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February 26, 2014

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**GRANGER OPENING STATEMENT: HEARING ON U.S. ASSISTANCE
TO PROMOTE FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY IN COUNTRIES WITH
REPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENTS**

The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related programs will come to order.

Today we will hear from the panel before us about a topic that is a high priority for this subcommittee – democracy promotion.

I would like to welcome our witnesses: acting Assistant Secretary Zeya, Deputy Assistant Administrator Mendelson, and Director Mendes. Thank you all for being with us today.

This subcommittee provides more than a billion dollars a year to promote democracy and good governance around the world. This funding supports a broad range of activities – it strengthens civil society, improves electoral systems, develops political parties, increases access to news and information, and builds transparency within foreign governments.

Today’s hearing will focus on some of the countries where democracy promotion is most challenging.

In the past few years in countries such as Russia, Venezuela, and Ecuador, we have seen democracy under threat as those governments clamp down on fundamental freedoms.

We remain concerned about countries that have oppressed their people for decades - such as North Korea, Iran, and Cuba. And there are many more countries that are reaching a crossroads as they decide how to govern.

We want to hear more about the work of each of the agencies represented here today so we can understand how the United States can promote democracy and freedom in some of these very difficult places.

We have also seen troubling trends that make the operating environment for democracy programs much more difficult.

These include - but are not limited to - the N.G.O. laws that are pending or have passed in certain countries, as well as entire USAID missions being closed down because governments do not support U.S.-funded democracy promotion activities.

We also know it is common practice for repressive governments to stay one step ahead of technology by blocking Internet connections and radio broadcasts, in an attempt to suppress dissent, free speech, and unbiased information on current events.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how the U.S. government is adjusting to these tactics, and I hope they will also address how we can ensure that the people carrying out these programs remain safe.

As President Reagan said, “freedom is never more than a generation from extinction. We didn’t pass it to our children in our bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.”

This subcommittee can play a role in advancing freedom through programs we fund in the bill. I hope today’s hearing will give us a chance to talk openly about the challenges the U.S. faces in countries that repress the rights and freedoms of their people.

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