

**Item 4: General Debate on Human Rights Situations
Requiring Council Attention**

Statement by the Delegation of the United States of America

**Delivered by Ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe
Human Rights Council 15th Session
Geneva, September 17th 2010**

Thank you, Mr. President.

We begin by commending the many countries that have engaged with the HRC special procedures this year for working with the international community to address human rights and domestic political challenges in their countries. Our hope is that Sudan will follow their example with the renewal of that special procedures mandate. We urge them to continue. We well understand the human rights challenges in those countries, but believe that working with the international community and the UN system will assist them in meeting those challenges.

With that in mind, the United States appreciates the opportunity to bring to the Council's attention the following country specific situations:

In Iran, we are concerned about continued restrictions on freedoms of expression, assembly and religion. Intimidation of and violence against political activists, civil society members, journalists, and in some cases their family members, must stop. Thousands of individuals have been detained without cause or sentenced without due process. Some have been executed for their participation in protests surrounding last year's disputed elections, or other political activities. Iran inflicts brutal punishments in contravention of its international obligations, such as the threatened stoning in the Ashtiani case and others. Iran persists in its use of torture. The government continues to ignore and abuse its citizens' human rights and fundamental freedoms, even those enshrined in Iran's own constitution and in its international obligations. Persecution of religious communities in Iran also continues. Lack of respect for the rule of law in Iran's judiciary and other government institutions contributes to these abuses. Dozens of members of the Baha'i community are in prison on spurious grounds, several Baha'i community leaders have recently been convicted and sentenced, and over 100 are awaiting trial. In accordance with Iran's international obligations, we encourage equal rights among marginalized populations, including minorities and women. As Iran continues to ignore its responsibilities to its own people, the need for our collective

spotlight on these issues through international monitoring and human rights protection mechanisms, becomes increasingly critical.

In **Burma**, the human rights situation remains grim. Under the repressive election laws that stifle meaningful competition and with the continued detention of more than 2,100 political prisoners, including Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the November 7 elections cannot be inclusive or credible. Our overriding objective is to promote a peaceful democratic transition, encourage national reconciliation, and achieve respect for human rights. We urge an end to systematic violations of religious freedom, notably the large-scale repression against the Muslim Rohingya, including refusal to grant citizenship, severe government restrictions on travel, and discrimination in employment and educational opportunities. Finally, six months ago Special Rapporteur Ojea Quintana invited consideration of a commission of inquiry. The United States believes a properly structured international commission of inquiry that would examine allegations of serious violations of international law would be warranted and appropriate. My government is examining how best to proceed on this initiative.

In **Cuba**, the government maintains restrictions on the freedoms of speech, expression, and assembly, and uses short-term detention and government-orchestrated mob violence to suppress dissent. Fifty two political prisoners have been slated for release and nearly 30 have been freed, albeit under the condition that they must depart Cuba. We continue to call for the unconditional release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, who should never have been jailed at all.

In the **Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea**, the government fails to protect even the most basic rights of its citizens and does not abide by its international human rights commitments. Reports continue to reach the international community of extrajudicial killings; prisoners dying from torture, starvation, disease, and exposure; the use of forced labor as part of an established system of political repression; denial of the universal freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly, and association; and restrictions of freedom of movement and workers' rights.

We are all aware of the ongoing suffering of the people of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**. The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the horrific attack against innocent civilians, including the use of mass rape, in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by rebel groups, such as the FDLR and the Mai Mai. We are outraged by the rape of hundreds of civilians in Walikale Territory of North Kivu Province by militants during July and August and call on the DRC government to enhance its efforts to fight impunity, strengthen security sector reform and civilian protection efforts, undertake a

thorough, prompt and effective investigation, and bring the perpetrators to account.

In addition, serious irregularities have compromised the independence of the government's investigation into the killing of noted Congolese human rights leader Floribert Chebeya Bahizire and the disappearance of Fidele Bazana Edadi. I reiterate the call for an independent investigation, with UN oversight, to investigate Chebeya's killing and Bazana's disappearance and to hold responsible persons accountable. My government stands ready to provide forensics experts to assist the Congolese authorities.

Although **China** has made significant and sustained economic progress in the past three decades, we have growing concerns about recent setbacks in the development of the rule of law, including the harassment and disbarment of public interest lawyers, restrictions on nongovernment organizations and the Internet, long sentences for people involved in peaceful political activity, restrictions on religious freedom, and the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities.

The United States remains concerned about the continuation of Emergency Rule in **Syria**, which has facilitated the repression of freedom of speech and assembly among nonviolent civic activists in Syria. The prevalent use of military courts arbitrary detentions, disappearances and extended prison terms deny Syrians due process. We are particularly concerned about the recent conviction and sentencing of well-known and respected human rights defenders Haitham Maleh and Muhanad al-Hasani.

The continuing erosion of democratic institutions and fundamental freedoms in **Venezuela**, particularly freedom of the press and freedom of expression, undermine the hemispheric consensus on democracy. These restrictions contradict Venezuela's commitments under the Inter American Democratic Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the OAS Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man. A free and independent media is a vital element in any democracy. We are concerned that the role of this critical democratic institution, part of the foundation of any healthy democracy, is being targeted in Venezuela.

In **Zimbabwe**, while we welcome some initial progress since the establishment of the transitional government, we remain seriously concerned about continued human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests of civil society and political party members, land seizures and forced evictions, corruption, and abuses at diamond mines. The government continues to use repressive laws to suppress freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and movement, and to criminalize homosexuality. We urge Zimbabwe's leaders to act in good faith for the benefit of all Zimbabwe's citizens and the stability of the region, by fully implementing the

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Global Political Agreement, sharing political power, promoting a professional and non-partisan security sector, and creating conditions for credible and internationally monitored elections.

The people of **Eritrea** continue to suffer under the Government's harsh policies, including severe restrictions on civil liberties and consistent and systemic gross human rights violations. In addition to the lack of a democratic process, they face unlawful killings by security forces, torture of prisoners, abuse and torture of national service evaders, infringement of privacy rights including roundups for national service, and executive interference in the judiciary. We remain concerned about the government's continued restrictions on freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and religion.

Thank you, Mr. President.