

HUMAN RIGHTS - OUR WORLD'S BEST CHANCE

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I am very glad to be here with you today. Very few realize how important the human rights cause has become around the world. After my opening remarks I hope we can have a candid exchange of views, and make good use of our time. We don't have to agree on everything - that would be absurd. Candid dialogue is very important.

Just a word on my personal background. I am from the sidewalks of New York and most of my diplomatic experience has been in Eastern Europe and Latin America, including Moscow and Warsaw. After retiring from the diplomatic service I have stayed on in the State Department precisely because of our human rights policy, which I am convinced has given us a much better foreign policy, as I am going to explain.

Now, our human rights policy began before Jimmy Carter became President, in 1977. It began in 1973/74, when Congressman Don Fraser and Congressman (now Senator) Tom Harkin held a series of public hearings, urging that we give human rights a higher priority in our foreign policy. Looking back almost 25 years I simply cannot believe how far we have come. Of course when Carter took power in 1977, human rights took a quantum leap, and our Human Rights Bureau was formed.

You can imagine how difficult it was in the beginning. There was bureaucratic inexperience. There was also bureaucratic resistance. Some said human rights are fine, but they have nothing to do with foreign affairs. There was lack of information and reference material, etc. But year by year, it got better, because I soon discovered this work is like pushups - the more you do, the more you can do. Then when Ronald Reagan became President in 1981, many assumed the human rights policy was over and our Bureau would be closed down. But it soon became clear the human rights policy had become institutionalized. There was widespread support in Congress, and we were still required by law to get the annual Human Rights Reports up to Congress by January 31 of every year. So our performance continued to improve, like pushups. There was more information and experience, other governments began to help, etc. The human rights cause was injected into the State Department's bloodstream.

Now the Clinton Administration has given a higher priority to human rights. The Human Rights Bureau has been expanded and reorganized. It is now the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. Our Assistant Secretary, John Shattuck, has

