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Secretary W. Christopher - Democracy/Human Rights - 6/14/93

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## Secretary Christopher Democracy and Human Rights: Where America Stands

*Address at the World Conference  
 on Human Rights, Vienna, Austria,  
 June 14, 1993.*

**T**hank you, Mr. Chairman. And thanks to Secretary General Fall and the Preparatory Conference Chair Warzazi.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I speak to you as the representative of a nation "conceived in liberty." America's identity as a nation derives from our dedication to the proposition "that all Men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." Over the course of two centuries, Americans have found that advancing democratic values and human rights serves our deepest values as well as our practical interests.

That is why the United States stands with the men and women everywhere who are standing up for these principles. And that is why President Clinton has made reinforcing democracy and protecting human rights a pillar of our foreign policy—and a major focus of our foreign assistance programs.

Democracy is the moral and strategic imperative for the 1990s. Democracy will build safeguards for human rights in every nation. Democracy is the best way to advance lasting peace and prosperity in the world.

The cause of freedom is a fundamental commitment for my country. It is also a matter of deep personal conviction for me. I am proud to have

headed the U.S. Government's first interagency group on human rights under President Carter, who is with us today. President Carter will be remembered as the first American President to put human rights on the international agenda. He has helped to lift the lives of people in every part of the world. Today, we build upon his achievements—and those of the human rights movement since its inception.

In this post-Cold War era, we are at a new moment. Our agenda for freedom must embrace every prisoner of conscience, every victim of torture, every individual denied basic human rights. It must also encompass the democratic movements that have changed the political map of our globe.

The great new focus of our agenda for freedom is this: expanding, consolidating and defending democratic progress around the world. It is democracy that establishes the civil institutions that replace the power of oppressive regimes. Democracy is the best means not just to gain—but to guarantee—human rights.

In the battle for democracy and human rights, words matter, but what we *do* matters much more. What all of our citizens and governments do in the days ahead will count far more than any discussions held or documents produced here.

I cannot predict the outcome of this Conference. But I can tell you this: The worldwide movement for democracy and human rights will prevail. My delegation will support the forces of freedom—of tolerance, of respect for

the rights of the individual—not only in the next few weeks in Vienna, but every day in the conduct of our foreign policy throughout the world. The United States will never join those who would undermine the Universal Declaration and the movement toward democracy and human rights.

### Securing Freedom After the Cold War

The Universal Declaration enshrines a timeless truth for all people and all nations: "Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace" on this earth. The Declaration's drafters met the challenge of respecting the world's diversity, while reflecting values that are universal.

Even before the Declaration was adopted, the Cold War had begun to cast a chilling shadow between word and deed. But the framers of the Declaration hoped that each successive generation would strengthen the Declaration through its own struggles. It is for each generation to redeem the promise of the framers' work.

Time and time again since the adoption of the Universal Declaration, human rights activism has unlocked prison cells and carved out pockets of freedom for individuals living under repression. Today, the global movement from despotism to democracy is transforming entire political systems and opening freedom's door to whole societies.



Nations that free human potential—that invest in human capital and defend human rights—have a better chance to develop and grow. Nations that enforce the right to seek and obtain employment without discrimination will become more just societies—and more productive economies. And nations that are committed to democratic values create conditions in which the private sector is free to thrive and to provide work for their people.

States that respect human rights and operate on democratic principles tend to be the world's most peaceful and stable. On the other hand, the worst violators of human rights tend to be the world's aggressors and proliferators. These states export threats to global security, whether in the shape of terrorism, massive refugee flows, or environmental pollution. Denying human rights not only lays waste to human lives; it creates instability that travels across borders.

### The Future Lies with Free People

The worldwide prospects for human rights, democracy, and economic development have never been better. But sadly, the end of the Cold War has not brought an end to aggression, repression, and inhumanity.

Fresh horrors abound around the world. We have only to think of the enormous human costs of regional conflict, ethnic hatred, and despotic rule. We have only to think of Bosnia—just a few hundred miles away from this meeting hall, but worlds away from the peaceful and tolerant international community envisioned in the Universal Declaration.

A lasting peace in the Balkans depends on ensuring that all are prepared to respect fundamental human rights, especially those of minorities. Those who desecrate these rights must know that they will be ostracized. They will face sanctions. They will be brought before tribunals of international justice. They will not gain access to investment or assistance. And they will not gain acceptance by the community of civilized nations.

The future lies in a different direction: not with repressive governments but with free people. It belongs to the men and women who find inspiration in the words of the Universal Declaration; who act upon their principles even at great personal risk; who dodge bullets and defy threats to cast their ballots; who work selflessly for justice, tolerance, democracy, and peace. These people can be found everywhere—ordinary men and women doing extraordinary things—even in places where hate, fear, war, and chaos rule the hour.

We must keep the spotlight of world opinion trained on the darkest corners of abuse. We must confront the abusers. We must sharpen the tools of human rights diplomacy to address problems before they escalate into violence and create new pariah states.

Today, on behalf of the United States, I officially present to the world community an ambitious action plan that represents our commitment to pursue human rights, regardless of the outcome of this Conference. This plan will build on the UN's capacity to practice preventive diplomacy, safeguard human rights, and assist fledgling democracies. We seek to strengthen the UN Human Rights Center and its advisory and rapporteurial functions. We support the establishment of a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

### Advancing Women's Rights

The United States will also act to integrate our concerns over the inhumane treatment of women into the global human rights agenda. We will press for the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. We will also urge the UN to sharpen the focus and strengthen the coordination of its women's rights activities.

Eleanor Roosevelt and the other drafters of the Declaration wanted to write a document that would live and last. They were determined to write a

document that would protect and empower women as well as men. But that remains an unfulfilled vision in too many parts of the world, where women are subjected to discrimination and bias based solely upon gender.

Violence and discrimination against women don't just victimize individuals; they hold back whole societies by confining the human potential of half the population. Guaranteeing human rights is a moral imperative with respect to both women and men. It is also an investment in making whole nations stronger, fairer, and better.

Women's rights must be advanced on a global basis. But the crucial work is at the national level. It is in the self interest of every nation to terminate unequal treatment of women.

### Next Steps of Our Own

Beyond our support for multilateral efforts, the United States recognizes that we have a solemn duty to take steps of our own.

In that spirit, I am pleased to announce that the United States will move promptly to obtain the consent of our Senate to ratify The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. We strongly support the general goals of the other treaties that we have signed but not yet ratified. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; The American Convention on Human Rights; and The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: All of these will constitute important advances, and our Administration will turn to them as soon as the Senate has acted on the racism Convention. We also expect soon to pass implementing legislation on the Convention Against Torture in furtherance of the worldwide goal of eliminating torture by the year 2000. To us, these far-reaching documents are not parchment promises to be held up for propaganda effect, but solemn commitments to be enforced.

My country will pursue human rights in our bilateral relations with all governments—large and small, devel-