

**Statement of
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Democracy in the Indo-Pacific
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Chairman Bera, Ranking Member Chabot, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I am grateful to Congress for bipartisan action in support of American diplomacy in East Asia and the Pacific, and ongoing support for democracy in the Indo-Pacific region. I am honored to be here with you today, especially alongside Deputy Assistant Secretary Stone, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Busby, and Deputy Assistant Administrator Hart.

The United States' whole-of-government commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific is focused on building the capacity of Indo-Pacific nations and regional institutions to promote civil society, rule of law, transparency, and accountable governance to strengthen democracy and counter malign influence in the region. Regional stability is best built on mutual trust between people and their governments through upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms. Partnerships that act to combat corruption and promote effective civil society are more successful than those that exert coercive authoritarian control. These values are at the center of our efforts in the Indo-Pacific to address challenges such as weak institutions, systemic corruption, and opaque business environments that undermine our own competitiveness and enable malign influence.

As Secretary Blinken recently noted at the Release of the 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices last month, the trend lines on human rights continue to move in the wrong direction. We are concerned by an increase in government efforts in many places across the Indo-Pacific region to shrink the space for civil society and democratic institutions through increased restrictions on human rights, particularly freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.

We see it in the genocide and crimes against humanity being committed against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other members of ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang, in the repression of Tibetans' distinct language, religion, and culture, and the ongoing repression of human rights and fundamental freedoms across China. Governments in the region are increasingly considering laws and regulations that would restrict the activities of NGOs or enhance government monitoring of them, and have increasingly cracked down on freedom

online. We see it in attacks on and the imprisonment of opposition politicians, anti-corruption activists, human rights defenders, lawyers, and journalists in Hong Kong, Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia.

And most egregiously, we see it in Burma where the military removed the democratically elected government in a coup in February and has since brutally crackdown on protesters opposing the military junta, killing hundreds and detaining thousands." These alarming trend lines have only worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which some governments have used as a pretext to target their critics and further repress human rights.

With the Biden-Harris Administration and the Department's renewed focus on promoting respect for human rights, countering corruption, strengthening democratic resilience, and taking a multilateral approach to addressing big global challenges, we will remain active in capacity-building efforts both bilaterally and multilaterally. Some priorities for the coming year are coordinating programming to address Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong Burma, and other governance crises; ensuring bilateral discussions include tailored approaches that focus on positive outcomes from good governance; leveraging and expanding on our engagement with existing multilateral frameworks such as APEC, ASEAN, the Mekong-U.S. Partnership, and the Quad to strengthen democratic institutions, promote respect for human rights, counter corruption, and support strong civil society; coordinating programming to enable access of information to all, including protecting the media, bringing to light environmental harm in communities, and promoting accountability for malign actors who spread disinformation and misinformation; coordination on programming to support environmental governance including efforts to address the effects of climate change, pollution, and environmental degradation, its disproportionate impact on marginalized and underserved communities, and the high rates of violence targeting environmental defenders; and leveraging and expanding on existing tools to drive improvements in governance, including sanctions programs like the Global Magnitsky, and various reporting tools like the Human Rights, Trafficking in Persons, and International Religious Freedom reports. All assistance is provided consistent with applicable law, including the Leahy laws. Through careful and effective Leahy vetting, EAP ensures that no assistance is furnished to any security force unit where there is credible information implicating that unit in the commission of a gross violation of human rights.

Let me take this opportunity to discuss in further detail the human rights and democracy situations in Burma, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia. I will provide a brief outline of our activities in these six areas.

- **Burma:** We continue to call on the Burmese military to refrain from violence, release all those unjustly detained, and restore Burma to the path of democracy. This military coup contradicts the will of the people of Burma, and we will continue to support the people of Burma as they work to overcome this crisis. We have condemned the coup and horrific violence in the strongest possible terms and will continue to lead the international community in taking concrete action to promote accountability for the military junta's horrific actions both before and after the coup. We have sanctioned coup leaders and military businesses and will continue to look for additional ways to deny revenue to the junta and its leaders. Moreover, the coup has brought further volatility to a country already facing a human rights and humanitarian crisis for members of ethnic and religious minority groups, particularly Rohingya. We hear the calls from members of Burma's pro-democracy movement and will continue to support their efforts.
- **Cambodia:** We are deeply concerned about the ongoing politically motivated trials of opposition members, journalists, and activists in Cambodia. During her recent meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen, Deputy Secretary of State Sherman underscored the importance of human rights and the protection of fundamental freedoms as integral to our bilateral relationship. She urged the Cambodian government to abide by its international and domestic human rights commitments and to ensure the protection of worker rights. The United States remains committed to the Cambodian people and their aspirations for a more prosperous, democratic, and independent country, where all voices are heard and respected and the Kingdom's sovereignty is protected. We will continue to press the government to reopen civic and political space in advance of the 2022 commune and 2023 national elections.
- **Hong Kong:** The PRC continues to undermine Hong Kong's autonomy and civil liberties, despite its obligations under the Sino-British Joint Declaration. Since the June 30, 2020 imposition of the National Security Law, the Department of State has repeatedly expressed concern regarding attempts to stifle dissent and opposition voices in Hong Kong. Hong Kong authorities have engaged in mass arrests of democracy activists, delayed parliamentary elections, disqualified sitting lawmakers, and altered the

composition of the Legislative Council and Chief Executive Election Committee. Hong Kong authorities have arrested and prosecuted journalists and passed legislation that would allow for exit bans to be placed on individuals seeking to leave the territory. We will continue to work with like-minded partners to highlight these concerning developments and examine all available policy tools to promote accountability for the Beijing and Hong Kong officials responsible.

- **Thailand:** With more than 200 years of friendship between the United States and Thailand, we are deeply committed to the strong security, economic, and people-to-people ties that exist between our countries. The United States prioritizes democracy and human rights across our foreign policy and in our relationship in Thailand. Protests calling for reforms in Thailand have been smaller and less frequent in 2021. We continue to message to Thailand's government, opposition parties, and civil society the importance for all democracies to strengthen our institutions and take steps to protect the rights of all our citizens. We have been clear that the United States supports fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression and association, as essential to Thailand's democracy.
- **Philippines:** Our alliance with the Philippines is our oldest in East Asia and critical to a free and open Indo-Pacific. Promoting respect for human rights is a central priority in U.S. relations with the Philippines – we recognize that a Philippine government that respects democracy and human rights is essential to maintaining a strong alliance. We continue to promote democracy and respect for human rights in the Philippines through sustained constructive engagement with all levels of the government, security forces, and civil society. We have urged Philippine counterparts to investigate allegations of human rights violations and promote accountability for those responsible. We also urge the Philippines to respect freedom of expression, including for members of the media. We remain concerned by the cases against Philippine online media outlet Rappler CEO Maria Ressa and Senator Leila de Lima and urge the government to resolve the charges equitably in accordance with Philippines law. U.S. support to the Philippines is an effective tool in the Administration's efforts to promote the respect for human rights. Our support for civil society and rule-of-law capacity building in the Philippines helps advance respect for human rights, strengthen media capability and independence, enhance political participation, bolster civic engagement, and expand the democratic civic space.

- **Indonesia:** Indonesia has made impressive strides in the last 23 years as it transitioned to a multi-party democracy with regular, credible elections. As the world's third largest democracy and home to the largest Muslim population, Indonesia serves as a model, not just in the region but also globally, of tolerant, pluralistic democracy. While this young democracy continues to make significant progress, as in many other countries, government institutions face challenges as they work to improve management of public services, protect human rights, and address the drivers of violent extremism and terrorist radicalization as well as address issues such as corruption and ensure accountability. Indonesia's progress in strengthening democratic governance and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms both offline and online has helped Indonesia expand its influence in the Indo-Pacific. Through our assistance, the U.S. government is partnering with Indonesia to strengthen democratic governance and fortify resilience against violent extremism, while strengthening an inclusive, just, and accountable democracy that protects all individuals' rights, roots out corruption, engages with an active civil society and media, and strengthens a culture of pluralism and tolerance.

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. I look forward to your questions.