Tracking Human Rights Worldwide: The State Department Country Reports

"We stand for democracy not because we want other countries to be like us, but because we want all people to enjoy the consistent protection of the rights that are naturally theirs, whether they were born in Tallahassee or Tehran."
— U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

The values the United States embraces – the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – are grounded in a universal truth. They are not an American inheritance, but are the birthright of every woman, man, and child.

Country Reports on Human Rights

The Country Reports are an essential element of the U.S. effort to promote respect for human rights worldwide. They inform U.S. government policymaking and may serve as a reference to other governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, human rights defenders and journalists. The Country Reports aim to advance worldwide efforts to end abuses, to help strengthen the capacity of countries to protect the human rights of all, and to shine a spotlight on countries that fail to live up to international human rights standards.

The Country Reports assess each country's situation independently against universal human rights precepts and each Country Report is intended to stand on its own. They are not compared to each other or placed in any order other than alphabetically by region.

Human Rights in the United States

America's open, democratic system allows U.S. citizens and people abroad to comment on U.S. policies without fear. The American system of government is not infallible; it is *accountable*. The U.S. democratic system provides a variety of self-correcting mechanisms, such as a robust civil society, a vibrant free media, independent branches of government – including the courts – and a well established rule of law.

The focus of the Country Reports is on the human rights performance of other governments. However, the U.S. does examine its own human rights record in periodic reports required by treaties to which it is a party. For example, the U.S. reports to a range of UN bodies, including the Committee Against Torture, the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as well as the Human Rights Council.

The United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process is a unique way of evaluating the human rights records of each of the 192 UN Member States once every four years. The United States human rights record will be reviewed in December of 2010 based on a report submitted by the U.S. government as well as input from civil society organizations.

What's new about the Country Reports this year?

- Reporting on prison conditions reflects new legislation for assistance to governments that make progress on improving prison conditions
- A new section on workers' rights
- Reporting on countries' initiatives to expand press freedom and their results
- Broader coverage of child soldiers, reproductive rights, and practices that threaten the health, well-being, or livelihoods of indigenous persons
- Expanded coverage of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) persons, as well as a section on "Other Societal Discrimination" covering persons with HIV/AIDS