



Statement of Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Hearing on Non-Governmental Organizations and Democracy Promotion
June 8, 2006

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing to examine our efforts to promote democracy around the world, and the role of non-governmental organizations as our partners in this effort.

In his second inaugural address, the President spoke eloquently about the need to advance democracy. And in our struggle against terrorism, and in promoting security and stability, the Administration is right: democracy is our most powerful weapon.

But I am concerned that we are not getting it right.

Fairly or not, the administration has created the impression around the world that it believes democracy can be imposed by force. And it has created the perception that it equates democracy with elections.

We have to recognize that democracy can't be imposed by force from the outside. Instead we should work with moderates from the inside, and over the long haul.

And we must understand that an election does not a democracy make.

In the Middle East Islamist groups have made huge strides -- Hamas in the Palestinian territories, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, religious parties in Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon. Holding elections without doing the hard work of building democratic institutions may leave us less, not more, secure.

A democracy must rest on the foundation of a strong civil society -- on building the institutions of democracy: political parties, effective government, independent media and judicial systems, non-governmental organizations, and civil society. Yes, elections are important, but so is support for things like grassroots governance, human rights, and education for girls. We must put more emphasis on this necessary, comprehensive approach.

A case in point is Iraq. President Bush has spoken of Iraq being a "beacon of freedom" in the Middle East. But unfortunately -- and inexplicably -- he has not put his money where his mouth is. Last summer, this Committee heard from both the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute that their critical programs in Iraq were in jeopardy -- precisely as Iraqi negotiators were burning the midnight oil to hash out their constitution -- if they did not receive additional funding. Senators Lugar, Kennedy and I, managed to get each of the institutes an additional \$28 million dollars through appropriations last year -- and we are working to increase the funding by \$104 million in the Emergency Supplemental. But the situation of these groups remains extremely precarious.

I realize that many of our non-governmental partners recognize the need for a comprehensive approach -- and it is because of their good work, dedication and courage that we have seen many of the gains that we have. I will be interested in learning more this morning about their efforts.

But our aid programs in places like Egypt and Pakistan, for example, have lagged in supporting democratic institution building. And Latin American and the Caribbean has experienced a significant decrease in democracy assistance funding -- nearly 66 percent since 2005 -- even as political and economic instability has increased.

So, the question in my mind is, "what more do we need to do?" Or, perhaps more appropriately, "what do we need to do more effectively?"

Again, I thank the Chairman for calling this hearing today. I look forward to a productive and helpful exchange on how we can work together to on this critical issue.