



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the invitation to talk with you today about the troubling trends regarding human rights in Russia.

Any discussion of human rights in Russia in 2001 must take into account the remarkable changes and achievements the Russian people have benefited from since the start of glasnost and perestroika in the mid 1980's, but especially since the collapse of Communist rule ten years ago. Freedom of travel and worship, the right to assemble and speak openly without fear of certain arrest and imprisonment, and the growth of independent media and an impressive community of non-governmental organizations -- including human rights groups -- all constitute a remarkable, one could even say unimaginable change from the strictures that developed over 70 years of totalitarian, authoritarian rule.

When viewed against that sad historical legacy, the human rights picture looks quite encouraging indeed. But it also means this laudable record of progress over the past decade must itself become new standard of measure as we consider and state our expectations for further progress in this area, which speaks to the values of liberty and democracy that are so much a part of what the United States stands for in the world. To put it more simply, it is not enough for Russia to be judged simply on how the current human rights situation differs from the communist past. To be true to our desire to support Russia's continued integration into international institutions, we must look at the Russian record in light of international standards and practices. And in this light, I would like to comment on some troubling trends that threaten to undermine the progress I cited at the outset of these remarks.

In particular, I would like to focus on the attempt to restore order in Russia today and the impact of this strategy on media freedoms. We must also discuss the crisis in Chechnya because it represents the fundamental dilemma for human rights in Russia today. Finally, I would like to elaborate on our long-term strategy to promote democratic values and civil society in Russia.

"Managed Democracy"

Just over one year ago, President Putin was elected with a promise to the Russian people of restoring order in the country, and this remains his top priority. The Russian public overwhelmingly supports him in this effort. The Russian government is not seeking "order" simply for its own sake. Its goal is civil and economic development. We, of course, strongly support civil and economic development in Russia. However, we are concerned by some of the means chosen to achieve these ends, which may be inconsistent and perhaps even threaten the progress of the past decade, and which also raise questions about Russia's compliance with international human rights obligations.

Russia appears to be pursuing a "managed democracy," in which the boundaries of free speech, dissent, the media, religion, civil society and politics are loosely determined by the executive and maintained through the use of law enforcement and other authorities.

The biggest and most recent example of such action is the case of Media-Most and its independent television station, NTV. NTV was an important catalyst for expanding media freedom in Russia because its broadcasts brought criticism of the

government and its policies into the homes of people, and, at the same time, accustomed the Russian government to hearing criticism of itself. The government's takeover of NTV relied on a combination of civil and criminal cases with state-controlled Gazprom as a business surrogate. The Russian government claims that the Media-Most takeover is simply a commercial affair, but through its single-minded pursuit of Media-Most and its head, Vladimir Gusinskiy, the government has demonstrated a broader set of goals that includes the stifling of outspoken critics in a way that has had a chilling effect on how other journalists go about their jobs.

Chechnya

The most persistently troubling human rights issue in Russia remains Chechnya. While we recognize Russia's territorial integrity, and right to fight terrorism and armed insurgencies on its soil, continuing and very credible reports of arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings on the part of federal forces are deeply disturbing. Especially troubling is lack of serious investigation and accountability for such crimes. The culture of impunity which has developed is not compatible with either respect for human rights or a achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict.

More broadly this is a question of values; what kind of long-term relationship can we pursue with a government that wages a brutal and seemingly endless war against its own people on its own territory? Our policy on Chechnya insists on a political settlement of the crisis, an end to ongoing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and credible accountability for past violations. We call for unimpeded humanitarian access and assistance, including the return of the OSCE Assistance Group to Chechnya and visits by UN special representatives.

Ultimately, the best hope for influencing a change in Moscow's policies away from violence and toward accountability, dialogue, reconciliation and reconstruction, will be the insistence of many voices in the international community as well as inside of Russia. Efforts like the joint United Nations Commission on Human Rights of the past two years and frank discussion of Chechnya in the Russia-EU Summit are part of making this point.

Mr. Chairman, let me touch briefly on the U.S. response to the human rights challenges in today's Russia.

At the government-to-government level, we have and will continue to raise human rights issues with the government of Russia at every opportunity. We will work directly, as well as in concert with EU and others in multilateral institutions including the UN and the OSCE. Underpinning these political and diplomatic efforts, however, is our work at the grassroots level.

Supporting the growth of a strong and vibrant independent media is one of our highest priorities in Russia. We are assisting both print and broadcast media throughout Russia by providing them with technical assistance and training to further their economic viability and to enable them to become more effective advocates for journalistic freedom. We are also giving direct assistance such as production grants and training. Training has grown from a focus on fact-based, investigative journalism to more business-oriented training to promote financial independence. Legal assistance for print and broadcast journalists has become a more central feature of our work, including protection against federal and local government libel suits and tax investigations. Finally, we are looking to step up our support for Russia's media watchdog NGOs and media monitors to allow them to track developments in the regions and draw attention to national and local government attempts to suppress the news. U.S. international broadcasting can play a pivotal role in supporting the development of independent media in Russia and foster stronger ties between U.S. broadcasters and affiliated Russian media outlets.

In addition, nearly 45,000 Russians have traveled to the U.S. on our exchange programs. Through these programs, we are exposing the next generation of Russian leaders to democratic values in action. Our openly-competed exchange programs provide an opportunity for any Russian to apply to gain substantive knowledge of how things work in the West, and make contacts with his or her U.S. counterparts that typically endure beyond the exchange. The programs have a strong track record, and we should increase the numbers of exchangees where capacity allows.

Mr. Chairman, next week President Bush will meet with President Putin in Ljubljana, Slovenia, for their first summit. They will be discussing their respective views and vision for our bilateral relationship. Issues of human rights will be an important part of this dialogue, for it is clear that a Russia whose respect for human rights accords with international standards and practices is a Russia with whom we can live and work more comfortably and effectively. A Russia committed to democracy

and individual rights is a Russia with which we will have a close and productive relationship, in spite of any disagreement we may have on one or another issue of the day. The significant progress we have seen over the past decade in this area has played an important role in creating a changed dynamic in U.S.-Russian relations that has permitted a much broader and more ambitious agenda to develop between our two countries. If we have a sense that progress on human rights and democratization has stopped or is being reversed, then it can't help but have a serious impact on the relationship as a whole.