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The U.S. Embassy's Information Resource Center is pleased to offer you an "Issue-in-Focus" on **Democracy and Human Rights**.

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HUMAN RIGHTS DAY 2009

DECEMBER 10, 2009

"Human progress depends on the human spirit, and this inescapable truth has never been more apparent than it is today. The challenges of this new century require us to summon the full range of human talents to move our nation and the world forward. Guaranteeing the right of every man, woman and child to participate fully in society and to live up to his or her God-given potential is an ideal that has animated our nation since its founding."
-- [U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton](#), February 25, 2009



Human Rights Day is observed by the international community every year on December 10. It commemorates the day in 1948 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The theme for Human Rights Day 2009 is the fundamental importance of non-discrimination captured in the slogan "Embrace diversity, End discrimination."

The realization of all human rights - social, economic and cultural as well as civil and political rights - is hampered by discrimination. All too often, when faced with prejudice and discrimination, political leaders, governments and ordinary citizens are silent or complacent. Yet everyone can make a difference.

EMBRACE DIVERSITY AND END DISCRIMINATION



Free and Equal in Dignity and Rights - All around the world, millions of people face a daily struggle against discrimination - both directly, through laws and policies, or indirectly, through societal attitudes and prejudice. When taken to the extreme, such discrimination has even resulted in policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide. However in recent history there have been many successes - from the toppling of the apartheid regime in South Africa, to the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on

the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to the extension of voting rights to women in many countries – that demonstrate that inequality and discrimination can be fought against and eradicated. Read more [here](#).

[An End to Discrimination](#) - Human Rights Day 2009 on December 10 focuses on ending discrimination. "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". These first few famous words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established 60 years ago the basic premise of international human rights law. Yet today, the fight against discrimination remains a daily struggle for millions around the globe. Read the Fact Sheet [here](#).

U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITMENTS AND PLEDGES



[U.S. Commitment to Advancing Human Rights](#) - The deep commitment of the United States to championing the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is driven by the conviction that international peace, security, and prosperity are strengthened when human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected and protected. As the United States seeks to advance human rights and fundamental freedoms around the world, Americans do so cognizant of their own commitment to live up to these ideals at home and to meet international human rights obligations. Read more [here](#).

[U.S. Election to the Human Rights Council](#) - "The United States is very pleased to be elected to join the Human Rights Council. We're particularly gratified by the strong support we received, 90 percent of the valid votes cast, and we're gratified by the strong showing of encouragement for the United States to again play a meaningful leadership role in multilateral organizations including the UN on the very vitally important set of issues relating to human rights and democracy." Read the full transcript of Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan E. Rice's Remarks, May 12, 2009, [here](#).



[U.S. Struggle Against Hate Crimes Is Unending Effort](#) - In the United States, racial bias against African Americans remains the most frequently reported reason for hate crimes, which can range from vandalism to physical assault, and in extreme cases murder. On October 28, President Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crime Prevention Act, named in part for James Byrd Jr., an African-American man who in 1998 was dragged to death on a three-mile section of country road in rural Texas. The new act is the first expansion of federal civil rights laws since the mid-1990s. Read more [here](#).

WOMEN OF COURAGE



Supports Women Who Fight for Social Justice - Around the world, women are challenging their societies to uphold freedom and human rights. Many take great risks to accomplish great things. Selected from scores of nominees offered by U.S. embassies around the world, women representing Afghanistan, Guatemala, Iraq, Malaysia, Niger, Russia, Uzbekistan and Yemen were honored at the State Department in Washington on March 11 for their outstanding contributions on behalf of women and their societies, and for tackling such issues as domestic violence, forced child marriage, human trafficking and government

corruption. These women are fighting for government transparency, access to justice and the rule of law and equal rights and opportunities for women. Read some of their stories [here](#).

PHOTO GALLERY



Evolution of Human Rights - In 1948, the United Nations formally defined human rights. The protection and nurture of these rights rely on the efforts of governments, nongovernmental organizations and individual citizens the world over. For centuries, philosophers, statesmen, religious leaders and activists developed an ethical framework that formed the basis for the widely accepted concept of human rights.

Map of Crimes Against Humanity: Victims and the World

Demand Justice - The 20th century introduced the world to war crimes tribunals, truth and reconciliation commissions and war reparations.

WEB RESOURCES

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), U.S. Department of State
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/hr/>

Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State
<http://www.america.gov/un-declaration.html>

United Nations: Human Rights
<http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/2009/>

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<http://www.un.org/rights/>

Human Rights Watch
<http://www.hrw.org/>



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