

**Opening Statement of Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member**  
**House Foreign Affairs Committee**  
**Hearing on: “Human Rights and Democracy Assistance:**  
**Increasing the Effectiveness of US Foreign Aid”**  
**June 10, 2010**

Foreign assistance programs, as we utilize them today, are a relatively new concept. Most of our assistance programs today did not exist before the Second World War, sixty years ago. Some of our programs, such as those for the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights, are, in fact, even more recent additions to our assistance efforts.

The relatively new and evolving nature of our democracy promotion programs argues strongly for ensuring we have objective means of assessing their performance over the long-term.

Today, with an annual budget for democracy promotion that is estimated to reach almost \$3 billion annually, we must also review the challenges that have arisen in the course of their implementation over the past three or four decades; and how best to address those in order to increase their efficiency and ensure that they advance U.S. interests and our priorities.

Some of the issues we must look at in order to improve our democracy assistance include:

- The need for better coordination of programs that are administered by a range of US Government agencies and non-governmental organizations;
- The need for objective, quantifiable means of measuring the effectiveness of democracy assistance programs;
- Differing points of view on how best to implement such programs, whether by targeting political entities, individuals and events, by embedding them in other development aid efforts, or by a combination of approaches;
- Finally, what is the proper role of democracy assistance in relation to our diplomacy in support of human rights and the expansion of democratic governance?

With regard to that last and very important point, I am concerned that the U.S. is shying away from strong diplomacy in this vital area by failing to condemn and hold accountable, or even worse, by actually engaging directly, repressive regimes.

While the recently-released National Security Strategy includes two pages on the promotion of democracy and human rights, what matters is what is done, not just what is written.

If our foreign aid for any objective, including development, is to be effective, we must have open and responsive governments and institutions, so that we can track the use of our funds and ensure that they are not diverted into private bank accounts.

Second, a lack of diplomatic focus on human rights and democracy will only embolden those dictators and corrupt rulers to consolidate their power.

We need to ramp up our diplomacy in support of democracy while also targeting our assistance for this key challenge.

For example, while aggregate funding numbers may have increased, I have concerns about whether certain time-tested organizations, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, are maintaining their proper place in our budget priorities. The Administration's request for the NED for FY 2011 is nearly a 9% cut from FY 2009 levels, and an 11% cut from estimated FY 2010 levels.

Assistance for Iranian civil society and the democratic opposition in Iran has to be considered a priority. As the Iranian regime has intensified its crack-down on the Iranian people, the United States has actually reduced our support for democracy and human rights in Iran.

While the budget for Fiscal Year 2009 requested \$65 million for the State Department's Iran Democracy Fund, the fund has now been scrapped. Its replacement, the "Near East Regional Democracy Fund," has an unclear mission and has received significantly less funding. These programming shifts and funding cuts have had a real and negative consequence.

Funding must be moved from organizations whose commitment to the principles of democracy is questionable, such as the farce that is the Organization of American States, to organizations that are consistent in their efforts on behalf of democracy. The United States foots 60% of the entire budget for the OAS while that organization pursues an agenda of appeasement toward repressive governments in our Hemisphere.

The OAS position on Cuba? In spite of hundreds of political prisoners languishing in jail, having committed no crime but speaking on behalf of democracy; in spite of there being only one political party allowed to operate in Cuba, the Communist Party; in spite of no labor unions allowed to operate; in spite of no human rights respected, what did the OAS do? It passed a resolution lifting the 1962 suspension of Cuba from the OAS.

Following an attack on a prominent synagogue in Venezuela, which highlighted the growing anti-Semitic campaign facilitated and tolerated by the Chavez regime, the then U.S. Ambassador to the OAS rightfully called for a condemnation. What did the OAS do? Nothing -- and the Secretary General expressed confidence in the Chavez system and its investigation of the incident.

What a waste of taxpayer dollars.

Again, our diplomacy on behalf of those who are oppressed and our commitment to democratic governance and the consolidation of democratic institutions must be strong and vigorous.

I thank our panel of witnesses this morning, and I look forward to hearing their testimony on this issue.