting democracy, indigenous issues and fighting corruption. The Embassy Public Affairs Section produces radio programs, news and coverage of significant events in indigenous languages of Quechua and Aymara and created an Aymara publication on key aspects of a U.S.-sponsored 2003 conference on indigenous rights. In 2004 workshops on democratic values are planned for indigenous and Afro-Bolivian groups as well as a CARE-implemented education-based program to promote improvements in political access and responsible civic and political participation among rural and indigenous populations.

The Embassy routinely raises the importance and provisions of Leahy legislation and other human rights conditions on U.S. security assistance in ongoing contacts with civilian and military officials and has offered support to the Government's own human rights database. The Embassy continues to conduct interagency vetting on all security forces considered for U.S. training and/or support. The United States also provided ongoing training and seminars to the Bolivian military, including regional Human Rights Consensus Document Implementation conferences. The Bolivian military has recently assigned a human rights officer to every command. In 2003, the Embassy assisted the National Police to establish a National Directorate of Professional Responsibility to investigate allegations against police officers of malfeasance, wrongdoing and human rights abuses and encouraged the establishment of the first national human rights office for the police. During the year, policemen and military personnel received crowd control training emphasizing respect for human rights and internationally accepted principles of crowd con-

trol. Narcotics police officers also received training on human rights issues as a key part of counter-narcotics training; basic training includes a 40-hour human rights module.

The United States has repeatedly raised with Bolivian officials the need for comprehensive action on trafficking in persons and related child labor and prostitution concerns. The Embassy has promoted passage of a model anti-trafficking law with senior officials and lawmakers. In 2003, the U.S.-based NGO International Justice Mission provided human rights training to police on the rights of street children, while \$1.5 million in funding from the U.S. Labor Department supported a CARE project working to keep the children of Potosi miners in school and out of the mines. The Labor Department is also funding a project to improve workplace safety and to promote tripartite dialogue among workers, businesspeople and the Government. The United States contributes to school feeding programs, and has a public health project to provide medical diagnosis and counseling on sexually transmitted diseases for prostitutes and the general population.

## BRAZIL

In October 2002, Brazil's constitutional Government held the fourth general election since the end of military rule in 1985, electing President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and members of the legislature in accordance with the 1988 Constitution. These elections met international standards.

The federal Government generally respected human rights, but the human rights record of some states remained poor. Although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained. Police continued to commit numerous abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, excessive use of force and other abuses. Prison conditions remained extremely harsh and life threatening. The judiciary was inefficient, often subject to political and economic influ-

ences, especially at the state level, and lacked adequate resources. Judicial officials were often poorly trained. In many instances, poorer and less educated citizens made limited use of an appeals process that might ensure their right to a fair trial. Millions of children continued to suffer from the poverty afflicting their families, worked to survive and failed to get an education. Child abuse was widespread and sexual exploitation of children and child prostitution prevalent. International trafficking in persons and internal slave labor were significant problems.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Brazil focused primarily on the needs of children, including protection from abuse and the worst forms of child labor, and on support to the Government's fight against HIV/AIDS and trafficking in persons. In addition, the Ambassador frequently, in both media interviews and public speeches, addressed the need to strengthen democracy in the Americas and the role of free trade in increasing development and supporting democracy. The Embassy also worked privately with the Government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other organizations to identify areas of particular concern and encourage key reforms.

Because children suffered from many of the worst human rights abuses in Brazil, the U.S. Agency for International Development focused its efforts on at-risk youth, designing a program to improve the ability of at-risk and working children and youth to become productive, healthy citizens. This prevention and human rights protection program is implemented by the National Association of Partners of the Americas through the POM-MAR Project in Northeast Brazil and in Brasilia. It promotes the effective application of international and Brazilian legislation guaranteeing the fundamental rights of children and young people and strengthens the capacity of local government and NGOs providing protective services to children and youth aged 7 to 18. These young people, either separated from family or parental care and protection or at risk of such separation, are

vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor in urban areas. Participating children receive a range of benefits: formal schooling, vocational training and access to quality education targeting the prevention and eradication of child labor, human and children's rights promotion, protection against physical, sexual and mental violence, health education targeting early pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and civic education in key democratic skills.

To further reduce child labor and associated human rights abuses, the Embassy worked with the Ministries of Labor, Education and Social Assistance and with President Lula da Silva's National Human Rights Secretary to implement a \$5 million U.S. Labor Department grant targeting child labor in Northeast Brazil. More than \$10 million in additional U.S. funding supported International Labor Organization projects working to combat child labor. In addition, the Embassy sponsored several Brazilian officials to participate in International Visitor programs to the United States, giving them access to a wide range of government, private sector, NGO and academic officials on topics such as affirmative action and promotion of access to justice by members of traditionally excluded groups.

In compliance with the Leahy amendment, the Embassy worked closely with the Ministry of Defense and NGOs to thoroughly vet all military units proposed for U.S. training.

Brazil has a significant problem with trafficking in persons. It is a major source country for women and children trafficked into prostitution primarily in Europe and some border countries. Internal sexual exploitation of minors in Brazil is a problem. There is also a significant internal problem with trafficking of men and children into forced labor in agriculture. To assist the Government's efforts to combat trafficking in persons, the United States sponsored a seminar in São Paulo to examine ways to reduce and eliminate trafficking in persons in Brazil. The seminar

was attended by many members of civil society, as well as federal and state government officials. In addition, \$5 million in U.S. funding supports “Projeto Educar,” initiated in August 2003 through the U.S.-based NGO Partners of the Americas and targeting the worst forms of child labor in Brazil through programs focused on improvements to basic educational access. This project benefits children working in hazardous agricultural activities as well as those trapped in commercial sexual exploitation.

## COLOMBIA

Although Colombia is a democracy, a major internal armed conflict financed by drug trafficking and other criminal activities has created an environment in which serious violations of human rights, almost all of which are committed by guerrilla or paramilitary terrorists, are commonplace. The Government’s human rights record remained poor; however, there were significant improvements in some areas. An increasingly small percentage of total human rights abuses reported were attributed to security forces; however, some members of the security forces continued to commit serious abuses, including unlawful and extrajudicial killings. Paramilitary and guerrilla terrorists regularly attacked civilian populations and were responsible for massacres, extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, torture, forced displacement and recruitment of child soldiers. The civilian judiciary is independent of the executive and legislative branches but confronts profound challenges from corruption and intimidation by guerrillas, paramilitaries and other wealthy criminal organizations. More significantly, the cumbersome inquisitorial judicial system is overworked and faces serious resource constraints. Impunity from prosecution, therefore, is a threat to the creation of a culture of respect for human rights.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Colombia is both proactive and responsive, tackling the root causes of human rights and religious freedom violations and social unrest while

continuing to invest in short-term emergency humanitarian assistance. Key strategic objectives include protection of vulnerable populations, increased access to the justice system, support for judicial reforms and the rule of law (including protection of witnesses and protections and training of human rights investigators and prosecutors), promotion of local governance and peace initiatives, and provision of humanitarian assistance. In April and September of 2003, President Bush discussed with President Álvaro Uribe a broad range of bilateral issues including the importance of continuing progress on human rights and extending democratic security throughout Colombia. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner also raised democracy and human rights concerns with President Uribe in separate visits to Colombia during 2003. During a February 2004 trip to Colombia, U.S. officials discussed the government’s plans to demobilize paramilitaries and encouraged the Government to hold demobilized combatants accountable for gross human rights violations and other serious crimes.

Working with the Colombian Ministry of Interior and Justice, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided security protection to 3,145 people and 71 offices under threat. The protection program assists threatened human rights workers, union leaders, journalists, members of the left wing Patriotic Union Party, mayors, city council members and municipal human rights workers. The U.S.-funded Early Warning System expanded to 20 regions, allowing it to respond effectively to 177 of 234 alerts and potentially prevent massacres, forced displacements and other egregious human rights violations.

In Fiscal Year 2003, 12 additional U.S.-funded Justice and Peace Houses – one-stop legal assistance and social services shops – were established for a total of 33, handling 1.9 million cases

and thereby increasing access to the justice system, particularly for poor and marginalized Colombians. In addition, the United States has helped to establish a total of 28 oral trial court rooms and train 3,421 judges in oral trial procedures, strengthened the office of Public Defense, created 9 new court rooms including five for specialized courts, one for ordinary courts and three mock trial court rooms in three Colombian universities, and 707 individuals were certified as conciliators.

The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has developed and implemented a multi-faceted strategy to strengthen the Colombian Government's capability to investigate and prosecute human rights cases, providing Colombian judicial police investigators, forensic examiners and prosecutors with the necessary training, technical assistance and equipment to strengthen and upgrade their individual skill levels. The strategy employs a task

force concept, whereby personnel from 11 satellite Human Rights Units in the Prosecutor General's Office train and work together, resulting in a more effective case flow from the initial criminal investigative stage through final case resolution. In 2003, the Office of the Prosecutor General conducted major operations against guerrilla and paramilitary terrorist/criminal organizations, bringing charges for murder, assault, extortion and drug trafficking. In 2003, DOJ trained 840 police assigned to rural outposts with little or no previous police presence, trained 400 police in accusatory system/oral trial techniques and trained 172 prosecutors, judicial police and judges in trial advocacy. Also in 2003, specialized training and state of the art equipment donations enabled Colombian forensic labs to investigate human rights violations more effectively. This included the enhancement of DNA analyzers and the Combined DNA Index System database, upgrading of the Integrated Ballistics Identification System (IBIS), updating of forensic imaging and document analysis systems, upgrading of the automated fingerprint identification system and the design and installation of a wireless network providing inter-agency connectivity and information sharing. Enhanced IBIS testing was used in an investigation in the department (state) of Casanare to link nine separate homicides to the same weapon, resulting in the arrest of one suspect for four of the homicides.

USAID's Peace Program underwent significant change and growth in 2003. While it continued to support civil society initiatives to promote peace and conflict resolution, the program also developed a working relationship with Colombia's new High Commissioner for Peace to design and implement initiatives to support peace negotiations with illegal armed groups. As negotiations began between the Colombian Government and terrorist paramilitary groups, USAID provided advice regarding policy and programmatic parameters for a possible demobilization initiative. Also in conjunction with the High Commissioner and Ministry of Interior and



Justice, the United States established Peaceful Co-Existence Centers in three of the most conflict-ridden municipalities in Colombia. These centers provided communities with a neutral space for dialogue, conflict resolution and social services.

The United States supported small community infrastructure projects through the Alternative Development program. The U.S.-funded Local Governance Program improved the capacity of municipal governments to involve citizens in local decision-making, provide services and manage resources effectively and transparently. These two projects supported the establishment of 630 social and productive infrastructure projects in 64 municipalities and were administered through local citizen oversight committees that established project priorities and oversaw their management and financing. In addition, the United States successfully completed a nationwide public awareness anti-corruption campaign that reached six million citizens through radio, newspaper and television messages and standardized internal control units in 19 government agencies.

The United States worked to help reform Colombia's criminal justice system in an effort to accelerate the legal process. The United States assisted the Government in drafting a new criminal procedure code to move the system toward an accusatorial system. The draft code is currently under consideration in the Colombian Congress. The United States organized joint accusatory trial technique courses for judges, prosecutors, police, defense attorneys and investigators, and funded visits for judges and legislators to observe the accusatory system in practice in Puerto Rico. The United States also implemented an instructors' course at the Prosecutor General's training facility, which trained instructors to conduct their own courses in forensic specialties, basic investigative skills, trial techniques, interview techniques and crime scene management. Over the next three years, the United States will assist the Government in providing training to approxi-

mately 3,000 prosecutors, 1,000 judges, 10,000 police investigators and 1,500 defense attorneys. In cooperation with the Colombian Justice Sector High Level Commission, the United States has built 27 trial courtrooms to complement the shift toward an accusatorial system.

Although non-governmental organization (NGO) statistics indicate kidnappings have dropped approximately 30 percent in 2003, kidnapping remains a significant problem in Colombia. The United States assisted the Government in developing and implementing a comprehensive program to investigate and prosecute kidnapping and extortion offenses. Six courses in the areas of Human Resources Intelligence Management, Racketeering Enterprise Investigations, Kidnapping Investigations and Ransom Investigations and Interviewing and Interrogation were held for 180 law enforcement, prosecutorial and military personnel. The intimidation of witnesses and judicial sector personnel continued to undermine the rule of law. In response, the United States provided training and equipment for Colombian protective force personnel in both the witness and dignitary protection areas, including personnel from the Bogotá mayoral and other government ministerial security details.

The ongoing armed conflict in Colombia has displaced approximately 2.2 million people since 1995. The United States is funding a number of international organizations and NGOs in Colombia that provide emergency humanitarian assistance such as food, temporary shelter, hygiene and household kits, psychosocial attention and health care to newly displaced persons. The United States is also providing mid- to long-term assistance to displaced persons through several international organizations and NGOs, focused on economic reintegration of displaced persons where they reside and a smaller but significant returnee component. Program activities include productive projects, micro-credit programs, vocational training and job placement, health care, shelter, income generation, improved education and basic community infrastructure.

Furthermore, USAID has assisted 1,176 ex-combatant and other vulnerable children through their child soldiers program.

Although labor union-related homicides and kidnappings dropped significantly in 2003, violence against labor union leaders and activists continues to be a grave problem, with levels surpassing any other country in the world. Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center provided U.S.-based training and technical education to nearly 40 Colombian trade union leaders who were under threat. The United States also funded an International Labor Organization (ILO) project designed to improve labor relations and generate quality employment for women. A second U.S. grant provided funding to the ILO's International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC). In 2003, almost 3,000 children left their work in low-tech open-pit mines under an IPEC-funded pilot project.

Human rights training is integrated into all U.S.-supported military exercises and operational training conducted in Colombia. Plan Colombia financed advanced human rights, international humanitarian law and operational law training for the military, as well as the establishment of a military Judge Advocate General (lawyer) corps and the Armed Forces School of Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law and Military Penal Justice. More than 3,000 military personnel have been trained since these programs began in 2001. The Embassy coordinated interagency human rights vetting of military units proposed for U.S. training and/or support.

Trafficking in persons (TIP) is a significant problem in Colombia. To address this problem, the United States funded an International Organization for Migration program to launch a call center allowing individuals who suspect a TIP scam to phone anonymously about suspicious overseas offers to work. Between July 31 and September 30, 2003, the center received 2,338 calls.

## CUBA

Cuba is a totalitarian state controlled by Fidel Castro, who exercises control over all aspects of life through the Communist Party and its affiliated mass organizations, the government bureaucracy and a formidable state security apparatus. The Government's poor human rights record worsened in 2003, and it continued to commit numerous serious abuses. The authorities routinely continued to harass, threaten, arbitrarily arrest, detain, imprison and defame human rights advocates and members of independent professional associations, including journalists, economists, doctors and lawyers, often with the goal of coercing them into leaving the country. The Government used internal and external exile against such persons. The Government denied political dissidents and human rights advocates due process and subjected them to unfair trials. Members of the security forces and prison officials continued to beat and abuse detainees and prisoners, including human rights activists. The Government failed to prosecute or sanction adequately members of the security forces and prison guards who committed abuses. Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening, and the Government restricted medical care to some prisoners as a method of control. The Government infringed on citizens' privacy rights. The Government restricted some religious activities but permitted others. Violence against women, especially domestic violence, and child prostitution were problems. Racial discrimination was a problem. The Government severely restricted worker rights, including the right to form independent unions.

During 2003, the Castro government responded to citizen efforts to bring about democratic reforms by arresting more than 75 activists, independent journalists and independent librarians, subjecting them to summary trials, and sentencing them to between 6 and 28 years imprisonment. These summary trials were marked by a lack of transparency and due process and drew



broad condemnation from foreign governments and non-governmental organizations. The defendants were falsely accused of being employees of and having received funds from the United States.

In the face of open hostility by the Cuban Government toward both the United States and pro-democracy activists, the United States has responded to the crackdown by greatly increasing high-level public statements on Cuba's human rights issues and encouraging other members of the international community to address them as well, and continuing moral and material support for Cuban civil society. Public outreach by U.S. officials was a particularly important demonstration of that moral support and of the U.S. Interests Section's determination to continue its efforts.

In the midst of the summary trials of the 75 dissidents, Chief of Mission James Cason spoke on Cuban civil society at the University of Miami, drawing attention to both the crackdown and the efforts of Cuban activists to endure despite repression. Secretary of State Powell and the State Department Spokesman issued press state-

ments demanding the release of the 75 victims of the crackdown and all other political prisoners. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega made public statements promoting human rights and a democratic transition in Cuba, including an October speech at the University of Miami in which he described both the continuing repression of the Castro regime and the efforts of the United States to promote a transition. Secretary Powell utilized his intervention at the Plenary of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States in June to insist that Cuba be held to the standards set by the Inter-American Democratic Charter. Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations Kim Holmes and Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner testified at a special hearing of the U.S. House International Relations Committee in April 2003.

These efforts culminated in President Bush's October 10 speech on Cuba at the White House, in which he firmly condemned the Cuban Government crackdown. The President went on to announce the formation of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, which will work to



accelerate the peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba and coordinate U.S. support to a free and democratic Cuban Government. These powerful public statements complemented parallel diplomatic efforts to generate broad international pressure for democratic change in Cuba, building upon the international criticism triggered by the Castro government's harsh repression of peaceful dissidents.

Within Cuba, the U.S. Interests Section continued its activities in support of civil society, despite the high level of harassment by the regime. Under its Enhanced Outreach Initiative, the Interests Section worked to promote democracy, human rights, free-market principles and the development of a civil society. This initiative focused on practical informational programs to promote democratic reforms and strengthen civil society, including projects to support broader and balanced access to objective information.

In addition, U.S. officers follow the cases of more than 350 prisoners of conscience, meet with the relatives of political prisoners as a demonstration of moral support and invite members of civil society to representational events, thereby underscoring the legitimacy of their efforts. On May 20, the Chief of Mission dedicated a monument to Cuban democracy activists at his residence, in an event attended by families of political prisoners. U.S. efforts to meet with Cubans throughout the country were hindered by a government ban on travel by U.S. officials outside of Havana and a prohibition on the commercial importation of books on democracy, economics, business, human rights and other topics.

Nevertheless, the United States successfully distributed news, books, radios, videos and Cuban political and historical literature (otherwise unavailable in Cuba). The U.S. Interests Section also offers Internet access to members of civil society. Officers in the Interests Section also worked to counter government propaganda by briefing visitors from the United States and other countries on local human rights conditions.

To strengthen domestic and international awareness of the human rights situation in Cuba, the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor produced a pamphlet on the lack of fundamental freedoms in Cuba entitled "The Dream Deferred – Fear and Freedom in Fidel's Cuba." Available in both English and Spanish, this succinct but comprehensive publication is in the process of dissemination both to U.S. embassies and human rights groups, and will be included in briefings and other public outreach.

Despite government claims of complete religious freedom in Cuba, religious activities remain heavily circumscribed. The U.S. Interests Section offers information to religious organizations on the island. Religious figures from a broad range of denominations, including those not officially registered by the Government, were invited to representational events in recognition of their important roles in society.

Labor rights are severely constrained, and the country's foremost independent labor organizers were jailed during the March 2003 crackdown. The United States worked to disseminate accurate information on international labor standards, as well as the 2003 report of the International Labor Organization's Committee on Freedom of Association citing Cuba's failure to meet internationally recognized labor standards.

The Cuban Government rejected efforts to engage on the issue of trafficking in persons, asserting the United States has no standing to address the problem of child prostitution in Cuba. Although lax oversight at some government-run tourist facilities has contributed to child prostitution, the Cuban Government has refused to recognize or discuss the phenomenon, publish statistics on child sexual abuse and prostitution or conduct public awareness campaigns demonstrating its commitment to combating this form of trafficking in persons.

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic enjoys a democratically elected government headed by Hipolito Mejia. Although there were some improvements in certain areas, the Government's human rights record was poor and serious problems remained, compounded by worsening economic conditions. Weak public institutions at times failed to protect fundamental human rights and enforce the rule of law. Trials were not expeditious, due to cumbersome judicial procedures and understaffed and underfunded justice system institutions without sufficient qualified and motivated judges. Police continued to use excessive force, and unlawful killings increased. Domestic violence continued to be a serious problem. To deal with these concerns, the U.S. human rights and democracy strategy aims to increase respect for human rights, strengthen institutions and encourage of free and fair presidential elections. In addition, the strategy addresses police reform, child labor issues, measures to combat corruption, respect for internationally recognized labor standards and programs to combat trafficking in persons.

U.S. officials routinely highlighted human rights concerns in public speeches. On various occasions throughout the year, Ambassador Hertell stressed the importance of human rights in public and private forums. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega, in an address to the Dominican Congress in December 2003, outlined U.S. policy concerns including human rights, the rule of law, trafficking in persons, building democratic institutions and the need for transparent elections. The U.S. Trade Representative and the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights also raised these priorities in meetings with Dominican government officials during their visits to the Dominican Republic. In addition, in June, the Dominican Republic actively participated in the Dialogue on Democracy hosted by Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky. In this Community of Democracies project, the

Dominican Republic worked with other democratic states from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean to discuss and develop inter- and intra-regional dialogues, institutions and strategies for the purpose of strengthening the global framework of democracy.

The United States engaged the Government on methods to reduce extrajudicial killings, torture and unwarranted violence by members of the National Police. A Human Rights and Democracy Fund grant awarded in September 2003 will allow for the creation of Police Abuse Reporting Centers in 2004. Through U.S. assistance to human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the National Police Institute of Human Dignity, citizens will be able to submit complaints of police abuse to three reporting centers, which will create an information system to register and channel complaints and profile human rights abuses for research purposes. As a result of this project, human rights violations committed by police will be reduced and more police officers will be sanctioned.

The United States invested more than \$500,000 to assist the National Police in developing a new curriculum for recruits and future officers at the Police Academies. The revised police curriculum includes training on police methods similar to U.S. standards. In compliance with the Leahy amendment, the Military Assistance and Advisory Group worked closely with the Armed Forces to vet military units for U.S. training and checked candidates with other embassy offices.

The United States promoted the rule of law in the Dominican Republic by supporting implementation of judicial reforms. U.S. technical assistance supported a survey of the cost of implementing the 2002 Criminal Procedures Code, which will be fully effective in September 2004. With U.S. assistance, in November 2003, the Supreme Court of Justice issued several resolutions requiring the National Police to obtain an arrest warrant from a competent judicial authority before arresting or detaining a suspect, except for persons

caught in the act of committing a crime. Also in November, the Attorney General's office issued a resolution requiring that a defendant have counsel at all phases of criminal proceedings and that police and prosecutors inform defendants of their rights upon arrest.

U.S. technical assistance and training also strengthened the efficiency and effectiveness of the judicial system. To reduce the backlog of pending cases, the United States assisted in creating a public defense program whereby the Government appointed 14 public defenders and two investigators and processed 1,052 cases in 2003. The United States provided technical assistance to the Prosecutorial School for the development of a Public Ministry Career Statute. The statute, published in July 2003, established a professional mechanism for selecting attorneys appointed through a civil service system.

In May and September 2003, the United States provided training on prosecuting money-laundering cases. Funding from the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development Assistance Training provided training for 60 Dominican judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers.

To encourage participatory democratic practices within political parties, the United States sponsored Dominican participation in civic education and exchange programs in the United States. In February and March 2003, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), in partnership with the National Democratic Institute, funded five young community activists who attended a seminar in Washington on political party leadership. Upon their return to the Dominican Republic, the participants implemented local projects to bolster democratic processes within their respective parties. The United States also funded a program to promote women's participation in politics. The program focused on methods to encourage women as voters and as candidates for office.

The Embassy was deeply engaged in promoting democracy. The United States is seeking to fund international election observers through the Organization of American States to ensure transparent, fair elections in May 2004. Through U.S. assistance to NGO partners, 6,000 Dominican volunteers were also selected and trained to observe the elections.

To address the reported upsurge in domestic violence, the United States sponsored a project to prevent domestic and gender-based violence in the Dominican Republic. USAID provided technical assistance to help raise public awareness about the issue. Once fully implemented, the project will assist the Women's Secretariat to develop guidelines for accreditation and regulation of model women's shelters. The United States also sponsored training in the United States for Dominican women with disabilities.

Throughout the year the United States continued to encourage strong government support for efforts to eliminate child labor, dedicating more than \$3 million over a five-year period to multi-year programs. A U.S. Labor Department-funded project targeted the worst forms of child labor in the sex industry, tomato-producing provinces, coffee growing areas and hazardous agriculture provinces. U.S. funding for these programs also included an educational component to sensitize parents and school-age children to the physical and sociological risks of child labor and to promote school attendance. As a result of U.S. assistance, in September the Ministry of Labor declared one of the targeted areas as "free of child labor."

The United States engaged the Government in a robust campaign to combat trafficking in persons. USAID funded an NGO partner to help draft comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation, which was passed by the Dominican Congress in July and signed into law by President Mejia in August 2003. In addition, USAID missions in the Dominican Republic and Haiti received a grant to



study the problem of Haitian children trafficked to the Dominican Republic. The United States also provided technical support to a newly created trafficking unit at the National Police. At the Embassy's urging, a trafficking unit was created in the Attorney General's office. Additionally, the United States funded several training courses for National Police members, prosecutors and judges on implementing the new law against trafficking in persons. In September 2003, a grant was approved to develop a curriculum at the USAID-supported Judicial School to improve processing of trafficking in persons cases. The United States continued to meet with key officials to encourage prosecution of traffickers.

## ECUADOR

Although Ecuador enjoys a democratically elected government that generally respects human rights, its weak government institutions, widespread corruption and limited resources contributed to human rights abuses. There were credible reports that security forces committed killings using unwarranted lethal force; however, the number of killings by security forces declined significantly in 2003 and members of the security forces faced prosecution and prison sentences for some violations. Police tortured and otherwise

mistreated prisoners and detainees. Prison conditions remained poor. Persons were subject to arbitrary arrest, and nearly half of the detainees in jail had not been sentenced formally. Violence and pervasive discrimination against women, indigenous people and Afro-Ecuadorians remained problems. Child labor remained a problem.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy aims to help strengthen the judicial system and the rule of law, promote human rights education, improve the media's effectiveness, combat the use of child labor and potential trafficking in persons, and assist Colombian refugees. In February 2003, President Bush discussed with President Lucio Gutiérrez a broad range of bilateral issues including the shared commitment to democracy, good governance and protection of the human rights of migrants. U.S. officials advocated respect for democratic institutions and stronger workers' rights.

The judicial system of Ecuador is plagued by inefficiency and corruption that undermines the rule of law and hinders speedy and fair trials; the United States supports a number of projects to strengthen judicial effectiveness and fight corruption. Judicial reform programs funded through



the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided approximately \$2 million to help train police, prosecutors and judges in the proper application of Code of Criminal Procedures, including investigations, evidence handling, proper conduct of trials and internal controls against corruption and malfeasance. The United States continues its support for Gutiérrez's anti-corruption campaign.

With U.S. assistance, Ecuador has established its first national inter-institutional commission to advance criminal justice reform, which has already set priorities for reforming the Code of Criminal Procedures and training justice workers. The United States also provided training in oral procedures for 500 Ecuadorian judges and prosecutors. To strengthen an inadequate public defense service, USAID provided funding of more than \$100,000 to expand citizens' access to justice, especially that of minor children and other members of vulnerable populations.

A wide range of U.S. programs support Ecuador's democratic institutions, and throughout the year the Ambassador, other embassy officials and visiting high-level U.S. officials publicly advocated respect for those institutions and constitutional processes. The United States helped the Government establish a new anti-corruption system promoting greater transparency in government contracting and greater public sector disclosure, and sponsored Ecuadorian participants in programs providing in-depth looks at the administration of justice, responsible policing, anti-corruption and grass roots democracy in the United States. U.S. journalism experts were brought to Ecuador to teach local members of the media techniques for effective and professional investigative journalism. In celebration of International Human Rights Day, the Embassy designed and implemented an innovative educational outreach program around the concept of individual liberty, one that reached students across the country. The Embassy also distributed posters of the U.S. Bill of Rights in English, Spanish and Kichwa, the most common language among indigenous in Ecuador. USAID strengthened local government effectiveness and transparency in 15 municipalities, including the establishment of citizen audit committees to oversee implementation of local assistance projects.

Spearheaded by SOUTHCOM Commander General James T. Hill, military-to-military contacts focused on promotion of fundamental human rights and humanitarian outreach including medical assistance and peacekeeper exercises. The Embassy coordinated interagency human rights' vetting of military units proposed for U.S. training and/or support, and human rights training was integrated into all U.S.-supported military exercises and operational training conducted in the country.

USAID established two programs to fight sexual and domestic violence against women and children. A program in Ecuador's five most populous provinces created institutional oversight mechanisms of legal processes in sexual crime

cases to improve transparency in prosecutions, while in Quito a domestic violence and gender program worked to improve the city's monitoring of domestic violence cases.

The U.S. Labor Department supported government efforts to combat child labor, providing more than \$2 million to the International Labor Organization for 2003-2006 programs to combat the worst forms of child labor in Ecuador, through projects in the agriculture and construction sectors and targeting the commercial sexual exploitation of minors. The United States advocated the strengthening of Ecuador's labor laws, including reform of Ecuador's outdated labor code to ensure the right of association without fear of retribution, and requested action by the Government in specific labor rights cases. In response to U.S. requests, for example, the Government formed an independent commission that investigated the Government's response to a 2002 strike by banana workers.

In addition to working against the worst forms of child labor, the United States repeatedly raised with Ecuadorian officials the need for coordinated action against the broader problem of trafficking in persons. Potential trafficking in persons was targeted through assistance to government efforts to dismantle alien smuggling organizations, where cooperation between U.S. and Ecuadorian officials led to the arrest of several alien smugglers. The United States also provided equipment for airports and border crossings to allow authorities to better monitor travelers.

The number of Colombians applying for refugee status in Ecuador almost doubled between 2002 and 2003. To help this vulnerable population, the United States provided funding to the UN High Commission for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, the American Red Cross and the Pan American Health Organization to support refugee centers and services for Colombians seeking refuge in Ecuador.

## GUATEMALA

Guatemala held open and transparent elections in November and December of 2003. While there have been major advances in human rights since the end of the civil conflict and signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, state institutions charged with enforcing the rule of law remain weak and serious human rights problems persist. There were credible reports of killings by individuals linked to security forces and of politically motivated killings by non-state actors. Security forces kidnapped, tortured, abused and mistreated suspects and detainees. Arbitrary arrest and lengthy pretrial detentions were problems. Judges and other law enforcement officials were subjected to intimidation and corruption. Impunity was pervasive, although efforts to reform the judiciary continued. Members of the media were targets of attacks, threats and intimidation. Attacks on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights workers by unidentified persons decreased during the year.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy aims to encourage and support the new Government's efforts to strengthen state institutions, civil society groups promoting human rights and an innovative UN proposal to investigate clandestine groups believed to be involved in attacks on human rights workers.

U.S. officials, including Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky and Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Roger Noriega, highlighted human rights concerns during meetings with President Alfonso Portillo, members of Congress and other high-level officials. Florida Governor Jeb Bush also raised human rights with President Oscar Berger during the inaugural visit. The Embassy expressed interest in key cases to authorities investigating human rights abuses during the year. Authorities were generally cooperative and in several cases shifted resources to



investigate cases of particular concern. The Ambassador also attended important human rights trials and publicly promoted human rights and its defenders on several occasions. From its genesis as a proposal from civil society, the Ambassador has championed the proposed UN Commission to Investigate Clandestine Groups (CICIACS). The United States provided support to NGOs that formed a “Coalition in Favor of CICIACS,” and an agreement was signed between the United Nations and the Government to create the CICIACS on January 7, 2004. The Commission will use international experts to investigate and prosecute cases involving human rights abuses, organized crime, official corruption and narcotics trafficking in Guatemalan courts. It awaits Congressional approval and Constitutional Court review.

Following the release of a March 2003 MINUGUA report documenting the use of torture by state agents against three narco-traffickers in Rio Hondo, the Ambassador urged the Minister of Government and the Minister of Defense to investigate the allegations and punish any Government officers found to be responsible. The ministers

agreed to take measures to prevent any recurrence of torture, but no known action was taken to sanction individuals responsible for this incident.

The United States provided a total of \$2.8 million and fielded approximately 40 official observers under the Organization of American States’ Electoral Observation Mission for the November and December 2003 rounds of the general election. The United States is now considering providing technical support to the new Congress and assistance for the negotiation of electoral reforms to increase voter participation.

The United States continued to support (\$4.2 million over three years) grassroots human rights promotion, including training local human rights promoters, media campaigns, targeted support for the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (limited training and equipment) and support for the Human Rights Movement, a coalition of human rights NGOs. A key Movement leader, Frank LaRue, was appointed by President Berger to lead the Presidential Human Rights Commission in January 2004. It is encouraging



that since 1996 civil society has blossomed in Guatemala and is now a major contributor to the new Government's human rights policies. Under this program, the United States also supported with \$250,000 a media and NGO campaign to raise public awareness of the recommendations of the Historical Clarification Commission, five years after it issued its report. Since 1999, the United States has provided \$4.3 million to fund exhumations of clandestine cemeteries dating to the civil conflict and mental health assistance for victims. The United States also funded negotiations between civil society and the Government to create a National Reparations Plan, which was established to compensate victims of the civil conflict.

To improve the country's judicial system, the United States funded the expansion of a network of Justice Centers to improve access to justice and modernize the justice sector by implementing oral debate in pre-trial hearings and administrative reforms to promote efficiency and transparency in judicial operations. The United States provided material support to the Guatemalan Public Ministry's Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Human Rights Workers. The Embassy sent journalists, government officials and civil society leaders on International Visitor programs in 2003 to study human rights, democracy and investigative journalism.

In 2003, the U.S. Labor Department announced a four-year, \$6.7 million regional project to promote labor rights education and strengthen labor inspectorates in Central America. The United States negotiated the U.S.-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with Central American nations which incorporated labor rights protections. If ratified, the CAFTA will supersede existing labor condition regulations under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). An inter-agency U.S. delegation conducted bilateral labor consultations in May; the U.S. Trade Representative held hearings on open GSP labor petitions in October. In all these exchanges, U.S. officials expressed concern about the need for the

Government of Guatemala to fully investigate past violence against trade union leaders, reform its labor justice system and reinstate workers illegally fired for unionizing activities. In November, the Embassy expressed concern to the Government over the potential for anti-union violence at a maquila where a new union, the third in the sector, had been organized. The Government responded quickly and violence was avoided. The Government successfully encouraged the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements at the Choi Shin/Cimatextiles plants, which became the first two such agreements to take effect in this sector.

The United States supported the creation of a Presidential Commission against Racism and Discrimination Against Indigenous Groups in 2002. The United States also supported a National Indigenous Congress held in August 2003, which promoted indigenous political participation through the creation of a National Indigenous Assembly, currently in formation. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) participates in a donor dialogue on indigenous issues to prevent duplication of efforts.

To foster more professional security forces and reduce human rights abuses, the Embassy and SOUTHCOM encouraged the Defense Ministry to incorporate human rights training into the Army's Civil Affairs curriculum. Partly as a result, the Minister of Defense opened a human rights office in June 2003 and provided it with permanent staff. Members of SOUTHCOM's Human Rights Division visited Guatemala in February 2004 and met with high-ranking Guatemalan officials, including the Minister of Defense, to discuss the Guatemalan military's formal commitment to implement a regional human rights initiative. In 2004, USAID will provide \$600,000 to the UN Development Program to strengthen civilian-military relations.

Guatemala was rated a Tier II country in the State Department's 2003 Trafficking in Persons (TIP)

Report to Congress. U.S. officials briefed the Government on the implications of the report in July 2003, and urged the Government to step up its efforts to prevent, prosecute and punish this crime. In response, the Government formed an inter-institutional group, composed of ministries, Congress, the Attorney and Solicitor General's Offices and the judiciary, to better coordinate these efforts. At the Embassy's urging, the Attorney General authorized the creation in 2004 of a new anti-TIP prosecution unit in the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Women. The United States worked closely with Guatemalan immigration officials to track down victims of trafficking in brothels in and near the capital. Several underage victims were found, and arrests were made of traffickers that remain to be prosecuted. The Embassy has urged the Government to stiffen sanctions against traffickers. The United States has supported an NGO providing job training to victims of trafficking and is considering supporting a regional victim support network of NGOs.

## HAITI

The political impasse and violence rising out of controversial elections in 2000 continued to undermine democracy and respect for human rights in Haiti during 2003. The Government's human rights record remained poor, with political and civil officials implicated in serious abuses. There were credible reports of extrajudicial killings by members of the Haitian National Police (HNP). Police officers used excessive – and sometimes deadly – force in making arrests or controlling demonstrations and were rarely punished for such acts. Attacks on and threats to journalists and political dissenters by members of Popular Organizations and by supporters of the President's party, Fanmi Lavalas, increased. Prison conditions remained poor, and prisoners with valid release orders continued to be held in defiance of these orders. Legal impunity remained a major problem, and police and judicial officials often failed to respect legal provisions or pursue and prosecute suspected violators. Child abuse, violence and societal discrimination

against women remained problems. Internal trafficking of children and child domestic labor remained a problem. Endemic corruption, a deteriorating judiciary and worsening economic and social conditions exacerbated this situation.

In this difficult political environment, U.S. efforts in 2003 focused on promoting the rule of law (including steps to combat the impunity enjoyed by human rights violators), fostering an environment where Haitian citizens know and exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities, strengthening local capacity to monitor human rights situations and protect victims and encouraging government action to combat the trafficking of children.

In the first two months of 2004, escalating tension between opposition demonstrators and pro-Aristide gangs, at times with the support of the HNP, resulted in numerous deaths. On January 31 President Jean-Bertrand Aristide accepted CARICOM's prior action plan, committing the Government to a number of measures necessary to create a climate of security for elections. Aristide failed to take any steps to implement the prior action plan, despite numerous assurances that he was committed to its implementation. Moreover, Aristide's government continued to condone and sometimes participate in human rights abuses, including violent suppression of legitimate and peaceful dissent. Anti-government armed rebels mounted a major insurgency in early February, ultimately resulting in Aristide's resignation and departure from Haiti on February 29, 2004. U.S. human rights and democracy strategy following these events has supported the processes laid out in UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1529 and CARICOM's prior action plan.

Among other actions, UNSC Resolution 1529 authorizes immediate deployment of a Multinational Interim Force (MIF) to restore order in Haiti and facilitate provision of humanitarian assistance, supports establishment of condi-

tions allowing the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS) and other international organizations to help the Haitian people, and mandates coordination with the OAS Special Mission and UN Special Adviser on Haiti to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian situation. The MIF now numbers approximately 2,500, more than half of which is composed of U.S. forces.

In an effort to expedite implementation of the prior action plan following Aristide's departure, the United States has formed an interagency group to coordinate rapid response efforts to reconstruct democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Haiti. Given the security and political situation on the ground, initial focus will be on reconstructing the criminal justice system (including police, judges, prosecutors and prisons), disarmament of all nongovernmental forces, supporting the interim Government, restoring now-defunct local governments, providing technical and material support to establish a Central Electoral Committee, supporting human rights organizations, and supporting reconciliation, reconstruction and social reintegration efforts. Additional medium-term projects will include election observation assistance, political party development, legislative reform and decentralization.

During 2003, embassy officials promoted the rule of law in Haiti through frequent high-level meetings and public statements that emphasized the importance of an independent judiciary and police enforcement of court orders, the arrest of criminals with outstanding warrants and the release of those still in detention despite valid release orders. In public statements, Ambassador Foley constantly condemned politically motivated violence, stressed the importance of general respect for the human rights of all Haitians and urged the Government to protect its citizens' right to demonstrate peacefully. Through the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the United States also conducted semi-

nars and workshops for more than 40 civil society organizations advocating the rule of law and judicial independence during the year. Among other benefits, this program resulted in the formation of a new federation of bar associations. Partnering with IFES, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided funding to a local human rights organization, the Committee of Lawyers for the Respect of Individual Liberty, to create a telephone hotline to document cases of human rights abuses.

Through the International Visitor (IV) Program, the Embassy sent more than 50 attorneys, civil society leaders, journalists, scholars, government officials and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives from Haiti to attend seminars in the United States on policy development, human rights practices and advocacy, women's rights and conflict resolution. An estimated 800 Haitians benefited from follow-on programs implemented by IV participants, including a weeklong series of lectures on human rights and a two-day forum on conflict resolution that drew crowds of civil society representatives from one of the poorest and most violent slums in Haiti.

Ongoing expressions of U.S. support for the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms included the mission's press conference and public delivery of the State Department's Country Report on Human Rights Practices to leaders of prominent human rights NGOs. Embassy officers also visited jailed human rights and student activists to press for their release in addition to the homes of victims of abuse to obtain personal accounts of human rights violations.

Working through the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, the United States provided training for political parties across the spectrum and for Haitian NGOs to strengthen political development. Also, the United States funded training to civil society groups, including student organizations and women's groups. The United States funded a

civic action website “Haiti – Get Involved,” training on political opinion polling and the founding of a resource center to document and disseminate anti-corruption policies and the best practices of state and private entities.

Child labor in Haiti, especially internal and external trafficking of children as domestic workers or “restaveks,” remained a U.S. focus in 2003. Embassy officials worked with the Government to address this problem, which led to the passage of national legislation prohibiting child trafficking and the introduction of a law prohibiting trafficking of all persons. Mission collaboration with the Government also led to the creation of a specialized police unit, the Brigade for the Protection of Minors, which was designed to investigate, arrest and prosecute cases of suspected child trafficking. USAID provided more than \$700,000 in funding to the Pan-American Development Foundation to implement an anti-trafficking program to shore up government efforts.

## HONDURAS

President Ricardo Maduro, elected in November 2001 elections that domestic and international observers judged to meet international standards, heads Honduras’ constitutional Government. The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, but there were serious problems in some areas. Members of the police were accused of committing extrajudicial killings. Human rights groups accused former security force officials and the business community of colluding to organize “death squads” – private and vigilante security forces that are believed to have committed a number of extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, particularly of youth.

Administration of justice was problematic due to an inefficient, understaffed and underfunded police force, Public Ministry (prosecutors) and judiciary, all of whom were subject to corruption and political influence. There was considerable impunity for members of the economic, military and official elites. Prison conditions remained

harsh, and detainees often did not receive due process. Other human rights problems included violence and discrimination against women and discrimination against indigenous people. The Government did not effectively enforce all labor laws and child labor remained a serious problem. Honduras is a source and transit country for trafficking in persons, including victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy aims to strengthen respect for human rights and the rule of law, promote transparency and combat child labor and trafficking. U.S. officials and public diplomacy outreach have publicly highlighted the need for improvements in human rights conditions in Honduras, particularly the rule of law and administration of justice. Secretary of State Powell discussed human rights and democracy issues during his meetings with senior Honduran government officials in Tegucigalpa on November 4, 2003, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Michael Kozak raised serious concerns over extrajudicial killings and trafficking in persons during his November consultations with senior officials in Tegucigalpa. The Embassy also worked privately with Honduran government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions and other organizations to encourage key reforms and discuss areas of particular concern. The Embassy also sent various civil society leaders and government officials on International Visitor programs in 2003 and 2004, on topics such as the administration of justice and the rule of law, anti-corruption, civil society and democracy, and journalism.

The Embassy has dedicated \$100,000 in counternarcotics assistance funding from the State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) to support the “Si Se Puede” government program for youth at risk. Coordinated by the Vice President’s office and implemented with the assistance of NGOs, police, community leaders and teachers, this proj-

ect works in vulnerable communities to discourage drug use and gang membership. Many of the youth in this program are at risk of becoming victims of violence if they join gangs.

Embassy human rights and democracy promotion efforts focused mainly on the rule of law and administration of justice, with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) providing \$3.1 million in 2003 to support administration of justice reform efforts. Significant assistance over the last several years has been spent in the development and implementation of a new Criminal Procedure Code, which introduced oral, adversarial trials, more effective and transparent procedures and greater protections for individual rights. Through USAID, the United States also funded the training and distribution of materials for judges, prosecutors, public defenders and forensics experts. U.S.-funded pilot courts in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula were able to complete an impressive total of 373 trials and closed another 4,905 cases through administrative means. The Supreme Court created a “purging unit” with U.S. funding that worked to clear backlogged cases dating before implementation of the new code, and has already reduced the backlog from 125,000 to 49,000 pending cases. The Honduran Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations, working with USAID assistance, has played a dynamic role in promoting broader and more effective civil society participation in justice sector reforms and monitoring, and in exercising oversight of the public policy process. To foster a more professional police force and reduce human rights abuses, the Embassy has also provided \$200,000 to support a Police Internal Affairs Office for three years. This office investigates complaints, including those from private citizens, and recommends appropriate actions ranging from administrative disciplinary action to criminal charges for substantiated complaints.

A coordinated effort to support transparency and anti-corruption efforts by the Government has received \$600,000 in U.S. funding for the Fiscal

Year (FY) 2004 implementation period.

USAID’s program activities include capacity-building for the Government’s Superior Audit Institution, the development and implementation of a Transparency and Anti-Corruption Public Awareness Campaign, the strengthening of independent national and local anti-corruption organizations and support to civil society social auditing efforts to provide oversight and monitoring of the use of public funds. The Embassy has encouraged the Government, including the Attorney General’s office, to vigorously pursue cases of corruption and particularly those involving government officials.

With national and municipal elections set for 2005, the United States continued to promote democracy through the development of transparent and accountable democratic institutions. USAID programs to increase the capacity for basic service delivery by municipalities and promote decentralization, including technical assistance to the Honduran Association of



Municipalities, received \$3 million in funding during FY 2003. USAID supported its partner, the Foundation for Municipal Development, in the capacity building of 46 municipal governments. In many cases, these projects demonstrated a positive correlation between the transparency and accountability with which municipal governments are being administered and the growing confidence that citizens have in the performance of their local governments, thereby strengthening public faith in their democratic governance and democratic processes.

Particularly important, given the recently signed U.S.-Central America Free Trade Agreement, U.S. officials have repeatedly engaged government, private sector and labor union officials on the importance of enforcing labor law and ensuring that core labor rights are protected. The U.S. Department of Labor funded a number of longer-term regional projects that benefited Honduras, including efforts to strengthen labor systems in Central America (“Cumple y Gana,” \$6.75 million in 2003-2007), promote freedom of association, collective bargaining and industrial relations for Central America (RELACENTRO project, \$1.87 million in 2001-2004), as well as a regional occupational safety and health project (CERSSO, \$6.6 million from August 2000 to March 2004). A \$6.3 million USAID-funded regional Labor Component (2002-2007) supports efforts to improve the functioning of regional labor markets while strengthening the protection of core labor standards through the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration. In addition, USAID provided \$8 million bilaterally and \$20 million regionally for other trade-related capacity building.

In compliance with the Leahy amendment and in coordination with SOUTHCOM’s regional emphasis on human rights and humanitarian outreach, the U.S. Military Group worked closely with the Ministry of Defense to vet military units for U.S. training and promote respect for human rights. Members of the Honduran military on visitor exchanges met with U.S. officials in

Washington to discuss civil-military relations and the importance of human rights and rule of law. Child labor remains a significant problem in Honduras. From 1995 to 2003, the United States provided more than \$37 million to the International Labor Organization’s International Program for the Eradication of Child Labor and other organizations, funding projects for Central America and the Dominican Republic to combat and gather information on the worst forms of child labor, including the sexual exploitation of children and their use in melon and coffee production.

Honduras is a source and transit country for trafficking in persons (TIP) for sexual and labor exploitation. Most victims are young women and girls, many of whom are trafficked to Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Mexico, the United States and Canada. Women and children are also trafficked internally, most often from rural to urban settings. The Embassy brought in a U.S. NGO expert and a State Department official as keynote speakers at government-organized seminars on the prevention and eradication of commercial sexual exploitation of children and trafficking in women and children. Through \$350,000 in INL Police Assistance funding, the Embassy supports efforts by the Frontier Police to prevent and interdict the transportation of illegal immigrants and the trafficking of persons. Additional funding will provide U.S.-implemented training in 2004 for Honduran police and prosecutors investigating and prosecuting trafficking in persons.

## JAMAICA

Jamaica has a mixed human rights record, and successive governments have struggled to respond to the high rate of crime, violence and drug trafficking with strong police action. Police shootings are frequent, especially in the course of apprehending suspects. In October 2003, the UN Special Rapporteur for extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions reported to the UN Commission on Human Rights that extrajudicial

executions by the police had occurred and that the legal system was not equipped to handle such cases. U.S. officials work closely with the Jamaican Government and civil society to emphasize the need for improvements and to increase Jamaica's ability to ensure the security and the human rights of its citizens. The U.S. strategy is to build capacity within the police and military and address the rights of children and persons living with HIV/AIDS.

In 2001, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) released a study that examined ways for Jamaica to reduce its homicide rate. The report contained 83 separate recommendations that culminated in a plan of action for improving the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF). The PERF recommendations called for reforms at all levels of the police force, but particularly emphasized the need for administrative changes. The JCF has accepted all but two of the PERF's recommendations.

To assist Jamaica in building a more professional police force, the United States provided \$500,000 to support a Law Enforcement Development Advisor position (LEDA) within the JCF. The LEDA is tasked with providing strategic policy advice to assist the JCF with implementation of the PERF recommendations. Working through the office of the JCF Commissioner, the LEDA has submitted recommendations on how to restructure and reform the police and establish a system of accountability and transparency, including stronger internal affairs and personnel practices. In addition, the Commissioner will draft a Code of Conduct for police officers, incorporating the principles of human rights and democracy into each officer's daily routine. Through a series of recommendations, the LEDA is attempting to create a police force that is proactive, productive and welcomed throughout Jamaica. In December 2003, the JCF instituted a new policy on officers' use of deadly force. Under the new policy, supervisors will be held responsible if their subordinates use force in an unlawful way and do not take all possible meas-

ures to prevent such incidents. The new policy conforms to a series of suggestions by the LEDA. Finally, using the expertise of the LEDA, the United States is seeking to change the perception of the police as a hostile force in the community and to foster organizational change from which both citizens and officers will benefit.

In 2002, the Narcotics Affairs Section provided the JCF with firing simulators, which are now installed at the JCF training academy as part of the police-training program. The simulators use computer programs to create real-life scenarios encountered by police officers and measure their ability to respond appropriately while improving their discretionary shooting methods.

On the community level, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is providing a \$3.5 million grant to develop a community-based anti-crime program in the once-embattled Grants Pen neighborhood of Kingston. The grant provides the JCF with training in community policing and confidence-building. Local police are being taught methods to promote safe encounters with citizens, and community members are receiving training in mentoring and problem solving.

Jamaican human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work in a variety of areas to educate and protect citizens from abuses. With U.S. assistance, the Independent Jamaica Council for Human Rights developed, produced and distributed 1,000 human rights coloring books for use in Jamaican primary schools. The books list ten inherent rights and their corresponding responsibilities. Both rights and responsibilities are illustrated and allow primary educators to incorporate human rights into a school's curriculum.

In an effort to strengthen the capacity of the legal system, USAID provided 23 case management systems to Jamaican courts. These systems greatly increase the ability of the local judiciary to hear cases. Other projects increased the level of training for court reporters in an effort to increase



the efficiency of record taking and storage. The United States provided funding to establish an online database of all Jamaican laws, which serves as a valuable reference point for citizens requiring legal information and increases their access to government.

In 2003, the Military Liaison Office spent approximately \$661,000 on its International Military Education and Training Program, sending some 50 members of the Jamaica Defense Force (JDF) to the United States to receive training. Both JDF officers and enlisted personnel participate in these programs, which include human rights instruction. This training prepares enlisted personnel who assist local police units in patrolling high crime areas of downtown Kingston, and includes units on basic leadership, due process, civilian control

of the military and the role of the military in a democratic society. Courses aimed at senior military officers highlight the impact of the rule of law on human rights as well as how to incorporate human rights considerations into the planning and conduct of military operations. Cooperation between the Jamaican and U.S. militaries, particularly the Embassy's provision of training and supplies in disaster management and preparedness and emergency medical services, has also yielded benefits to local communities in Jamaica.

Embassy officials remain in dialogue with Jamaican officials and civil society regarding respect for the rights of women, children and people with disabilities. Through the Ambassador's Fund for HIV/AIDS, the Embassy awarded grants to nine Jamaican non-profit organizations to help reduce discrimination against persons living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Among the projects was a training session for student nurses and health care professionals working with people living with AIDS. Another project involved a community radio station, which helped to increase sensitivity toward AIDS patients by increasing the station programming dedicated to HIV/AIDS topics to five hours per week.

As the Jamaican Parliament began consideration of the Child Care and Protection Act, embassy officials met with relevant government ministries, NGOs and parliamentarians to push for strong protections for vulnerable youth. Conversations focused on a clause of the bill prohibiting the trafficking or sale of minors. Embassy officials met individually with members of the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee considering the bill to highlight the importance of combating trafficking. They also attended committee meetings, networking with NGOs and representatives of local and international organizations to highlight the need for strong enforcement mechanisms against child traffickers. Members of the Committee agreed to substantial increases in the penalties for trafficking in minors, thereby sending a strong message to the public that the



Jamaican Government would punish those guilty of exploiting the most vulnerable members of society. U.S. officials press for vigorous enforcement of the laws against trafficking, encouraging Jamaican authorities to investigate cases and prosecute offenders.

In cooperation with the Jamaican Government and the International Organization for Migration, the Embassy is in the final stages of implementing an international entry/exit system, which will assist in the battle against trafficking in persons. This system, which is scheduled to begin processing passengers in Spring 2004, will enable the Jamaican Government to monitor international arrivals and departures and allow local and international law enforcement agencies to examine travel patterns to determine trends pertaining to trafficking in persons. By analyzing entry/exit data, the Government will be equipped to focus its efforts, saving time and resources in the process. The project also includes important training components, including seminars on human trafficking. By combining infrastructure with training, the Embassy is increasing Jamaica's awareness of trafficking and providing officers and officials the tools to combat the problem.

## PERU

Emerging from a decade of authoritarian government, Peru is engaged in a process of democratic transformation. President Alejandro Toledo has affirmed that strengthening democracy and protecting human rights are among his top priorities, and the human rights situation has continued to improve under the present Government. There is general respect for press freedom, an increasingly important role for civil society and a commitment from the Government to reform to judiciary, police and military. Nonetheless, judicial inefficiency and corruption, problems with public security forces and poor prison conditions contributed to human rights abuses. Police were accused of unwarranted killings and abuse of detainees. There continued to be allegations of

torture and abuse of military recruits and of prisoners. Impunity for past crimes remained a problem, and security forces sometimes harassed victims or other witnesses to keep them from filing charges. Violence against women and children and discrimination against persons with disabilities, indigenous people and racial and ethnic minorities continued. Labor advocates argued that labor laws restricted collective bargaining rights; however, a 2002 law addressed some of these problems. Child labor remained a serious problem in the informal sector. Trafficking in persons was a problem. Perhaps even more dangerous is a growing public perception that democracy has not delivered.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy in Peru is to promote decentralization and judicial



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reforms and to strengthen the efficiency and credibility of the national Congress in coordination with broader regional efforts as part of the Andean Regional Initiative. The United States has supported the work of Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), efforts to fight child labor and child sexual exploitation and programs to promote greater awareness of democracy for and political participation by historically marginalized groups. The Embassy also continued to sponsor an innovative public schools program promoting a culture of lawfulness as well as ongoing democracy and anti-corruption discussions that included both government and civil society participants.

During June meetings with President Toledo and other officials, the Special Envoy for Western Hemisphere Initiatives urged continuing efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and processes, cited the importance of press freedom and encouraged continued support to anti-corruption initiatives. Embassy officials and high-level delegations, including Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Michael Kozak in January 2004, continue to raise these and other human rights issues both in public statements and private discussions with government officials and civil society.

In addition, in June, Peru actively participated in the Dialogue on Democracy hosted by Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky. In this Community of Democracies project, Peru worked with other democratic nations from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Peru worked with other democratic states from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean to discuss and develop inter- and intra-regional dialogues, institutions and strategies for the purpose of strengthening the global framework of democracy.

Over a five-year period, the United States will dedicate \$20 million to judicial sector reform, conditioned on political performance and continued political will. The election of a new, pro-

reform Supreme Court president in January 2003 provided a positive signal of progress. The United States provides technical assistance to a wide range of democratic institutions including the judiciary, the Congress, the Ministry of Justice, the National Judicial Council and the Judicial Academy. Implementation began with the creation of an improved examination process for permanent judicial appointments, an assessment to reduce caseload in the Lima courts and establishment of an oversight program to evaluate judicial performance.

A \$2.1 million U.S. program to promote efficiency through internal reforms in the National Congress began in 2003, and has already helped reduce the number of congressional committees, establish a center for parliamentary research in Congress and provide direct technical assistance to congressional commissions debating essential reforms and working on draft legislation to reform the justice sector and the penal system, strengthen the Congressional Ethics Commission and establish new laws for municipalities and promote decentralization.

Regional/municipal elections in late 2002 led to the creation of new regional governments in January, with newly elected mayors – many in office for the first time – assuming their positions at the same time. Throughout 2003 and early 2004, the United States provided technical assistance and support to these newly elected officials, including critical training in essential functions such as budget preparation and responsible management of social programs newly transferred to the regions by the central government. U.S. assistance in the installation of a standard nationwide financial management system should lead to a more transparent, uniform budgetary process throughout the Government.

In addition to key structural reforms, Peru needs to come to terms with its violent, anti-democratic past in order to mature as a democracy. To this end, the United States was the largest single donor to Peru's TRC, providing more than \$2



million to the Commission and to assist victims. Modeled on similar commissions that had worked successfully in other countries undergoing transitions from dictatorship to democracy, the TRC analyzed the political, social and cultural conditions that fostered an era of violence between May 1980 and November 2000. It submitted its report to President Toledo in August and is turning over the names of alleged human rights violators for investigation.

The Commission found that more than 69,000 Peruvians had lost their lives during this 20-year period, the vast majority Quechua-speaking indigenous persons from rural areas, and identified the Maoist guerrilla group Sendero Luminoso as most responsible for the violence and the deaths of the greatest number of innocents. At the same time, the report recognized that Peru's vast social and cultural divisions – combined with weak democracy and underdeveloped institutions – had left society vulnerable to a movement like Sendero and the violent, sometimes excessive, counter-response by some members of the military. U.S. assistance programs are designed to respond to many of the recommendations on institutional reforms in this report.

President Toledo embraced the report and formally apologized to the victims of the violence in a December 9 speech, announcing a \$814 million “Peace and Development Plan” for those regions most affected by the violence and pledging educational outreach and the creation of a multi-sectoral committee to monitor ongoing efforts to reconcile citizens and heal the vast social and cultural gulfs that had led to the rise of Sendero. Compensation for victims and their families through free education, low-cost housing and psychological support was also offered.

The United States promoted additional structural reforms through several initiatives. A model curriculum for junior high students, implemented in coordination with the Ministry of Education and based on living within a culture of lawfulness, is now in its third year. The United States worked to support ongoing restructuring of the police force, funding the establishment and training of a police Internal Affairs Group to investigate allegations of corruption and human rights violations as well as the human rights training of police officers, including training in non-lethal crowd control. All U.S.-Peru military training missions incorporated human rights training, and military

and police units proposed for U.S. training and/or support received thorough interagency reviews consistent with Leahy legislation.

Outreach and public awareness programs robustly supported structural reform efforts in Peru, including International Visitor programs focused on decentralization, journalism, the media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). U.S. grants, speakers and public video conferences with U.S. and Peruvian experts promoted better public awareness of race relations, domestic violence and anti-corruption issues. The United States worked to build the technical capacity of the Labor Ministry to encourage and teach the techniques of peaceful collective bargaining to leaders in business and labor. The Embassy has also supported and monitored U.S. programs to combat child labor in Lima and in the mining sector.

Trafficking in persons in Peru had appeared a troubling but relatively small problem, with official cases in the single digits each year. However, the Government recently acknowledged the gravity of the country's trafficking problem and is taking significant steps to eliminate it. The United States supports these efforts, including the Government's establishment of a new multi-agency anti-trafficking working group, comprehensive new anti-trafficking legislation slated for expedited consideration in 2004, and the creation of a new anti-trafficking unit in the Ministry of Interior in January 2004. U.S. funds support a new Organization for International Migration project – in coordination with the NGO Movimiento El Pozo and the Peruvian Immigration Department – to establish an anti-trafficking in persons hotline, a public awareness campaign and additional research on the issue.

## SURINAME

The Government of Suriname, headed by President Ronald Venetiaan, is still in the process of consolidating democratic and constitutional rule, and May 2000 elections were generally judged to meet international standards. The

Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens but there were problems in some areas. Police mistreated detainees, particularly at the time of arrest, and local detention facilities remained overcrowded. The judiciary was ineffective, and a shortage of judges resulted in a huge case backlog and lengthy pretrial detentions. Media self-censorship continued. Societal discrimination against women, minorities and tribal persons persisted, as did violence against women. While the Government took steps to combat trafficking in persons, trafficking in women remained a problem.

The U.S. human rights and democracy strategy is to strengthen Suriname's weak law enforcement institutions and to address critical human rights issues in broader programs targeting HIV/AIDS, health, education and micro-economic development. U.S. officials routinely and publicly highlighted the need for improvements in human rights conditions in Suriname. The Ambassador and other mission officers also worked privately with officials, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other organizations to identify areas of particular concern and promote systemic reforms.

To foster professionalism and strengthen respect for the rule of law, U.S. experts from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Customs and other agencies trained local law enforcement officials (including police, customs officials, prosecutors and judges) in anti-corruption, joint police intelligence and undercover techniques and best practices. The United States supported the Government's establishment of a new financial intelligence unit and provided additional funding through the regional Caribbean Anti-Money Laundering Program. Law enforcement officials from Suriname were trained in the United States and elsewhere, and two Surinamese judges visited the United States to observe U.S. judicial processes and meet with counterparts.

A Fulbright Senior Specialist assigned to the local university taught a human rights course to

undergraduate and graduate students, including key policymakers. Another Fulbright Specialist at the university provided approximately 20 seasoned professors with student-centered instructional techniques to foster critical thinking rather than rote memorization. The success of this program encouraged a local institute to incorporate these techniques in its own teacher-training course. In 2003, the Embassy held an e-commerce workshop for local businesswomen and sponsored two Surinamese women for International Visitor programs centered on “Multiculturalism” and “Women in Business.” Approximately 60 Peace Corps Volunteers promoted human rights and democratic values through their work with marginalized groups in education, health and micro-economic development programs.

The United States promoted greater attention to the issue of HIV/AIDS, dedicating more than \$425,000 to programs by the Government and local NGOs that worked to fight discrimination toward persons infected with HIV/AIDS, provide technical assistance (voluntary counseling and testing training and surveillance methods) and promote institutional capacity building. The Ambassador’s Fund to Combat HIV/AIDS supported public awareness campaigns by four local NGOs and cosponsored national consultations on HIV/AIDS. This allowed the completion of a National Strategic Plan to Combat HIV/AIDS, which will strengthen Suriname’s appeal for funding from the Global Fund. The Peace Corps contributed directly to these efforts by assigning at least ten volunteers to work primarily on HIV/AIDS-related projects. The Ambassador met privately with officials to relay concerns about HIV/AIDS, and penned an op-ed on the issue that received front page coverage in local dailies.

The United States worked to promote military professionalization and to support humanitarian efforts by the Surinamese Armed Forces to actively enhance the welfare of their citizens. Seventeen military officers and noncommissioned

officers (vetted in compliance with Leahy legislation) received training in legal and border patrol issues.

Trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation remains a serious concern in Suriname. The United States strongly and consistently urged government action against trafficking in persons and funded a two-year program to assist Suriname in that fight. In response to these efforts, the Government established an anti-trafficking commission (composed of various ministries and a local NGO, and headed by the Ministry of Justice and Police) to study the problem. The Government also launched a public education campaign against trafficking in persons using public service announcements obtained from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. The Public Prosecutor’s Office and the police established a registry of all brothels and their employees by nationality and established a “special victims’ unit” and a telephone hotline in May to handle all cases from the commercial sex industry. In cooperation with police, they also worked to expand existing services for victims of domestic violence to meet the needs of victims of trafficking.

## VENEZUELA

Venezuela remained embroiled in a political crisis over the government of President Hugo Chávez, elected in July 2000 in generally free and fair elections. The democratic environment suffered from deteriorating rule of law and weakened institutions that were increasingly subordinated to political interests. Respect for political rights continued to be of special concern as opposition groups petitioned the National Electoral Commission to convoke a recall referendum on President Chávez’s rule. The Government’s human rights record remained poor. Political violence and intimidation against opposition political parties, the media, labor groups, the courts, the Catholic Church and human rights groups were common and often carried out by government sympathizers inspired by the rhetoric of President

Chávez and other government officials. Both the International Labor Organization and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions identified violations of core worker rights. The police and military continued to commit numerous abuses, including extrajudicial killings of criminal suspects. Arbitrary arrests, detentions and torture of detainees persisted. Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening. Impunity, one of the country's most severe human rights problems, allowed corruption and extreme inefficiency to flourish in the judicial system. Child labor increased as economic conditions worsened, and violence against women and children remained problems.

The U.S. democracy and human rights strategy in Venezuela supports political rights while continuing to fight human rights abuses. The Embassy worked to encourage the implementation of Organization of American States (OAS) Resolution 833, which calls for a constitutional, democratic, peaceful and electoral solution to the country's political crisis, and to strengthen democratic Venezuelan institutions, encourage communication and dialogue and oppose violence and extra-constitutional changes in government through a variety of programs.

To discourage extrajudicial killings and torture committed by the country's public security forces, the United States sponsored several training programs for law enforcement officials that incorporated vital rule of law and human rights concepts. During the second half of 2003, six Venezuelan officers participated in a ten-day counterterrorism seminar in the United States, three officers attended terrorism and police management training by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), one officer went to a three-month leadership course at the FBI Academy and three attended the "Latin American Law Enforcement Executive Development Seminar." The Embassy Legal Attaché also organized a two-week course on terrorism crime scene investigations for 50 participants and a one-week anti-kidnapping seminar for another 40 participants.

The Embassy continued to promote the strengthening of democracy, rule of law and political rights through U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs). U.S. funding to National Democratic Institute (NDI) activities promoted transparency in the electoral process through domestic observation, political party democratization and renewal, and assistance to municipal anti-corruption initiatives. To accomplish these objectives, NDI worked with a consortium of civil society groups spanning the political spectrum to provide quality control in the electoral process, including administrative procedures and media reporting, and with the full range of political parties to promote party reform and modernization. The International Republican Institute (IRI) complemented these efforts through outreach to political parties across the political spectrum in the execution of electoral campaigns. IRI's training emphasized the development of campaign strategies and effective communication of party platforms to voters as well as the development of a volunteer observers' trainer network to observe, assess and report on electoral processes. The United States provided additional support to the Carter Center's continuing mediation and electoral process observation efforts and to NGOs working to promote local political dialogues and informed public discussions on issues such as education, to train community and civil society leaders in democratic leadership, mediation and conflict resolution, and to enhance organized labor outreach to the informal sector at the grassroots level.

Public statements by the Ambassador and other U.S. officials, including Members of Congress, reiterated strong support for OAS Resolution 833 as the way out of Venezuela's political crisis. The embassy website and other public diplomacy outreach bolstered this coordinated effort, ensuring wide distribution of relevant remarks by Washington policymakers and OAS officials to the media and public. In addition, the Embassy

arranged a digital video conference (DVC) on the California gubernatorial referendum, spurring detailed discussion of a possible Venezuela referendum.

U.S. public outreach programs in Venezuela worked to strengthen the administration of justice and prevent human rights abuses in the country. These included a DVC on judicial ethics and the sponsorship of five expert speakers on various aspects of the administration of justice as well as a one-week workshop on “Mediation and Conflict Resolution in Prisons” conducted by an expert trainer in conflict resolution. Participants, who represented all sectors of the judicial and penal systems, followed up on their workshop experience by creating a sustainable network for continuing professional collaboration. In late 2003, the United States sponsored an additional expert speaker on victim protection, and funded an International Visitor program on “Human Rights and Prison Reform.”

The United States provided more than \$718,000 for programs to strengthen civil society and democratic institutions that worked in key sectors such as justice and human rights, transparency in government, media and freedom of expression, conflict management and community activities to foster dialogue among polarized groups. One of these projects, designed to raise public awareness and respect for human rights, conducted human rights workshops for leaders of key societal sectors and distributed printed materials detailing national and international mechanisms for protection of human rights. Another grant promoted democratic discussion between government and opposition parties in the National Assembly on topics such as freedom of expression, facilitated by an international expert.

Especially relevant due to the standoff between government and private media were U.S. efforts to support a free and democratic press. The Ambassador hosted a Press Freedom Day event to highlight the importance of free speech, a message backed by U.S. grants that emphasized the

importance of an impartial media, allowing all candidates to have air time during elections, media regulatory systems and the need to allow for democratic coexistence among those with opposing viewpoints. The Embassy also arranged a DVC on the role of the media in a democracy for pro-government and opposition-affiliated journalists, and regularly issued press statements in support of freedom of expression and against the use of violence by any party for political ends.

In compliance with the Leahy amendment, the Embassy worked to vet military units and law enforcement personnel candidates for training and assistance, ensuring no beneficiaries of U.S. assistance had committed human rights abuses.



The Embassy's human rights officer also met regularly with contacts in the private sector and within the Government to foster support for human rights and track significant areas of U.S. and international concern.

To assist women's efforts to overcome discrimination and violence, the Embassy and Vital Voices Global Partnership cosponsored a kickoff workshop for women business and community leaders. The Vital Voices worldwide network helps women organize themselves to address a range of issues, including leadership training, coalition building and the fight against trafficking in women and children. The Embassy also cosponsored a one-day conference on proposed changes to the Domestic Violence Law that would have reduced legal protections for battered women and children. Conference participants produced a written argument (amicus brief) against the proposed change for presentation to the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court.

The United States also works to strengthen immigration controls and mitigate alien smuggling and trafficking in persons, and in 2003 sponsored Department of Homeland Security anti-fraud training for 300 Venezuelan employees from airlines, airport security and the immigration/passport agency. The Government has no anti-trafficking information campaigns and has not fully funded the existing network of women's shelters run by Inamujer. To address this issue, the United States independently provided the International Organization for Migration with copies of the State Department's anti-trafficking brochure "Be Smart, Be Safe" for distribution to airlines and other institutions. These brochures are also distributed to the public through the Embassy's Non-Immigrant Visa Unit.