

Statement of the Honorable Sam Brownback, Chairman  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe  
hearing on  
“Human Rights and U.S.-Russian Relations: Implications for the Future”

July 27, 2006

I want to welcome everybody today to Helsinki Commission hearing on "Human Rights in Russia: Bilateral Relations and Implications for the Future." We will discuss the extent to which the U.S. can effectively promote human rights and democratic governance in Russia, while assessing the prospects for working cooperatively on issues of importance to both our nations and the limits to such cooperation when our interests diverge.

To be sure, there are many countries in the world where the human rights situation is much worse than in Russia. But those countries do not currently hold the presidencies of the Council of Europe and the G-8.

What are we to make of President Putin's hosting of President Karimov of Uzbekistan on the one year anniversary of the massacre at Andijan? Or Moscow's indifference to human rights violations in Chechnya? Or recent attempts to intimidate political opposition and human rights activists?

Clearly, it is not in the interest of the United States to ignore or attempt to isolate Russia. We should be open to working with Russia when and where beneficial, such as the war on international terrorism, eradication of weapons of mass destruction, health and environmental issues and energy supplies.

The challenge for the U.S., then, is to be true to our broad mission of promoting human rights and democratic governance in Russia, while at the same time attempting to maintain a productive and mutually beneficial relationship. This is a difficult task.

Our experts today are uniquely qualified to address these questions, and I look forward to hearing their testimony. I'd be pleased to add also to the hearing record a statement by Joseph Grieboski, president of the Institute on Religion and Public Policy, for his testimony.

Our first panel is Ms. Felice Gaer, chair of the Commission on International Religious Freedom. She's also vice president of the International League for Human Rights, a member of the board of directors of the Sakharov Foundation and a member of the advisory committee on Human Rights Watch, Europe and Central Asia division.

I would also note, for those watching or present, that most of the witnesses attended the G-8 or the pre-G-8 conferences, so they'd have some direct experiences to discuss. I'm also like to note for those here or watching that we issued a press release recently between and with Senator Clinton and myself on the Senate-passed resolution on "Forbes" journalist Klebnikov. And I want to thank my colleague, Senator Clinton, who is also a member of this Helsinki Commission, for her work on this important topic. With that, Ms. Gaer, thank you very much for being here with us today. It's been a pleasure to work with you. And I appreciate greatly your work and your contribution.

The floor is yours.