

John Shattuck on the growth of the Human Rights Bureau in the 1990s

In the 90's, it became more and more important to look at ways of helping countries improve their human rights record and also, from a bureaucratic standpoint, it was certainly useful for the Human Rights Bureau for the first time to begin to have some control over funding for the kinds of things that USAID was doing to promote civil society in certain countries. That was really more the democracy portfolio, if you will. Very specifically, there was a transition memorandum that was written for the Clinton administration, contributed to I think by some of the people who had been involved in human rights even in the Bush administration, which suggested that it would be useful to add this democracy portfolio. And then there is an additional piece of it, which is international labor affairs, and that was really a natural because so much of the work on international labor affairs in the 60's, 70's and 80's was human rights work. There was a small office attached to the Secretary of State's office. It was an advisor for international labor affairs and it really didn't have any bureaucratic strength so the decision then was made to add that to the Human Rights Bureau's portfolio. So, in 1994 there was a formal reorganization and the Human Rights Bureau grew significantly. I think we grew by approximately ten new positions and we, for the first time, began to have responsibility for making recommendations about where USAID funding should go to support civil society groups, and that has continued and in fact I think that is a big part of the Bureau's responsibility today.