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ADDRESS BY
UNDER SECRETARY FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS
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61TH UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT

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U.S. High-Level Segment Statement
61st Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights
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Congratulations on Indonesia's election as Chair of the Commission on Human Rights. It is fitting that a nation that recently had historic, democratic elections should hold the chair. High Commissioner Arbour, you are a welcome presence at your first annual Commission session.

Distinguished colleagues, President Bush said in his inaugural address: "There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom." Last week, he remarked, "It should be clear that the advance of democracy leads to peace, because governments that respect the rights of their people also respect the rights of their neighbors." There is an unmistakable link among human rights and democracy and peace. Therein lies our hope for the world—our support for the quest for liberty that is shared by people everywhere, and that forms the bedrock principles on which the United Nations and the Commission originally were founded.

This belief in freedom is shared by democratic governments on every continent and by those who aspire to liberty around the world. In fact, last week at the Community of Democracies meeting at the United Nations, UNDP Administrator Malloch Brown said

“democratic governance is increasingly viewed as a universal value.” This sentiment was also affirmed overwhelmingly in 1999 by this very Commission, which by a vote of fifty-one to zero, reinforced the commonsense notion that democracy is a human right. Specifically, the Commission adopted a resolution entitled the “Promotion of the Right to Democracy,” which was co-sponsored by over fifty nations. This is because democracy is the best guarantor of the inalienable human rights this Commission exists to protect.

History is calling to us—democracy is on the march everywhere, and it is the imperative of our time to rally to this cause. Georgia’s Rose Revolution and Ukraine’s Orange Revolution freed millions and inspired countless more who are still living under despotism. People around the world saw citizens of Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Palestinian Authority choosing their own governments and knew that they too should have that right. In Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East, people have raised their voice for a true democracy with free and fair elections and the rights enjoyed by many throughout the world. There is now enormous momentum for democracy to reach every corner of the globe.

We seek to support this not only by expressing our solidarity, but also through a variety of direct means. We are pleased with the strong expressions of support for President Bush’s call for a UN Democracy Fund. This initiative focuses on promoting and consolidating newly established democracies. The U.S. is also one of many supporters of the Community of Democracies—an association of nations committed to the promotion of democratic principles. We seek to work with participating Community of Democracies nations in international organizations and fora like this. Our nations will form a Democracy Caucus at this year’s Commission—as we did at the last UN General Assembly—not as a bloc, but as a network of countries that share a common commitment to freedom and democracy, a network to advance resolutions and initiatives consistent with our democratic values.

We see this as an important vehicle to strengthen both the quality of resolutions and the composition of the Commission, as well as to make the Commission's outcomes consistent with the principles of the UN Charter. This will be a topic at the upcoming third ministerial of the Community of Democracies, which will be hosted by Chile at the end of April. Chile's strong leadership over the past two years builds on the foundation laid by Poland and South Korea during their chairmanship of this important network.

The United States will work with other nations to advance a resolution at this Commission on standards for sound democratic elections. We also will seek to advance a resolution on freedom of association and rights of labor to organize, a basic element of an economically open, free, pluralistic, and democratic society.

Democracies should offer leadership in refocusing the Commission on its core mission, as it was originally conceived. Governments that are elected and that recognize their citizens' rights at home are in the best position to protect these fundamental rights globally. We need to put a stop to the trend of the world's worst human rights abusers securing membership on the Commission to deflect criticism of their abuses at home, and we encourage and support more democracies to vie for Commission membership. I should note that the United States does not support the recommendation of the High-Level Panel that the Commission should abandon an elected membership. If we do not reclaim this Commission for its mandate, we are allowing this body to be tarnished and turning our backs on those still fighting for the freedoms we possess.

While the march of freedom is accelerating, we nonetheless must remain concerned that liberty and the ability to choose one's government still elude many of the world's people.

If men and women are bold enough to stand up and confront tyrants, the least we can do is have the courage to support their cause. There are still regions of the world that simmer with resentment and tyranny and are prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder. Thus, there is much work for this Commission to do.

In the words of President Bush, "America will not pretend that jailed dissidents prefer their chains, or that women welcome humiliation and servitude, or that any human being aspires to live at the mercy of bullies." Neither should this Commission. Fellow delegates, the world is watching. For these six weeks, let us not ignore the forgotten or disappoint the hopeless. Their fate—as well as the credibility of this Commission—is in our hands.