



United States Mission to the OSCE

Release of the 2015 Human Rights Reports

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 14, 2016

Yesterday, Secretary of State John Kerry released the State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices covering calendar year 2015. These reports, commonly known as the Human Rights Reports, document the human rights situation in 199 countries and territories around the world. Every year, diplomats and staff at U.S. embassies and consulates work with human rights activists, governments, non-governmental organizations, and colleagues in Washington to confirm the facts and draft the annual reports, which are mandated by the U.S. Congress. The reports can be accessed on the internet at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/>

In the preface to these reports, Secretary Kerry notes that in every part of the world, we see an accelerating trend by both state and non-state actors to close the space for civil society, to stifle media and Internet freedom, to marginalize opposition voices, and, in the most extreme cases, to kill people or drive them from their homes. The Secretary notes that some look at these events and fear democracy is in retreat. In fact, they are a reaction by authoritarian and repressive governments to the advance of democratic ideals – to the rising demands of people from every culture and region for governments that answer to them.

The Secretary also pointed to the troubling trend among some elected leaders who undermine existing democratic institutions, notably by taking steps to stifle opposition, circumvent the electoral process, and weaken judiciaries. Furthermore, corruption, often carried out with impunity, has had a corrosive effect on democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law.

In contrast, governments that protect human rights and are accountable to their citizens are more secure, bolster international peace and security, and enjoy shared prosperity with stable democratic countries around the world.

The release each year of the Human Rights Reports is an indication of the United States' commitment to uphold and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. My delegation will continue to work with participating States, the Chairmanship, and OSCE institutions and field missions to advance the universal human rights principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.