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PRESS RELEASE

USUN PRESS RELEASE # 203 (05)
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 2, 2005

Statement by Ambassador Sichan Siv, Alternate U.S. Representative to the General Assembly, on Agenda Item 71 (c): Human Rights Questions, in the Third Committee, November 2, 2005

Mr. Chairman,

Our leaders pledged in September to build a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. They recognized that freedom, equality, tolerance and respect for human rights are indispensable in international relations. America believes that these conditions are critical -- indeed, essential -- within each nation.

Around the world, people understand that they should have the power to decide their own destinies, within their own homelands, by exercising free choice in how and by whom they will be governed. They would choose freedom over oppression -- the consent of the governed, not the coercion of the state. They would fulfill their democratic aspirations by holding free, fair and transparent elections.

This past year the world has been impressed by the transformational elections held in **Iraq, Afghanistan** and in **the West Bank and Gaza**. In **Indonesia**, 2004 was a landmark year in the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy as it held its first-ever direct presidential election.

But elsewhere, the struggle for freedom encountered roadblocks. The **Iranian** government continued to deprive its people of the freedom they seek and deserve, through summary executions, disappearances, torture, and restricted freedoms of speech, assembly and religion. Iranian activist Akbar Ganji's imprisonment solely for his peaceful advocacy of a representative and accountable government is a serious violation of fundamental human rights and is symbolic of the regime's repressive policies. Women and minorities, including non-Muslims such as the Baha'i, continued to face cruel discrimination. Its June 2005 presidential election -- in which the un-elected Guardian Council of Clerics decided who could run, disqualifying over 1,000 candidates, including all women -- failed to meet international standards. America stands with the Iranian people as they stand for their own liberty, and we urge this committee to pass a strong resolution on the deplorable situation in Iran.

The DPRK's regime remains one of the most oppressive in the world, denying its citizens the most basic freedoms of religion, conscience, speech, assembly and association. Prisoners are tortured, starved, forced into hard labor, compelled to have abortions or watch the infanticide of their newborns, and, ultimately, executed. People are totally barred from changing their government through elections. Hence, many in the country vote with their feet or in desperation flee as refugees. This committee should pass a resolution addressing "the human rights situation in the DPRK".

The human rights situation in **Turkmenistan** remains extremely poor. Freedom of assembly, speech, and the press are non-existent. Political opposition is strictly prohibited, and families of those overseas who have engaged in opposition activities are routinely harassed and prevented from traveling abroad. The President, with a cult of personality, rules by decree. None of the other government bodies, such as the rubber stamp parliament and People's Council, have any real authority. The United States seeks the support of committee members for our resolution addressing the human rights situation in Turkmenistan.

Nearby, in **Uzbekistan**, the world was appalled by reported shootings in Andijan. There must be an independent, international investigation of that tragedy and the events leading up to it. The accused must be tried openly, transparently, and fairly. We urge this committee to adopt a resolution expressing concern about Andijan. We are deeply concerned about the harassment and restrictions on journalists and non-governmental groups (NGO's), and call on the government to stop this repression. We urge Tashkent to encourage freedom for all religious groups, as the free expression of faith is a fundamental right.

Meanwhile, the very poor human rights record of the regime in Rangoon has worsened. Its junta has become one of the world's greatest human rights violators. Over 1,000 political and religious prisoners remain in detention, arrests of pro-democracy supporters continue, and Aung San Suu Kyi remains cut off from the rest of the world. All of the people in this country, its democratic opposition and minority groups included, should be permitted to hold a meaningful, inclusive and credible dialogue about national reconciliation and democracy. If unaddressed, this repression could have implications for regional stability. This committee can help express the concern of the international community by passing a strong resolution on what will be called in this forum "the situation of human rights in Myanmar"

There is another country that is the subject of a proposed resolution where the United States is nevertheless pleased to note progress. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, the Constitutional referendum currently scheduled for December 18th and the general elections planned for next year could be watershed moments for democracy in a country that historically has been plagued by serious abuses. This Committee should support efforts to bring effective governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law to all residents of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It is our sincere hope that these upcoming events will make a 2006 resolution on DRC unnecessary.

We are all appalled by the continued violence in Darfur, **Sudan**, and the grave humanitarian needs of over 2 million people displaced as a result of genocide and on going conflict. Khartoum's overall human rights record is extremely poor. Government security forces are responsible for extrajudicial killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrest, torture and rape and often act with impunity. The January 9 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan was an historic accomplishment that ended twenty-two years of civil war. We urge the Government of National Unity to build upon this and improve its human rights record throughout the country, by establishing accountability for atrocities, especially those committed against women in camps for internally displaced persons. We urge all parties to end the violence in Darfur and reach a political settlement that will enable internally displaced persons and refugees to return safely, with dignity, to build a better future.

There are other troubling human rights situations in the world today, deserving of this Committee's continued attention even if they are not the subject of resolutions here.

In **Belarus**, for example, President Lukashenko has created a dictatorship in the heart of Europe. The government denies its citizens their human rights and freedom, and its repression continues to deepen. New legal measures silence independent voices, monopolize information, and obstruct political opposition and democratization. The October 2004 referendum that allowed Lukashenko to seek a third term did not meet international standards. The United States calls Belarus to reverse its current course.

Despite the best efforts of the international community to engage **Cuba** on its human rights situation, Havana has failed to take steps that would guarantee its own people human rights. Instead, it has persisted in imposing a repressive and totalitarian state that deprives the Cuban people of the right to express dissent without risk of incurring a decades-long prison sentence, and moreover deprives them of a voice in any kind of possible political and economic reform.

While the United States values our discussions with **China** on a range of issues, and notes some progress in improving human rights there, China's human rights record remained poor. The Government continues to harass Chinese citizens who seek to pursue their religious beliefs free from government oversight, and remains intolerant of those seeking to express independent political and social views. Chinese authorities continued to target and restrict the media and the Internet, severely limiting the free flow of information. The use of counterterrorism measures to repress minorities seeking peacefully to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as Muslim Uighurs, is also a source of deep concern. My government seeks to engage with China to improve this record.

Syria's human rights record is far worse than last year due to the increasing number of arbitrary arrests and detentions. Some of the "Damascus Spring" reformers arrested in 2001, remain in detention despite their expected release in June 2005 after serving three-

quarters of their sentences. Security forces continue to torture, arbitrarily arrest and detain dissidents.

Zimbabwe continues to violate the most basic rights of its citizens, most recently uprooting hundreds of thousands of lives with their bulldozing of the homes of the country's poorest residents. The Secretary General's special envoy, the head of UN-HABITAT, Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, documented that clearly. In addition, Zimbabwe continues to undermine any democratic reform by the severe repression of opposition parties in view of March elections.

To support democratic aspirations around the world, we must not only condemn abuses, but also support young democracies by helping strengthen transparency accountability to enforce the rule of law, and to build foundations of good governance -- from a thriving economy and a vibrant civil society, to a free media and educational opportunities for their people. We must make the best possible use of UN human rights mechanisms; make more and larger contributions to the new UN Democracy Fund; and never stop our vigilance on behalf of freedom.

Although freedom is threatened in some parts of the world it has a way of asserting itself, as we saw in the extraordinary developments in **Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan**. This Committee has the power to help those who wish to help themselves. With the resolutions we pass, the statements we make, we can provide a voice to the voiceless and hope to those who face oppression.

Thank you.