

# USAID

## Highlights

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## Agency Initiatives Promote Democracy

*"Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."*

—Reinhold Niebuhr, American theologian

In a nation founded on democratic principles, Americans sometimes take for granted the fundamental rights and freedoms they have enjoyed for more than 200 years. For people in much of the developing world, however, these rights our forefathers found to be self-evident are dreamed-of privileges toward which they struggle.

In 1976, for example, only four countries in all of Central and South America had democratically elected governments—the rest were ruled by dictatorships or military regimes. In a dramatic reversal, by 1986 12 of 18 Central and South American nations had installed governments dedicated to democratic principles.

Supported by foreign assistance legislation passed by Congress, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) helps the people of the developing world work toward individual rights and freedoms.

In the 1960s, USAID interest focused on political development and popular participation. In the next decade, U.S. government policy promoted the enhancement of individual human rights, tying a country's eligibility for assistance to its human rights performance.

In 1978, Section 116(e) of the Foreign Assistance Act was enacted to promote civil and political rights of citizens in less developed countries worldwide through the development of specific projects addressing these needs.

"From that legislation grew the Agency's Human Rights and Democratic Initiatives program, which focuses not only on basic human rights, but, increasingly during the '80s, also attempts to strengthen democratic institutions," says Richard Bissell, USAID assistant administrator for the Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination.

In a 1982 address before the British Parliament, President Reagan outlined U.S. efforts "to foster the infrastructure of



A Salvadoran votes in the 1988 elections, for which USAID provided technical assistance. The Agency helps developing countries hold free and fair elections vital to the democratic process.

democracy—the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities—which allows people to choose their own way..."

Today the program outlines seven major guidelines for human rights projects: the development of democratic principles and institutions that promote human rights, free and fair democratic electoral systems, adherence to the rule of law through a legal framework conducive to civil and political rights, research on and discussion of civil and political rights, the awareness of civil and political rights, the development of human rights organizations, and the increased access of women and ethnic groups to the judicial system and to political processes.

"In the early years, the idea behind the program was that individual human rights were best protected and promoted through public awareness activities and legal assistance programs," says Travis Horel, USAID coordinator for Human Rights and Democratic Initiatives. "During the '80s, the program has encompassed democratic institutions as the best guarantor of individual rights.

"For more than 200 years, the United States has held the belief that democratic governments afford their people the fullest human rights. In an effort to promote that for other people, the Agency attempts to strengthen democratic institutions."

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Recognizing that civil and political rights cannot be separated from social and economic development, USAID works to integrate its concern for those rights into all its economic assistance programs and projects.

USAID believes that the most effective method of institutionalizing democracy is through encouraging attitudes that enhance human rights and democratic initiatives at the grass-roots as well as the governmental level. These include the right to civil and political liberties, the right of citizens to participate in governing themselves, the right to travel freely within and outside one's country, and the right of citizens to associate in political, economic and religious activities.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS

By educating people about their rights, the Agency seeks to improve the human rights atmosphere in the developing world.

The Leadership Role Awareness for Women in Southern Thailand project is designed to address the problem of rural women's ignorance of their legal rights. The women also are encouraged to seek roles as leaders.

Under the project, women in the Songkla-Haad Yai area receive instruction in their villages on everyday legal issues and are taught how to develop their roles as village leaders. A pamphlet outlining their legal rights was printed as a reference. The women are then able to share what they learned with other residents of their villages.

With funding from USAID, the Moroccan Red Crescent Society (the equivalent of the American Red Cross) presented a series of six seminars on international humanitarian law and human rights. The seminars were designed to raise awareness of human rights concerns among Moroccan Red Crescent volunteers, mid-level government officials, youth, military, media, physicians and public health officials.

Since its creation in 1980, the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights has received support from USAID and other international donors. The institute offers technical training to

individuals and organizations involved in protecting human rights throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

The organization's education and research programs examine issues ranging from constitutional rights and criminal justice systems to concerns of refugees and indigenous peoples to religious discrimination. An Inter-American Institute of Human Rights program to introduce human rights education into school curricula at all levels has already trained more than 4,000 people in five countries.

#### DEMOCRATIC INITIATIVES

The Agency's democratic initiatives emphasize increasing adherence to the rule of law by improving the administration of justice; strengthening independent legislatures; and promoting free, fair and credible electoral processes and grass-roots participation in those processes.

In 1983, President Reagan formed the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America (the Kissinger Commission) to advise the U.S. government on long-term policy that would best respond to the challenges of democracy building and to threats to security and stability in the region. The two major recommendations of the commission were to promote democracy in the region and to strengthen the administration of justice.

The resulting multimillion-dollar program of the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean supports an Administration of Justice program and democratic initiatives such as the work of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights.

Africa Bureau funds principally help strengthen legal systems and the rule of law in that region of the world, as well as providing programs on human rights and legal awareness.



USAID human rights programs stress increasing the access of women and ethnic groups to the judicial system and to political processes.

Additional monies are earmarked to assist victims of apartheid in South Africa.

In Asia and the Near East, USAID funding supports a wide-ranging program that incorporates all of the seven major objectives of the 116(e) program, including projects to increase the access of women and ethnic groups to the judicial system and political processes.

### ENSURING FAIR ELECTIONS

Governments based on fair and democratic elections are responsive to the needs and wishes of their people.

USAID often receives requests from the developing world for electoral assistance. Two weeks before the 1986 Philippine election between Ferdinand Marcos and Corizon Aquino, for example, the Agency received such a request.

"Since the Agency often received these requests at the last minute, then-Administrator Peter McPherson felt that the forging of a relationship earlier in the process, where possible, would be a more responsible and efficient way to assist in the development of electoral processes in requesting countries," Horel says.

"Therefore, the Agency supports the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, which is a clearinghouse dedicated to examining all of the technical issues pertaining to the electoral process in any given country.

"We depend very much on our people in the field to determine if the assistance requested would be non-partisan and evaluate whether it would have an impact on the outcome of the election," Horel says. "Most of the time, governments ask for things that they just don't have the money for, typically the procurement of commodities or technical assistance."

According to Horel, such requests can include ballot boxes or bags, non-duplicable paper for the preparation of ballots so that ballot boxes cannot be stuffed, or indelible ink. In many developing countries, the voter's finger, often the pinkie, is dipped in indelible ink to indicate that person has voted and cannot vote again in that election.

"Governments sometimes ask for technical advice such as how to guarantee ballot security, how to computerize voter registry systems, how best to count votes and how to get ballots from remote parts of the country to a central counting place," Horel says.

In El Salvador in 1982, 1984 and 1985 and in Guatemala and Honduras in 1985, U.S. assistance for the electoral process included providing special ballot paper and ink and aiding in computerizing voter registration rolls. USAID funds also have been used to train poll monitors in Guatemala and to support teams of international electoral observers for elections in Honduras, El Salvador, the Philippines, Chile, Haiti and Guatemala.

For the plebiscite held in Chile in October, the Agency gave a \$1.2 million grant to the Inter-American Institute of



In many developing countries, voters dip a finger in indelible ink after casting their ballots to prevent repeat voting.

Human Rights' Center for Electoral Assistance (CAPEL) in Costa Rica for a non-partisan effort to register eligible Chileans to vote in the plebiscite.

"The legislation governing the Human Rights and Democratic Initiatives program states that no assistance can be given that will influence the outcome of any election either directly or indirectly," says Horel. "The Agency always ensures that we are in complete compliance with the law. For example, all of the volunteers and staff working on the Chilean project had to take an oath that they would not in any way participate in partisan politics."

### STRENGTHENING THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

The development of independent, accessible and fair justice systems is crucial to the survival of any democracy.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, a collaborative effort of USAID, the departments of State and Justice, and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) has developed a program to assist democratic Latin American and Caribbean governments in carrying out fundamental judicial reforms.

Under the program, judicial reform measures include training for judges, prosecutors and other legal personnel; reproducing and disseminating basic legal materials; training for criminal investigators; modernizing law codes; strengthening case reporting systems; and supporting local bar associations.

In addition, cooperative links are being established between relevant private U.S. organizations such as law schools, bar associations and law institutes and their counterparts in Latin America and the Caribbean. Grants to support these initiatives have been made to the U.N.-affiliated Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders (ILANUD), the University of the West Indies, the Inter-American Bar Association and Foundation and private and governmental agencies in individual countries.

The Near Eastern regional Legal Education and Training Project being carried out in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia strengthens legal systems by providing wider education

and training opportunities to legal and related professionals. Included are lawyers, magistrates, judges, prosecutors, administrators and law professors.

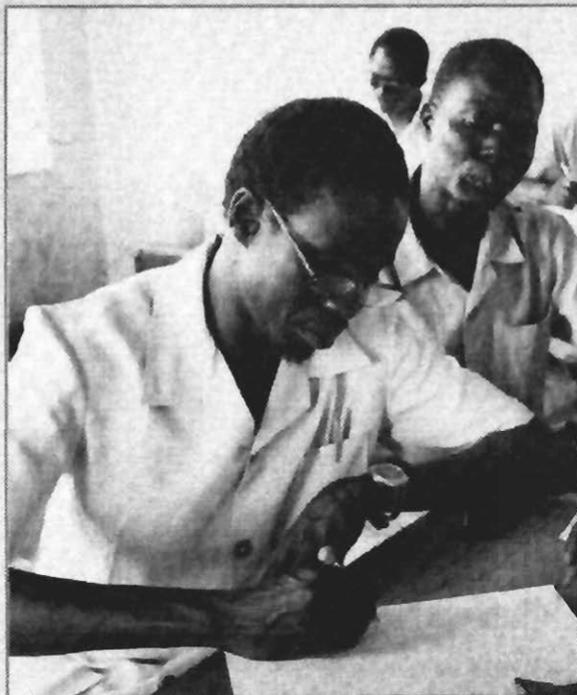
Administration of justice initiatives in Africa have included judicial training, support for recodification and updating of laws, legal awareness programs for the public and the provision of texts on human rights and other laws for judicial libraries.

In Nepal, two USAID initiatives make the legal system more accessible to legal professionals and laymen. Under the first, knowledge of and access to the Nepalese legal system were provided by publishing important Supreme Court decisions, making physical improvements to the court's library, procuring legal publications and developing a microfilm system and a survey of land and murder cases.

A second initiative aimed to make the laws, regulations and codes available to both lawyers and laymen in Nepal through purchase of offset press machinery to publish these materials. U.S. reference materials, research on water rights and some private printing costs also were provided.

#### BUILDING STRONG LEGISLATURES

USAID funds are used to support activities to promote and facilitate continuing interchange among parliamentarians in Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Western



In addition to human rights programs, USAID projects in Africa help build legal awareness and strengthen the rule of law and legal systems.

Europe. The Agency also is helping build the institutional capacity of legislative bodies.

In 1982, USAID funded a training seminar initiated by the Congress of the Dominican Republic and a local university for newly elected legislators.

Drawing on this model and using technical assistance from participants in the Dominican program, the legislatures of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras undertook similar training programs funded by the Agency. Interest generated by the seminar led to the design of long-range programs of support services to enhance the policy-making and administrative skills of legislators. The goal is to strengthen information management and analysis and provide administrative support.

#### HELPING DEMOCRACY EVOLVE

Understanding that democracy is more a set of basic principles and institutions than a single, immutable model and that institutions must evolve from a society's cultural tradition and circumstances, USAID is dedicated to helping developing countries devise democratic systems based on their own histories and societies.

"Just as democracy has taken various forms in the developed world, democratic societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America will evolve according to what best suits their people and their needs," says Bissell. "The Agency's democratic initiatives programs are designed to support these efforts through each stage of a country's democratic development."

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