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STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

Human Rights Day 2010

When Eleanor Roosevelt presented the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the UN General Assembly, she proclaimed: "We stand today at the threshold of a great event, both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind." On December 10, 1948, the world moved to recognize and protect the equal and inalienable rights of all people, inspiring individuals around the globe to claim the rights that are our common heritage.

I witness small and large acts of courage every day in every part of the world. Liu Xiaobo, this year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, helped author Charter '08 calling for peaceful political reform in China and lost his freedom for the cause. On this Human Rights Day, I reiterate our call for his immediate release. Elsewhere, the group Damas de Blanco has faced harassment and intimidation while advocating for the release of political prisoners, focusing international attention on Cuba's poor human rights record. Magodonga Mahlangu and her organization, Women of Zimbabwe Arise, suffer arrests and abuse as they continue working to empower women to mobilize and take non-violent action against injustice. Citizen heroes from all walks of life draw strength and hope from the promise that every country in the world has made in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The work of these activists to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person," and their courage to persist is a testament to all that is good in the human spirit.

Sixty-two years after Eleanor Roosevelt laid out those clear, inviolate principles, we again stand upon a threshold as the need to support and defend civil society has taken on renewed urgency. A vibrant civil society is an essential component of free nations, yet many governments continue to employ intimidation, questionable legal practices, restrictions, detention, and willful ignorance to silence the voices of those who defend human rights. The United States is committed to promoting and defending civil society around the world. And we will continue to remind leaders of their responsibilities to their citizens under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To support this, I have asked our embassies to open their doors to civil society activists today to listen to their concerns and demonstrate our support.

The Declaration has long served as a beacon to those seeking the protection of fundamental, internationally recognized rights and liberties. Today, and every day, the United States stands with those committed to making the vision enshrined in the Declaration a reality for all people. We call on every nation to join us in working to fulfill the Declaration's promise, at home and abroad.