

## PREFACE

The world changed immeasurably over the course of 2011. Across the Middle East, North Africa, and far beyond, citizens stood up to demand respect for human dignity, more promising economic opportunities, greater political liberties, and a say in their own future. Often they faced tremendous odds and endured violent responses from their governments. The resulting upheavals are still unfolding today in places like Syria, where the regime has brutalized its own people. In Burma, after years of repression, the government has taken preliminary steps to allow reforms to begin. This year's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* chronicle these dramatic changes and the stories of the people defending human rights in almost 200 countries around the world.

Congress mandated these country reports more than three decades ago to help guide lawmakers' decisions on foreign military and economic aid, but they have evolved into something more. Today, governments, intergovernmental organizations, scholars, journalists, activists, and others around the world rely on these reports as an essential update on human rights conditions around the world – where we have seen progress, where progress has come too slowly or at great cost, and all too often, where it has been rolled back.

Our reports are founded on the simple truth at the heart of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – that all people are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Respect for human rights is not a western construct or a uniquely American ideal; it is the foundation for peace and stability everywhere. Universal human rights include the right of citizens to assemble peacefully and to seek to reform or change their governments, a central theme around the world in 2011. As President Obama has said, “History offers a clear verdict: Governments that respect the will of their own people, that govern by consent and not coercion, are more prosperous, they are more stable, and more successful than governments that do not.”

In my travels around the world as Secretary of State, I have met many individuals who put their lives on the line to advance the cause of human rights and justice. In ways small and large, they hold their governments accountable for upholding universal human rights. Their courage and commitment to peaceful reform are an inspiration. This report recognizes their bravery and should serve as a reminder: The United States stands with all those who seek to advance human dignity, and we will continue to shine the light of international attention on their efforts.

These reports are part of our broad commitment to promote human rights. Every day, officials from the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and many other government agencies devote themselves to advancing human rights as a priority of U.S. foreign policy. They champion our values in every country of the world and stand up for the inherent rights and freedoms of all people. I am honored to work alongside them, and I thank them for their contributions to this report.

On behalf of all of them, and everyone around the world working to protect human rights, I hereby transmit the Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2011* to the United States Congress.

*Hillary Rodham Clinton*  
*Secretary of State*