

Testimony of Michael Posner
of the
Lawyers Committee for Human Rights
before the
Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations
of the
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this hearing and for inviting me to participate. My name is Michael Posner. I am the Executive Director of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. Since 1978, the Lawyers Committee has monitored human rights in all regions of the world. The Committee's work is impartial, holding every government to a single standard, that contained in the International Bill of Human Rights.

In my testimony this morning, I wish to make several general observations about the recently-released State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and then to focus on specific sections to illustrate some of the strengths and weaknesses in the reporting process. Secondly, I want to comment briefly on the current session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, and the performance of the United States delegation at those meetings. Finally, I will present several specific recommendations pertaining to human rights and United States foreign policy. In so doing, the Lawyers Committee hopes to encourage Congress, and this subcommittee in particular, to address some of these issues in greater detail.

Department of State Country Reports

On February 21, the State Department's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices was published, receiving considerable public attention both in this country and around the world. The publication of this annual report has become increasingly significant as the reports themselves have become more comprehensive and professional. The first Country Reports were issued in March 1977, **mandated** by Congress as a means of providing reliable information on human rights conditions in **the context** of the ongoing debate about U.S. trade and aid policies. Prepared under the Ford Administration and published in the first months of the Carter Administration, the report covered the human rights records of 82 countries in 143 pages. By contrast, this year's volume covers 169 countries in 1,641 pages.

As the Country Reports have grown much larger, we believe that the quality of the reporting has improved as well. With some notable exceptions, the Country Reports continue to improve as foreign service officers stationed throughout the world become more familiar with the reporting process and sensitive to the importance of preparing comprehensive, objective reports.

Several months from now, the Lawyers Committee will publish a critique of a number of sections in the most recent Country Reports. This will be the 11th year in which the Committee has undertaken these critiques, eight of which were prepared jointly with Human Rights Watch. Though our systematic review of the reports has just begun, I want to make a few preliminary observations about the reports generally, and about several country sections in particular.

Overall, our greatest frustration with the reporting process is that while most reports are informative, thorough and objective, the Bush Administration has not translated the concerns outlined in these reports into effective human rights policies. The case of China is perhaps the most dramatic example. As the State Department concluded in the report, "the human rights climate deteriorated dramatically in 1989." The report describes "credible evidence [which] indicates that the [Chinese] leadership deliberately ordered the use of lethal force to suppress peaceful demonstrations," which resulted in "at least several hundred and possibly thousands" of deaths. The report also describes "persistent and consistent" reports of torture, and thousands of arbitrary arrests and detentions.

Yet despite the State Department's clear and detailed description of a human rights crisis in China, the Bush Administration has thus far taken inadequate steps to address that crisis. Earlier this month the Lawyers Committee's Chairman, Marvin Frankel, wrote to President Bush urging "a full review of the administration's China policy, particularly as it addresses human rights." Judge Frankel's letter states: "In our view, until substantial and fundamental changes become evident, the U.S. should be firm in applying the same human rights standards to the Chinese Government as it applies elsewhere in the world." Specifically, Judge Frankel's letter

proposed the development by the Bush Administration of a "comprehensive human rights country plan toward China that will enable U.S. officials to raise these issues in an effective and well-coordinated manner in the coming months."

Despite the overall improvements in the Country Reports, including the report on China, there continue to be striking inconsistencies in quality. As in the past, we continue to see especially serious deficiencies in the reports on Central America. This undoubtedly reflects the highly contentious debate in this country with respect to U.S. policy toward Central America.

This year's reports on El Salvador and Guatemala, in particular, appear to have been written with the intention of putting the best face possible on two grim human rights situations. On the issue of political killings, the report on El Salvador notes that while "various groups charged that death squads were operating again," it is the State Department's view that "many of these deaths are likely the result of individual acts of right-wing vigilantism rather than of organized paramilitary death squads as existed before 1984." The implication seems to be that the government of El Salvador has nothing to do with these killings. The report fails to state, as it should have, that Tutela Legal, the human rights office of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, documented 38 death squad killings in 1989. Without citing those statistics, the report tries to discredit Tutela's findings on this issue saying that "though its marshalling of data is usually comprehensive, Tutela has on occasion asserted that, based on circumstantial evidence only, the perpetrators of certain killings are death squads linked to the government."

While the report acknowledges "confirmed cases of torture and mistreatment of prisoners by members of the security forces," it emphasizes the State Department's view that "it is not believed that there is a government policy that permits or condones torture or mistreatment of prisoners." Several times throughout the report the State Department emphasizes the Salvadoran government's progress in investigating human rights violations. It notes, for example, that "although abuses continue, successful investigation and prosecution efforts now mean that military

personnel, including officers, cannot count themselves immune from prosecution." The report blames continued problems in the investigative process on those in the "lower ranks of the ESAF [El Salvador Armed Forces]" whose cooperation in investigations is described as "at best, erratic or problematic."

We continue to view these problems quite differently. In our view, the experience of the last 10 years makes it clear that the Salvadoran armed forces, as an institution, is either unwilling or incapable of cleaning its own house. It remains true that despite the enormous amount of international pressure that has been brought to bear in several prominent human rights cases, no officer of the armed or security forces of El Salvador has been convicted of a human rights crime. In general, the tone of the report on El Salvador stands in sharp contrast to many other sections in the Country Reports and appears to be tailored to the ongoing congressional debate about U.S. aid to El Salvador.

The section of the report on Guatemala takes much the same approach as does the report on El Salvador, in that it seeks to present very serious human rights problems in the least negative tone. The introduction to the section on Guatemala states that "the military continues to have a *reputation* for human rights violations, though its record has improved over the past five years" (emphasis added). The recent record of serious human rights abuses by the Guatemalan military has been well documented by a number of international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Americas Watch, the International Human Rights Law Group, the Washington Office on Latin America, and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. These reports provide more than ample information to allow the State Department to conclude that the Guatemalan **military** is committing serious human rights violations.

While the Guatemala section goes on to acknowledge that political violence is occurring, it emphasizes that "there is no evidence that extrajudicial killings were part of the government's counter-insurgency or anti-crime actions or that top government officials ordered or condoned

them." The report also concludes, without reference to its source of information, that "[w]hile most killings appeared to result from personal vendettas or other criminal activities, an unknown but probably relatively small number were politically motivated." This conclusion is at odds with reports by non-governmental human rights groups, including our own.

Persistent problems continue to affect the overall quality of a number of the other sections in the Country Reports. The State Department still has a tendency to acknowledge that abuses have occurred, but to excuse government leaders because they are not in control of their own forces. The report on Haiti is a good example. It states that "human rights abuses perpetrated or directed by government leaders were the hallmark of previous regimes. The Avril Government avoided the egregious violations -- massacres and politically motivated killings -- characteristic of its predecessors." The report states that political killings, which were "clearly sanctioned by high-ranking government officials" occurred in 1987 and 1988 but not in 1989. It cites as an example the killing of three political activists in November, concluding that "there was no substantiated evidence linking these apparently politically motivated killings to government forces." In this case and others, the report goes out of its way to deflect responsibility from government forces, despite strong evidence that they are implicated in these actions and that senior government officials are not doing everything in their power to prevent such violations from occurring or to find and prosecute those responsible. In this section and several others, the State Department fails to draw the logical inference arising from a near complete absence of prosecutions for political crimes, that such inaction signals that a government condones these violations.

Other sections of the report excuse violations caused by a particular government's lack of resources, which produce weak judicial institutions, as well as poor training and low pay for armed and security forces which result in a lack of discipline. The report on Liberia, for example, emphasizes that "the judiciary suffers from severe shortages of the basic tools it needs to do its work, such as office supplies, stenographers, and records of precedent cases." While these deficiencies are undoubtedly significant in Liberia and many other countries, they should not be

presented without acknowledging that many of these countries' governments also interfere with the independence of the judiciary, deliberately keep their judicial systems poor and ineffective, make a systematic effort to suppress dissent, and engage in ongoing rights violations against those they perceive to be their political opponents.

The report barely mentions the trial of Gabriel Kpoleh, leader of the Liberian Unification Party who was convicted of treason in 1988. It notes only that the trial was "controversial", but never explains why. Several defense witnesses have testified that they were beaten and subjected to degrading treatment and detention without trial because of their participation in the case. A prosecution witness recanted his written testimony and asked the court to protect him against prosecution by the Liberian government. Though the State Department's report notes that a retrial has been granted, it does not quote from the Supreme Court's order which cited "incalculable blunders, errors and omissions as well as the numerous irregularities" in the court below.

In several sections, the State Department fails to offer its own analysis of reports by non-governmental organizations that it cites, or to draw its own conclusions. The report on Iraq is a good example. Though the report is generally quite critical of human rights conditions in that country, it relies heavily on reports by Amnesty International, without endorsing those findings. On the issue of political killings, the State Department says that "for years execution has been an established Iraqi method for dealing with perceived political and military opponents of the government." The State Department offers no assessment as to whether these practices are still occurring. Rather, it cites several Amnesty International reports which present detailed information on political killings in 1989. The State Department concludes that "independent information to confirm the allegations cited in AI reports is not available."

With respect to torture, the State Department cites an Amnesty International report which concluded that torture and ill treatment of prisoners was widespread in 1989, including the torture of children. It notes that the government of Iraq "categorically denied any use of torture against

children as an official policy or as a practice," and concludes, without any further comment or analysis, that "impartial observers have so far been unable to look into these allegations." Is the suggestion that Amnesty International is not impartial? Has anyone from the U.S. embassy in Baghdad ever considered independently investigating these issues? In closed countries, such as Iraq, where international human rights groups are not permitted to visit, the State Department's embrace of the position that there has been no independent confirmation of allegations of torture and political killing merely reinforces the determination of such governments to keep independent monitors out.

In a few instances, the Country Reports continue to criticize local human rights groups in a highly inappropriate manner. The report on the Philippines, to cite one example, continues the State Department's campaign against Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFD), one of the oldest and best known non-governmental human rights groups in the Philippines. In the 1988 Report, the State Department charged that TFD "considered by many to have links to the CPP [Communist Party of the Philippines], collects information only on alleged government abuses." In our critique, the Lawyers Committee and Human Rights Watch noted that

many human rights organizations worldwide report only on state violations of international human rights, so TFD's practices are not exceptional. Moreover, repeating the allegations of Communist links is precisely the kind of unsubstantiated labelling that has made human rights activists the target of right-wing violence. That is a wholly inappropriate use of the State Department's human rights report.

In its 1989 report, the State Department makes matters worse. It repeats the statement that TFD only reports on abuses allegedly committed by government forces. It then goes on to say that TFD's "acceptance of sometimes poorly substantiated reports and its close association with the CPP have led to charges that it overstates the case against the government." The report provides no evidence of TFD's "close association" with the illegal Communist Party, which is stated as fact. It also fails to identify any of those who have charged that TFD's reports "overstate" government abuses.

Mr. Chairman, I want to add also a few comments about other sections of the report. With respect to the Israeli-occupied territories, the State Department presents an accurate picture of the situation, and the unabated violence that continued during 1989, the second full year of the intifada. In its analysis of the use of force, the report notes that "violations of the rules of engagement [by the Israeli Defense Forces] have resulted in death and injury." It states that "there were a number of instances in which [limits on the use of force] were exceeded" by Israeli security forces, and correctly states that "many deaths and wounds were from bullets in the head or upper body." The State Department concludes, rightly in our view, that IDF "regulations often were not vigorously enforced, many cases of unjust killing did not result in disciplinary action, and punishments were often lenient."

The report also notes, as it should, the dramatic escalation of violence by Palestinians against other Palestinians, many of whom were accused of collaborating with the Israeli civilian and military authorities. It does not, however, present a complete analysis of this aspect of the conflict. According to statistics compiled by the Associated Press, by the beginning of February 1990, 175 Palestinians have been killed by other Palestinians since the intifada began in December 1987. Included in this number are individuals known to be collaborators with Israeli authorities, as well as others killed for violations of religious and social norms, such as drug dealers and prostitutes; individuals killed in family and inter-clan disputes; and those killed for reasons of personal vengeance. Those targeted for elimination have been stabbed, hacked, axed, shot, beaten, lynched, burned and strangled to death. The PLO leadership has publicly acknowledged that it condones these killings in situations where the victims have allegedly ignored warnings from the Palestinian leadership to discontinue activities which it claims threaten the lives other Palestinians

The Lawyers Committee unequivocally condemns these summary killings. We strongly urge Palestinian leaders, inside and outside of the occupied territories, to undertake all efforts necessary to put an immediate halt to the executions, which violate the fundamental right to life and serve to perpetuate and escalate a cycle of violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The State Department's report on these killings neglects to note that, by their own admission, Israeli military and security forces have supplied weapons to some of these individuals and rely on them to provide intelligence and to identify suspects wanted for arrest. In our judgment, the Israeli practice of recruiting and arming certain Palestinians to carry out security-related activities in the West Bank and Gaza is a contributing factor in the escalation of violence, and should have been noted in the report.

One final point with regard to the occupied territories' section is that the State Department seems to go out of its way to avoid mentioning Palestinian human rights groups by name. This impulse is carried to an extreme in the section on the Israeli government's attitude regarding international and non-governmental investigations of alleged violations of human rights. In that section, the report states "individuals working for a prominent Palestinian legal rights organization were detained, beaten, prevented from travelling freely and harassed at military checkpoints." Presumably, the report is referring to Al Haq, the Ramallah-based human rights group. The report should identify the organization by name and provide details, as the State Department does in reports on other countries, including the names of Al Haq workers who were harassed and detained in 1989. In particular, it should have noted the case of Sha'wan Jabarin, who was arrested and beaten, once severely, in October 1989 -- actions which resulted in charges of brutality and improper behavior against an IDF staff sergeant and two soldiers. Jabarin is now serving a one-year term of administrative detention.

Ironically, the section on the Soviet Union, which has for years been a model of thorough reporting, appears to have suffered as a result of efforts to acknowledge the dramatic changes that have occurred there in the last year. While the report emphasizes, as it should, the "remarkable opening up of the political process" during 1989, in several instances the State Department gives more credit than it should to announced reforms. Though the report states that actions such as "intimidation of dissidents by local police, particularly the KGB" continue to occur, it goes on to

say that "subject to the foregoing limitations, there is now general respect for freedom of expression, freedom of association, some freedom of the press and freedom of assembly and freedom of religion." In our judgment, this is too simple a view and fails to convey the lack of institutionalized reform in the Soviet Union. The State Department does concede that legal reform has proceeded slowly. Yet, reflecting the hopeful tone of the report, it goes on to emphasize that "major steps [in legal reform] are promised for 1990." The problem is that those steps have been promised for some time, but little substantive legal reform has actually taken place.

The report on Zaire also suffers from wishful thinking in its discussion of purported reforms announced by that government. Many of these measures, which were originally taken in response to international criticism of Zaire's human rights record, have been in place for more than three years.

The State Department makes reference to "continued efforts to prevent human rights abuses" and "continued successful efforts. . .to regularize arrest authority." Neither the Lawyers Committee nor any other independent human rights organization has found evidence of measures to institutionalize meaningful and genuine human rights reforms. In fact, several government officials have frankly acknowledged their inability to control the actions of the various security forces. In this respect, the report places unwarranted emphasis on the activities of the Judicial Council which is referred to as a "super-ministry of justice", and the Department of Citizens Rights and Civil Liberties (DCRL), a government ministry charged with addressing human rights concerns in Zaire and before international bodies. There is little evidence to suggest that either of these official entities is having any real effect in holding Zaire's various security forces accountable for their actions.

The State Department also softens its standards when it analyzes the Zairian government's attitude toward international human rights monitoring efforts. The report says "the government's attitude toward external investigations has been inconsistent, as with the 1989 visits from the

Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (see Section 1.d)." Those who take the time to refer back to Section 1.d will learn that though our delegation did visit Kinshasa in August, six of the people with whom they met were subsequently arrested. At least three of them reported that they were interrogated and threatened in connection with their meetings with the Lawyers Committee. Five of the six were later released without charge after as long as two months. The sixth was released after more than two months, but is required to report frequently to the security police. This indicates that the government's view is far from inconsistent. Their attitude is clear -- they don't like outside scrutiny and are determined to make those who work with international human rights groups pay the price. The State Department should have been more direct in making this point.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights

Mr. Chairman, I also want to note our concerns about current U.S. policy toward human rights in the context of the United Nations and, in particular, the U.N.'s Commission on Human Rights which is now concluding its annual meeting in Geneva. We perceive an erosion of support among Western delegations and others for maintaining any serious protection role for the Commission on Human Rights. One indication of this erosion is the decreased reliance on country-specific rapporteurs on human rights, whose task has been to focus international attention on governments that are engaging in gross human rights abuses.

In recent years, the United Nations, through the Commission on Human Rights, has examined the specific human rights situations in Afghanistan, El Salvador, Iran, Chile, Cuba, Guatemala, Poland, Romania and other countries. While this process has many faults, its principal strength has been its potential for singling out rights-violating governments for increased public scrutiny and for beginning the process of holding governments accountable for their actions. Today, as the Commission moves into the final two weeks of its current session, that system is in serious jeopardy.

In our judgment, the U.S. delegation at the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva has not taken adequate measures to counter the trend away from country-specific resolutions and rapporteurs. Particularly troubling is the idea that technical assistance through the U.N.'s Advisory Services Program to governments that consistently violate human rights might be a better way of responding to such situations. Earlier this month, the Lawyers Committee published a detailed report on the operation of this program in Guatemala entitled *Abandoning the Victims: The U.N. Advisory Services Program in Guatemala*. The report concludes that the U.N.'s three-year effort has "had no effect on Guatemala's dismal human rights situation." We have provided copies of that report to members of this Subcommittee.

In the next two weeks, the Commission on Human Rights will have the opportunity to consider country-specific resolutions on four countries where we believe particular scrutiny would be highly appropriate: China, Haiti, Iraq and Guatemala. In each of these countries gross human rights violations are being committed, a finding which the State Department's Country Reports seem to support. In each of these cases, we believe that it is imperative for the United Nations to take a more aggressive role in pressing for protection of human rights and demanding the accountability of those governments for their actions. In our judgment, the U.S. delegation to the Commission should play a strong role in helping to assure that the United Nations rededicates itself to its responsibility, too often neglected in recent years, to help protect the human rights of people throughout the world.

Recommendations with Respect to Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy

In the last three years, the Lawyers Committee has proposed a series of recommendations aimed at strengthening U.S. human rights policies. The recommendations were based on a six-month study we conducted in 1988 of human rights and trade, aid and bureaucratic policies. This morning, I want to focus on five of those recommendations, which I urge this Subcommittee to pursue as a matter of priority.

1. Establish an Effective System of Inter-Agency Human Rights Coordination

An effective mechanism is needed for coordinating human rights policy among the various U.S. government departments that administer programs affecting human rights. The establishment of a high-level coordinating group, similar in function to the Inter-Agency Group on Human Rights and Foreign Assistance chaired by Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher during the Carter Administration, would serve this purpose.

The newly established coordinating body should have a broader mandate than the Christopher Committee, which only focused on certain economic assistance programs. The new coordinating group should be chaired by the Deputy Secretary of State. It should be composed of representatives of all executive departments and agencies that make decisions affecting human rights, including Treasury, Defense, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, NSC, AID and the USTR. Review of all U.S. actions with human rights implications, including security assistance, military sales, and multilateral and bilateral economic aid should be within the competence of the coordinating group.

The approval of the group should be required before actions with human rights implications are taken by the government. Such a group would insure that policies and activities of executive departments and agencies are coordinated and consistent with the overall U.S. human rights policy and strategy toward a country. The Bush Administration is urged to take a leading role in the creation of this coordinating group. However, if the administration fails to act, Congress should mandate creation of a human rights inter-agency coordinating group.

2. Country Reports on Human Rights Should be Followed Up by Development of Country Specific Human Right Strategies

The State Department has made excellent strides in becoming aware of and sensitive to human rights concerns in the establishment of U.S. foreign policy. Nevertheless, U.S. human rights policy has remained essentially reactive and *ad hoc*. Instead of establishing long-range strategies for improving human rights in various countries, the U.S. is relegated to the less effective approach of responding after-the-fact to foreseeable events in other countries.

The Lawyers Committee calls on the Bush Administration and the State Department to identify 15 to 20 countries where serious human rights problems exist, and establish long-range strategies with respect to improving the human rights situations in those countries. Beginning with the annual Country Reports and the problems identified therein, the State Department should evaluate current U.S. efforts to improve human rights in the country and propose multi-year strategies designed to achieve improvements in those countries.

3. Human Rights Training Within the Foreign Service Should be Improved

There is still a need to improve human rights training for human rights officers in the State Department, in part as a way to improve the quality of the annual Country Reports. Enhanced training programs would also play an important role in making human rights a central aspect of U.S. foreign policy.

Thomas Shannon, a former human rights officer in Guatemala, discussed training of foreign service officers in a May 1989 article in *Foreign Service Journal*.¹ His comments are an excellent introduction to this topic: "[H]uman rights work [must be] recognized for what it is -

¹Shannon, "The Unaccepted Challenge." *Foreign Service Journal*, at 32 (May 1989).

- a new kind of diplomatic activity that requires special training and support."² The Lawyers Committee recommends that human rights be explicitly included in the training of foreign service officers at all levels, including ambassadors and deputy chiefs of mission. The training should involve case studies and non-governmental human rights organizations should be invited to participate in Foreign Service Institute training programs on a regular basis.

The Lawyers Committee also endorses the recommendations put forth by Mr. Shannon:

- * Human rights officers should be given training to prepare them for their jobs, brought up-to-date on human rights legislation, and put in contact with local and regional human rights organizations.

- * The importance of human rights in the formation of U.S. foreign policy should be stressed at regular conferences on a global and regional level.

- * The Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs should participate in the selection of human rights officers, particularly for countries where human rights is an important factor in our bilateral relations, and reward those who do excellent work in their reporting on human rights issues.

Improving the quality and credibility of both State Department reporting on and advocacy of human rights is dependent on better, more thorough and explicit training in human rights issues for all foreign service officers.

²*Id.*

4. Establish Human Rights Departments at all Multilateral Development Banks

Multilateral development banks (MDBs) are financial institutions that seek to promote the economic growth of their developing country members. MDBs include the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank); related institutions, including the International Development Bank and the International Finance Corporation; and regional institutions, including the Inter-American Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank and the African Development Fund.

MDBs are owned by member governments, with voting strength determined by relative contributions of resources. In supporting economic growth, the MDBs have established the goal of "sustainable development." In the pursuit of this goal, MDBs have recognized that development can only be considered in its social and cultural context. Therefore, factors other than financial criteria are considered in determining what projects to sponsor. For example, poverty alleviation, education, and women in development have become issues that are increasingly emphasized in MDB projects. Environmental units have also been established at the World Bank and regional banks to address environmental concerns.

Consideration of the conditions under which citizens live has thus become an important aspect in determining what projects MDBs sponsor. Human rights are central to this analysis. In fact, there is a necessary link between human rights and economic development and stability. It is for this reason that the Lawyers Committee is calling for the establishment of human rights departments at all MDBs.

Consideration of human rights should be recognized and adopted as a necessary factor to be considered in the choice of MDB projects. As demonstrated by the inclusion of environmental factors in the establishment of MDB policy, the requirement that MDBs not interfere in the internal affairs of their members should pose no obstacle to the inclusion of human rights as a

consideration to be reviewed. Human rights would be only one factor in the assessment of MDB policy, loans and investments. Such a focus, however, would further the success of MDBs in sponsoring sustainable economic growth and sound economic policies. The inclusion of human rights in the MDB equation would serve to enhance the excellent developmental work done by MDBs in promoting civil, economic and social justice.

5. International Human Rights Covenants Should be Ratified

Historically, the U.S. has played a major role in establishing minimum universal standards for human rights and in advocating the transformation of human rights from a domestic issue to one of international concern. Nevertheless, although they are consistent with the U.S. Constitution and laws, the U.S. has failed to ratify several key international treaties. Ratification of these human rights instruments would strengthen the credibility of the U.S. when criticizing human rights abuses in other countries. Ratification would also underscore our commitment to live up to these standards in our own country.

Two treaties of particular concern to the Lawyers Committee are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Together with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provides an individual complaint procedure, these treaties comprise what is called the International Bill of Human Rights. It would be particularly fitting in 1991, the year the U.S. celebrates the 200th anniversary of the adoption of its own Bill of Rights, for the U.S. Senate to give serious consideration to the ratification of the International Bill of Human Rights. We urge President Bush to commit his administration to seek Senate assent to these Covenants and the four other treaties now pending before it. We also urge the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to hold hearings on the two Covenants and to transmit them to the full Senate, without unnecessary reservations, for its advice and consent.

In conclusion, we believe that increased inter-agency coordination, long-range human rights strategies, improved training of foreign service officers, the establishment of human rights offices in multilateral development banks and U.S. ratification of key human rights treaties are five concrete steps that can be taken to improve U.S. human rights policy. We call on the Bush Administration and Congress to take these actions to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.