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2012 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

On April 19, 2013, Secretary Kerry submitted the 2012 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (commonly known as the Human Rights Reports) to the United States Congress as required by law. This report, now in its 36th year, is available on www.State.gov and www.HumanRights.gov. It is required by law to inform U.S. government policymaking. It also serves as a reference for other governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, scholars, interested citizens, and journalists.

Key Human Rights Developments Across the Globe

The following were among the most noteworthy human rights developments in 2012:

1 Shrinking Space for Civil Society Activism Around the World: In 2012, certain governments continued to repress or attack the means by which citizens could organize, assemble, or demand better performance from their leaders. Across the globe, crackdowns on civil society included new laws impeding or preventing freedom of expression, assembly, association and religion; heightened restrictions on the ability of organizations to receive funding; and the killing, harassment, and arrest of political, human rights, and labor activists.

2 The Ongoing Struggle in the Middle East for Democratic Change: The hope of the early days of the Arab Awakening ran up against the harsh realities and challenges facing transitions from authoritarian regimes that had systematically repressed the development of civil society and democratic institutions: Bashar Assad's brutality against his own people in Syria; inter-communal tensions and political violence in Yemen, Bahrain, and Iraq; and serious hurdles to sustainable democracy in Egypt and Libya.

3 Emerging Democracy and Space for Civil Society in Burma: Burma continued its historic transition towards democracy, beginning with the release of more than 300 political prisoners in January 2012. In addition, the Burmese government has opened new space for civil society by relaxing press censorship, permitting more types of

uncensored content online, and permitting a number of assemblies and processions throughout the country.

4 Threats to Freedom of Expression in the Changing Media Landscape: Freedom of expression – a crucial element of democracy – faced serious threats around the world. There were also positive strides, however, with social media amplifying voices and allowing ordinary citizens to expose human rights violations or organize collective action even when traditional media was fully controlled by authoritarian regimes, such as Cuba.

5 The Continued Marginalization of Vulnerable Groups: In too many places, governments continued to persecute, or allow the persecution of, religious and ethnic minorities; women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people; persons with disabilities; migrants; and other vulnerable populations. Additionally, lawful migrant workers across the globe faced employment and societal discrimination, lack of sufficient legal protections, harassment in the workplace, and, in some cases, severe vulnerabilities to labor exploitation, including forced labor.

More About the Human Rights Reports

This year we have made improvements to the content of the reports, including more detailed and comprehensive information on prison conditions, corruption within governments (in line with the U.S. Government's support of the global movement for more open and transparent governments through the [Open Government Partnership](http://www.OpenGovernmentPartnership.org)), and workers rights. We have also improved our coverage on LGBT issues, disability issues, and the rights of women and girls.

New this year, [HumanRights.gov](http://www.HumanRights.gov) has a collection of 30-second "Demystifying Human Rights Reports" video clips, which answer frequently asked questions.

This fact sheet was created in partnership with the Bureau of Public Affairs.

