

Preface

I am proud to present the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the first time as Secretary of State. When I served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, my colleagues and I depended on these reports for an accurate assessment of human rights conditions around the world. I know how valuable they are to those in the State Department and other federal agencies who carry out U.S. foreign policy as well as to members of Congress, the academic community, activists, students, journalists, lawyers, judges, foreign governments, and concerned citizens everywhere.

The pages that follow document the often difficult march forward of human freedom around the world. Significant progress is being made in some places, but in far too many others governments fall short of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' vision of a world where people live "free and equal in dignity and rights."

We report on the world's newest country, South Sudan, and its efforts to ensure a peaceful future for its people. We cover the horrifying violence in Syria, historic elections in Egypt, Georgia, and Libya, and the promising democratic opening in Burma. The reports also reveal the courage of individuals, including netizens, activists, workers, and journalists who advocate for universal human rights. The reports make clear that many of our most pressing foreign policy challenges are, at their core, about the universal and undeniable human quest for freedom and dignity.

Our world is complex and increasingly influenced by non-state actors – brave civil society activists and advocates, but also violent extremists, transnational criminals, and other malevolent actors. In those places where human rights and fundamental freedoms are denied, it is far easier for these negative destabilizing influences to take hold, threatening international stability and our own national security.

It is in our interest to promote the universal rights of all persons. Governments that respect human rights are more peaceful and more prosperous. They are better neighbors, stronger allies, and better economic partners. Governments that enforce safe workplaces, prohibit exploitative child and forced labor, and educate their citizens create a more level playing field and broader customer base for the global marketplace. Conversely, governments that threaten regional and global peace, from Iran to North Korea, are also egregious human rights abusers, with citizens trapped in the grip of domestic repression, economic deprivation, and international isolation.

The United States stands with people and governments that aspire to freedom and democracy, mindful from our own experience that the work of building a more perfect union – a sustainable and durable democracy – will never be complete. As part of this commitment, we advocate

around the world for governments to adopt policies and practices that respect human rights regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, race, sexual orientation, or disability; that allow for and honor the results of free and fair elections; that ensure safe and healthy workplaces; and that respect peaceful protests and other forms of dissent. The United States continues to speak out unequivocally on behalf of the fundamental dignity and equality of all persons.

I hereby transmit the Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012* to the United States Congress.

John F. Kerry
Secretary of State