



| SOUTH ASIA





Countries in South Asia face myriad human rights and democracy challenges. There are, however, several common themes to the problems of the region. Sectarian tensions, homegrown and imported terrorist groups, extremism, pervasive corruption and ineffective legal systems present major obstacles to development, peace and stability in South Asia. Terrorism and the many insurgencies that plague the region both reflect and contribute to a poor human rights climate. The unprecedented level of U.S. engagement with the countries of the region provides an opportunity and an obligation to press for greater democratic accountability and respect for individual rights.

The United States is addressing the broader challenges in South Asia through counterterrorism, conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts, education and economic reform, and Muslim outreach activities. U.S. democracy programs combine legislative, judicial, and local governance reform and projects to strengthen civil society and independent media at national and local levels to improve transparency, accountability and inclusiveness. Support for democratic “precursors” such as political party building and reform, promoting women and minority participation in political processes and institutions, human rights education and training, and anti-trafficking and child labor legislation and enforcement programs are also major areas of activity.

*“We go forward with confidence, because we trust in the power of human freedom to change lives and nations.”*

President Bush, Speech at American Enterprise Institute February 26, 2003

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR ADJUDICATING CASES IN SRI LANKA

---

Since November 2002, USAID and the Sri Lankan National Commission of Jurists (SLNCJ), the local implementing non-governmental organization, have been setting up the physical facilities needed to run the legal assistance program. USAID has been the purchasing and installing in the courts \$100,000 in office equipment and materials for use primarily by SLNCJ, but secondarily by the courts. This allows the courts to improve their efficiency and process cases in a more timely fashion. In the next few months, the SLNCJ will initiate the legal aid and awareness aspects of the program, which focus on vulnerable groups in the north and east of the island, strengthening rule of law in these areas. Much of the program's outreach will be in areas heavily populated by Tamils. We hope the Tamils will view this assistance as a benefit, albeit minor, of the ceasefire. Providing them with greater access to the judicial system will hopefully strengthen their regard for the government and rule of law.



## AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is a nation recovering from 23 years of civil war and political instability. Most governing and civil society institutions deteriorated and largely ceased to function. Afghan society experienced waves of serious human rights abuses during the years of war that touched nearly every ethnic group, religious minorities, and the female half of the population.

To help Afghanistan build democratic institutions, the Embassy worked closely with the commissions mandated by the 2001 Bonn Agreement to undertake constitutional, judicial, and human rights reform and provided \$200,000 to the Technical Advisory Services and Office Support for the Bonn Commissions. The U.S. Government provided advisors and technical support to help the Constitutional Commission's Drafting Committee prepare a draft constitution, plan for public consultations, and set up permanent offices. The draft will be considered for approval during a Constitutional Loya Jirga in October 2003. The U.S. Government also helped get the Judicial and Human Rights Commissions up and running with technical assistance and office equipment.

The Embassy encouraged the growth of civil society organizations and grassroots political organizing to build public awareness and engagement in the run up to national elections in June 2004. Reaching out to Afghanistan's next generation of leaders, the Embassy sent 12 young Afghans to the United States for a seminar on conflict resolution and sent

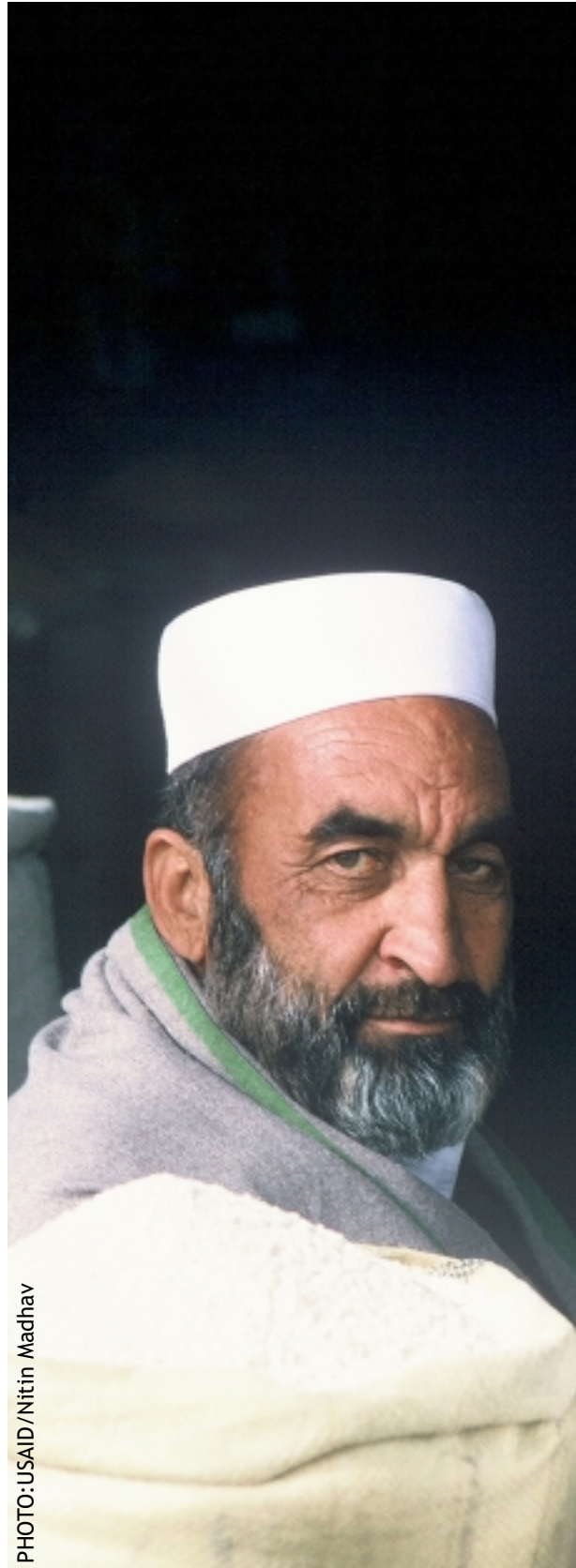


PHOTO: USAID/Nitin Madhav

another six Afghans on a three-week International Visitor program on “Human Rights and Democracy.”

Furthering the U.S. policy of promoting the rights of women, the Embassy used \$163,000 to send a group of female political activists to the United States to participate in an international advocacy training program on human rights in preparation for the Emergency Loya Jirga in June 2002. Women participated in the Loya Jirga in significant numbers, and a female candidate ran for the office of President. The Embassy sent 14 women from throughout the Afghan government on an International Visitors’ program designed to enhance leadership skills.

The U.S. Government provided a grant of \$251,000 to support the establishment of mobile legal clinics inside Afghanistan and among Afghan women refugees in Pakistan to provide women with basic legal training. The U.S. Government also funded \$2,575,000 for the establishment of ten neighborhood-based Women’s Centers in Kabul and several nearby cities to provide vocational training to women. Another 14 Women’s Centers focusing on literacy and development of vocational skills are being constructed throughout Afghanistan.

To advance respect for human rights among law enforcement officials, the Embassy reached an agreement with the Ministry of Interior to provide U.S. trainers to prepare Afghan officials to teach a two-week program on human rights, leadership, and modern policing techniques during the basic training for police officers. The human rights awareness

component of the training will cost approximately \$1 million. The starting point for the program is Kabul’s 7,000 person police force.

The Embassy encouraged the creation of a free and independent press, laying the groundwork to establish 16 independent radio stations with a grant of \$1.95 million. Programming content is slated to include human rights and legal advocacy. The Embassy also provided modest grants to two independent newspapers.

To address the weakness of Afghanistan’s education system, the Embassy sent 13 female education specialists to the United States for a four-week teacher-training program. The program built skills in curriculum and materials development, and improved computer literacy with a train-the-trainer component.

## BANGLADESH

During 2002, the United States continued to push for Bangladesh to have stronger democratic institutions, a political process more transparent and accountable to citizens, and increased respect for the rule of law and human rights for its citizens. To accomplish these goals, the U.S. has a number of successful programs devoted to improving good governance, fostering democracy, and attempting to eliminate child labor and trafficking of persons. In Fiscal Year 2003, U.S. human rights funding for Bangladesh is expected to exceed \$14 million.

Bangladesh continued its successful transition from military rule to democracy in 2002. Since 1991 the country has held

three parliamentary elections, which though violent, were judged generally free and fair by the U.S. Government and other international observers. This transition from military rule to democracy has allowed the U.S. Government to engage this moderate Muslim nation on human rights. The Embassy utilizes USAID programs that seek to strengthen human rights groups and fight corruption. The U.S. Government spent approximately \$1.8 million dollars on human rights promotion, NGO grants, training, and technical assistance in Bangladesh. These joint programs work to strengthen Parliament and local government and make those democratic institutions more accountable to their citizens. In addition, the public affairs section of the Embassy helped establish a program of alternative dispute resolution, which holds great promise of clearing the court system of its million-case backlog.

Improving conditions for Bangladeshi workers has been an important aspect of Embassy Dhaka's overall strategy for many years. A major focus has been eliminating the worst forms of child labor, where a \$6 million dollar program is having an effect. Working with the Government, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS), the International Labor Organization (ILO), and local labor and industry groups, the Embassy has achieved some notable successes, including the virtual elimination of child labor from the ready-made garment industry. A \$1.5 million dollar garment industry labor relations project has helped to make this a reality. In addition, Bangladesh has committed to allowing full freedom of association in the

export processing zones (EPZs), and Embassy Dhaka continues to press the government to make good on this promise. The ILO, with USAID and Department of Labor funding, is working with EPZ management to make this commitment a reality.

Embassy Dhaka continues to work with government, civil society, and other donors to help USAID lead a thematic working group on anti-trafficking, including launching a media package that is currently being used by all NGOs working on the issue of trafficking. The results of this media package are clear: public awareness and condemnation of trafficking are going up, as are arrests and conviction of traffickers. Thirty-two traffickers were convicted in 2002 as a direct result of this program.





## BHUTAN

Although Bhutan is ruled by a hereditary monarch, in recent years its Government has adopted some measures to increase the power of the National Assembly, and the King has continued the efforts toward social and political modernization begun by his father. The current move to a constitutional monarchy provides a significant opportunity for our Bhutan human rights agenda. Nonetheless, a number of human rights problems exist: the Government prohibits political parties; arbitrary arrest and detention have remained problems; and torture and abuse of detainees reportedly have continued, with impunity for abusers. The U.S. Government's strategy for Bhutan focuses on helping the country evolve into a constitutional monarchy with greater civil liberties, and also addresses the issue of Nepalese refugees who left Bhutan in 1991-92. In general, however, the absence of both diplomatic relations and an official U.S. presence in Thimphu have limited the ability to monitor and influence human rights developments there.

Prior to 2002, there was no written constitution in Bhutan to protect fundamental political and human rights; however, during 2002 and 2003 a constitution was being drafted and debated by the National Assembly and the Cabinet. The U.S. has provided advice to the Government throughout this process. The Ambassador and a Political Officer traveled to Thimphu in April, and a Political Officer and Senate Staff Delegation traveled there in December, to meet with government officials and

exchange information regarding the U.S. system of governance. As Bhutan undergoes a transition to a constitutional monarchy, a development that could materialize within two years, the U.S. will continue to provide information to the Government and to other appropriate interested parties on our Constitution and governmental structure.

The U.S. furthered its commitment to supporting democracy on the local level. In addition to maintaining regular contact with India-based Bhutanese NGOs, the Embassy sponsored two Bhutanese Governors to attend programs on state and local governance through the International Visitors Program.

Embassy officers have engaged the Government in numerous meetings and delivered demarches to Bhutanese officials in New Delhi regarding the plight of the 100,000 refugees currently lodged in Nepalese camps. Due in part to U.S. vigilance, the Governments of Nepal and Bhutan have made progress towards resolving this situation.

## INDIA

Despite being a strong and vibrant democracy, human rights problems are widespread in India. Many of these abuses are generated by a traditionally hierarchical social structure, deeply rooted tensions among the country's many ethnic and religious communities, violent secessionist movements and the authorities' attempts to repress them, and deficient police methods and training. To help counter these problems, the U.S. actively engages the Government of India (GOI) to assist in the improvement of human

rights. These engagements include a wide variety of tools, including public diplomacy and official diplomatic channels to facilitate advances and enhance U.S.-India cooperative efforts.

Throughout the year the U.S. advocated improvements in the country's effectiveness in enforcing the legislative framework designed to prohibit and punish abuses. In October, U.S. officials, including a Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, met with senior Indian officials to discuss an upcoming session of the Commission on Human Rights and the Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). At the meeting's conclusion, Indian officials confirmed plans to amend its penal code in conformity with OPCAT.

The U.S. Embassy provided a grant to the Institute of Social Sciences in New Delhi to provide political and organizational

training to strengthen the skills of local legislators from Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, the Embassy took the lead in mobilizing interest among the foreign diplomatic community to observe the 2002 state Legislative Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir in September/October. Furthermore, Embassy observers visited some 200 polling stations during three rounds of elections and reported their observations. These elections proved to be the most transparent, free, and fair in Kashmir's recent history, due in part to the strong role of the National Election Commission, which the U.S. supported.

The U.S. Government supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage religious tolerance and freedom, including regular consultations with high level officials. In April 2002, the Ambassador publicly condemned the religiously-motivated attacks in Gujarat that resulted in the deaths of





over 2,000 Muslims. His statement followed U.S. aid that provided over \$200,000 to help more than 50,000 internally displaced persons in urban areas of Gujarat. These families were given family survival kits, hygiene kits, employment training, medical care, and stress counseling.

The U.S. Embassy sponsored approximately 45 journalists to travel to the United States as International Visitors in 2002. By participating in courses and training on broadcast media, the formulation of U.S. foreign policy, state and local governance, and U.S. economic policy, these journalists were exposed to the strong connection between open access to government officials and information and freedom of the press in the United States.

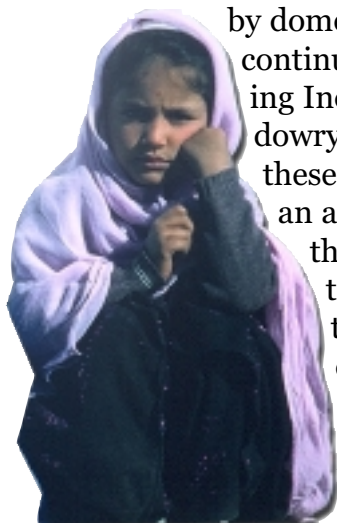
Finally, the U.S. has provided funding to support expanded roles for women. On July 30, the consulates in Mumbai and Chennai organized Digital Video Conferences on combating domestic violence. Furthermore, the Embassy gave a \$60,000 grant to the New Delhi NGO, Shakti Shalini, to help women victimized by domestic violence. This organization continued to be instrumental in reforming Indian law to protect women from dowry-related deaths. Following on these steps, the U.S. Government gave an additional \$300,000 to assist in the design of activities that helped to facilitate the ability of women to pursue their legal rights, enhance the functioning of institutional channels for dispute resolution, redress of grievances, and expand legal services and protections to women.

During the year, Embassy officials worked with Indian officials and international organizations to address the problem of trafficking in persons (TIP). Specifically, the Embassy sponsored seven Indian human rights professionals to attend multi-regional programs on trafficking of women and children. In addition, the U.S. administered \$1.62 million for India to address trafficking, violence against women and child labor, and to promote opportunities for disadvantaged groups to participate equitably in society. Furthermore, the Embassy engaged the Government of India on efforts to combat trafficking at numerous meetings. At the first bilateral Global Issues Forum on October 30, the U.S. launched an effort to cooperate more closely in multilateral fora, and encouraged increased prosecutions in cases of trafficking in persons.

The U.S. continued to call for reforms in the India labor market. The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government of India on International Labor Organization Convention 182 relating to child labor, which India has signed but not ratified.

## NEPAL

The Human Rights situation in Nepal is rapidly escalating into a crisis. To address this situation, the U.S. actively engages the Government of Nepal (GON), the military, and members of civil society on a variety of fronts to advance human rights. U.S. programs tackle needs in areas as diverse as rehabilitation of torture victims, advocacy in a democracy, voter education, child labor, trafficking in persons, civic education, and women's political participation.



For the past seven years, Nepal has been gripped by a violent domestic Maoist insurgency in which nearly 7,000 people have been killed. To counter this, a central part of all U.S.-Nepalisi bilateral dialogue at all levels of interaction with the police, the army, and the civilian government has been frank and there have been serious discussions about the importance of human rights. The Embassy and the armed services of Nepal have maintained an active dialogue on the subject of human rights. Specifically, the Embassy has continued to argue that respect for civilian rights is a tactical necessity in counterinsurgency, as well as a moral imperative of a democratic government. The U.S. Embassy's repeated demarches demonstrably have influenced the human rights sensitivity of top military leaders. The U.S. has also sponsored guest speakers for journalists, editors, and the military government on the importance of human rights. For instance, in September the U.S. Government sponsored a two-day seminar on the Law of Armed Conflict and Rules of Engagement for approximately 20 Royal Nepali Army (RNA) officers at the rank of colonel and above. To follow up, in December the U.S. Government trained the RNA on civil affairs. In May the U.S. Government sponsored a military law exchange program that focused on the Law of Armed Conflict and rules of engagement, military justice and disciplinary framework, and the training of legal professionals in the military.

Furthermore, in June the U.S. Government initiated a \$600,000 project to rehabilitate torture victims and build capacity among health professionals that deal with torture victims. Under a coop-

erative agreement with a local NGO, more than 1,000 torture victims and their families will receive comprehensive medical and psychological care, as well as legal counseling. Mobile treatment clinics also conduct community awareness programs to inform rural communities of their rights and the legal and therapeutic recourse available to them. Fact-finding teams (composed of a doctor, a lawyer, and a journalist) investigate, document, and report credible accounts of torture.

To address Nepal's weak democratic institutions, the U.S. Government worked with the Government, civil society, and American NGOs to bolster support for free and fair elections. A two-year voter education program, funded at approximately \$600,000, trained 180 district election officials and 1,227 civic/political leaders from 30 districts in proper election procedures. The program also printed and distributed 50,000 voter awareness booklets with pertinent election laws and 70,000 voter resource manuals. In addition, 30 episodes of a radio drama on voters' rights and responsibilities were aired in 10 local languages. As a result, district election officials, local political party and civic leaders, as well as general voters, benefited from increased awareness of election procedures. To increase awareness of citizens' rights and responsibilities in Nepal's relatively young democracy, the public diplomacy section of the U.S. Embassy sponsored a \$164,451 program to develop a civic education curriculum for schools in at least 15 districts. The curriculum has been so successfully received that the Ministry of Education plans to implement its use in grades 10-12 and has asked for complementary materials for use at the primary school level.

The U.S. continued to call for reforms in the Nepal labor market. The U.S. Government has committed \$5 million for a comprehensive, three-year, “time-bound” program to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. This program is being implemented through the International Labor Organization and the NGO, World Education.

The U.S. has provided funding to support expanded roles for women and to strengthen advocacy and local government accountability. Thus far, women’s coalitions have engaged in advocacy campaigns on a wide variety of issues, including the dowry system, leadership training, employment conditions for women in hotels and restaurants, reservation of 25 percent of local government budgets for women’s development, and combating witchcraft accusations.

The U.S. has supported with \$900,000 anti-trafficking programs that included training for local government anti-trafficking task forces, overseas employment agency rights training, dissemination of information on safe migration, psychosocial counseling, and anti-trafficking network strengthening. The U.S. Government reviewed studies focused on labor and migration laws in the context of trafficking and women’s right to migrate. The U.S. Government also funded a program through UNICEF to provide computer equipment and to design a database for police units specifically charged with limiting trafficking.

## PAKISTAN

To promote democracy and fair labor standards and to address Pakistan’s religious freedom and human rights record, the U.S. Embassy and Consulates worked with the Government and local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to strengthen existing institutions, train civil society and government leaders, and raise awareness on key human rights and democracy issues. The Ambassador commemorated International Human Rights Day by hosting a large reception honoring Pakistan’s civil society. At this reception, she reminded the audience that “every day in Pakistan we must focus on human rights.”

Since the 1999 bloodless coup, the U.S. Government has pursued a goal of building democracy in Pakistan. To support this goal, the U.S. Government provided approximately \$5 million for a voting awareness campaign and training for poll watchers before the October general elections, to encourage voter turnout and institutionalize poll monitoring. Specifically, the U.S. Government strengthened democratic institutions by providing funding to a local NGO to conduct ongoing orientation programs for newly elected legislators. As a direct result of this program, five Pakistani political and civil society leaders were able to participate in International Visitors Programs, and more are slated to attend in the coming months. In addition, the U.S. Government continued to discuss human rights concerns in high level meetings with the leaders of Pakistan, including with the President, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister.

As part of the U.S. Government’s Border Security Program training, the Embassy worked with the United States High Commission for Refugee UNHCR to offer a four-hour training block to 53 Pakistani law enforcement personnel in Quetta and Peshawar on International Refugee Law to reduce human rights violations against refugees.

Furthering the U.S. Government’s policy of encouraging religious freedom, the U.S. Ambassador’s demarche to the Attorney General and Law Ministry of Pakistan regarding several blasphemy death sentences helped expedite two long-standing appeals. The U.S. has sent two Islamic clerics on a specially-tailored International Visitors Program to promote understanding and religious tolerance. Furthermore, ongoing contacts with government security forces improved protection for religious minorities and helped to defuse at least one planned attack on a Christian church on Christmas Eve. The U.S. Government also pushed for further aggressive investigations and prosecutions of those who perpetrated violence against religious minorities, including those allegedly responsible for the recent attacks in Taxila, Murree, and Karachi.

The U.S. continued to be the largest supporter of International Labor Organization’s International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor in Pakistan. Specifically, the U.S. sponsored a \$5 million fund to combat child labor and \$1.5 million for workforce education and skills training in Punjab province. The projects target working children and children at risk of falling into work by

placing them in non-formal education centers to learn basic literacy and numeric skills, with the goal of mainstreaming them into the government school sector. In addition, to continue to support grass-roots community and labor organizations, the Embassy sent a leader of the Bonded Labor Liberation Front on a multi-regional IV program on “NGO Management.”

In support of the U.S. Government’s policy to combat trafficking worldwide, the Embassy sent a speaker to Pakistan’s national conference on trafficking and human smuggling to speak about steps the Government could take to fight trafficking in persons.



PHOTO:USAID

## SRI LANKA

The ongoing peace process has had more of a direct and dramatic impact on improving the human rights situation in Sri Lanka than any other factor during the past year. The U.S. Government continued to contribute to the peace process in many ways, including through consistent and high-level use of public diplomacy tools and through private interaction with key actors. The 2002-2003 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Sri Lanka includes programs to assist and reinforce the peace process, including contributing close to \$1.5 million to support technical experts of the new Peace Secretariat and for outreach programs to engage the public.

The Government's arbitrary arrests of Tamils has been a serious human rights problem. During the year, the U.S. supported projects to address the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and to insure that no new arrests under the PTA occurred. In addition, the U.S. Government empha-

sized to the Government the importance of actively investigating reports of government officials failing to comply with legal protections. U.S. programs initiated the purchasing of equipment to process the cases and is in the final stages of helping fund attorneys for persons still in government custody.

The U.S. Government maintains indirect contact with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), but recognizes that the LTTE is on the U.S. Government's Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list. U.S. officials made public statements raising concerns about the LTTE's forcible recruitment of children and harassment of the minority Muslim population. Moreover, U.S. officials made approaches to influential Tamil politicians regarding the behavior of the LTTE. At year's end, tensions between the Muslim community and the LTTE had eased somewhat, and the LTTE agreed to renew its work with UNICEF to stop child recruitment and to counteract the effects on those already recruited.



PHOTO: USAID/Nitin Madhav

During the year, the U.S. used International Visitors Program grants to further promote human rights and religious freedom. During the past year, the Embassy nominated a Sri Lankan Muslim leader to participate in an “Islam in America” program. The Embassy also nominated numerous key individuals from human rights organizations for programs focusing on improving organizational modalities and improvement in judicial reform.

The U.S. Government continued to discuss with the Government of Sri Lanka the problem of trafficking in persons. The Embassy provided assistance to the National Child Protection Authority and the Don Bosco Technical Center for the NGOs’ work in combating trafficking in children and rehabilitating those children that have been sexually exploited.

