

**Testimony of  
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Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor  
before the  
House Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on  
Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International  
Organizations  
Democracy Support Strategies in Africa  
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Thank you Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify on Democracy Support Strategies in Africa.

Advancing democracy in Africa is a top priority for the Administration. This reflects a core U.S. value as well as what African citizens want for themselves. People across the continent are demanding greater voice, participation and accountability in how they are governed. Surveys such as Afrobarometer consistently show high majorities of African citizens want democracy – 71% in a recent poll. Citizens are demanding more from their governments—better services, transparency, greater accountability to the people, and expanded opportunities to benefit from economic growth.

In the last year, several countries have experienced significant democratic advances. Nigeria held successful elections in 2015 that led to the country's first democratic transition between parties since the end of military rule in 1999. And this month, Nigeria announced its intention to join the Open Government Partnership, highlighting its commitment work with civil society to increase transparency and accountability, and combat corruption. Similarly, I just returned from a trip to Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic (CAR), where both countries held successful elections, emerging from transitions and electing reform-minded Presidents. Each of these three countries now has a moment of opportunity to make important changes and build on these foundations.

Despite these positive developments, however, democracy in other parts of Africa has deteriorated. As Freedom House's 2016 Freedom in the World report shows, in too many places the pre-electoral environment and the space available for civic participation remains restrictive and flawed. Too many entrenched leaders continue to manipulate their countries' constitutions, judiciaries, and electoral processes to indefinitely extend their time in office. They systematically

thwart citizens' rights to choose their leaders without pressure or fear, and those who protest on the street are sometimes arrested, detained, tortured and beaten.

Civil society has made great strides in promoting the transparent conduct of elections, but governments have become increasingly sophisticated in limiting democratic space. For example, the governments of the Republic of Congo, Chad and Uganda all blocked access to online media during national elections in an attempt to limit the free expression of their citizens, control information, and reduce international scrutiny. Despite challenges, civil society has become increasingly effective in organizing election observation, conducting parallel vote tabulations, and conveying real-time information of electoral irregularities. This growth in civil society – alongside our investments to build the capacity of electoral commissions, strengthen political parties, educate the electorate, register voters, and monitor elections – help mitigate irregularities before, during, and after election day.

Nigeria is a good example where support for the national election commission, voter education, and civil society monitoring all contributed to a largely effective, fair, and peaceful presidential election process. Through our Fundamental Freedom Fund, DRL was able to provide \$1.4 million to the International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) to support election observer missions. The presence of observers signaled that domestic and international audiences were keenly watching the process, and helped deter election spoilers and avert widespread vote rigging from taking place.

But for all the progress in promoting transparent elections, many governments seek to close space for political opposition and civil society, as well as restrict media access, well before election day. These governments often control the flow of information through state-owned media, restrict or close down access to the internet, and harass and arrest journalists. Impunity and lack of investigation by officials when journalists are killed creates an environment of intimidation and fear for the media.

These same governments also limit freedom of assembly and expression – they intimidate civil society activists, and arrest or “disappear” members of the opposition, often under the guise of promoting state security. Even in cases where those arrested are not charged or held in detention for very long, these actions send a threatening signal to those who seek to criticize the regime in power or challenge incumbents at the polls. These tactics impede the development of viable opposition and entrench autocratic leaders.

Recent events in Uganda illustrate how a government can curb fundamental freedoms to such an extent that it undermines the credibility of elections. Leading up to and following the February 18 elections, the Government of Uganda harassed and arrested opposition supporters, restricted media and increasingly pressured civil society. During the contest itself, Uganda blocked social media and limited communications. In the days following elections, opposition candidate Kizza Besigye was held under house arrest for 42 days, and has been detained several times following the April 1 lifting of the house arrest. Mr. Besigye was arrested again on May 11, the day before President Museveni's inauguration, and has reportedly been charged with treason, in part because of his demand for an independent international audit of the election. Uganda has also banned all live reporting of opposition party Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) protests and arrested dozens of others. The Government of Uganda has put forward the Communications (Amendment) Bill that would seek to give the government outright power to control communications, all under the rationale of "citizen protection and security." The United States has repeatedly urged the Government of Uganda both privately and publicly to protect and preserve the basic freedoms of citizens, as guaranteed by the country's constitution. We will continue to do so even as we maintain a close relationship with the Government of Uganda focused on our shared priorities of promoting regional security and advancing the development of the Ugandan people.

We continue to identify ways to advance democratic practices in difficult operating environments. You may recall that the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won all 546 parliamentary seats in the 2015 general election. This striking victory was not a reflection of overt fraud on election day, or a deficit in technical capacity to hold credible elections. Rather, it underscored how a highly restrictive political space prevents competitors from getting involved. In a statement following the polls, the United States expressed deep concern over continued restrictions on civil society, media, opposition parties, and independent voices and views. During his August 2015 visit to Addis Ababa, President Obama underscored that "when all voices are being heard, when people know that they're included in the political process, that makes a country stronger and more successful and more innovative." Following the President's visit, Assistant Secretary Malinowski has visited Ethiopia three times to press the government to address human rights concerns, seek the release of wrongly imprisoned journalists, and most recently to participate in the Democracy and Human Rights Working Group to discuss tangible steps the Ethiopian government can take to address these issues.

I recently visited Burkina Faso, which is an example of a country where a leader's overreach led to unrest and ultimately his removal from power, but also where the United States is partnering with new leadership to chart a more stable, inclusive, and democratic way forward. Blaise Compaore's effort to extend his term in power in October 2014 was met with widespread popular resistance. A vibrant and active civil society led by an energized youth movement of artists and musicians - "Le Balai Citoyen," or Citizen's Broom - broke 27 years of one-man rule and gave rise to the country's first democratic elections since 1978. Newly elected President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré has pledged to address a number of concerns raised by civil society and has taken encouraging initial steps, such as passing an anti-corruption law that requires certain officials to publically declare their assets and forbids officials from receiving gifts worth more than 60 dollars. Sustained engagement from civil society will be essential to ensuring the Burkinabe government continues to take concrete steps to address the issues citizens have raised.

As Burkina Faso takes steps toward a democratic future, other leaders in the region continue to undermine democracy and legitimate, inclusive politics by changing constitutions and using other means to extend their stay in office. For example, in the past, Rwandan President Paul Kagame has repeatedly stated his commitment to respect constitutional term limits and to mentor a generation of leaders able to sustain Rwanda's economic growth and stability. We were deeply disappointed when earlier this year Kagame announced his intent to stand for a third term and held a snap constitutional referendum to cement this decision with barely two weeks' notice. In making this choice, he missed a significant opportunity to deepen democracy in Rwanda and demonstrate global leadership.

The violence currently afflicting Burundi is a revealing example of how anti-democratic policies - namely the President violating the Arusha Agreement in running for a third term - can rapidly lead to widespread human rights violations, civilian casualties, and an increased risk of mass atrocities. The ongoing crisis in Burundi has resulted in hundreds of lives lost and over 260,000 Burundian refugees fleeing the country. A country that had experienced 10 years of progress in reconciliation and development is now deeply destabilized and struggling with a crumbling economy. During his travel to the region in April, Assistant Secretary Malinowski pressed the Government of Burundi to deliver on promises to allow access to international human rights monitors, to release scores of political prisoners, to ensure accountability for human rights abuses, and to commit to the regionally-mediated dialogue as the best route to a political resolution to the crisis.

We will continue to support the Burundian people's peaceful pursuit of their democratic rights and freedoms. We are strongly urging all sides to work with the newly appointed East African Community facilitator, former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, and are hopeful that the regionally-mediated dialogue will resume on May 21 in Arusha. We are calling on all key actors to commit to participating in the regionally-mediated dialogue without preconditions or redlines, and to uphold the Arusha Agreement as an essential pillar for stability in Burundi.

Burundi is a cautionary tale for the unfolding political crisis in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). According to the DRC's constitution, the President is limited to two terms in office. Elections are scheduled for November 2016, at which point the DRC should experience its first democratic transition in power, which would mark a monumental step towards solidifying the DRC's fragile progress towards democratization, stability, and development. Instead, President Kabila is delaying elections through a strategy of "glissement" or slippage, and refusing to announce his intention to step down at the end of his term. The government continues to undermine the democratic process through an increased pattern of harassment, arrests, and intimidation against civil society activists and opposition leaders. Security forces are demonstrating an increasing willingness to use excessive force, including against peaceful protestors. This combustible combination of violent repression, the silencing of opposition voices, and erosion of DRC's democratic institutions threaten the security of the DRC, and in turn the stability of Central Africa. Prompt action is required to reverse these troubling trends and create conditions conducive to preparations for elections that will allow the Congolese people to peacefully participate in the selection of their next leader.

The protection of political space is an indispensable ingredient to such elections and long-term stability in the DRC. In this context, we are partnering with a range of Congolese and international partners to ensure that citizens have access to up-to-date information about the political process, and that those leading the fight for transparency are equipped with the right tools and support to effectively advocate for the rights of all Congolese. The Lifeline Fund, a multilateral initiative with support from 17 governments, including the U.S., provides emergency assistance to civil society organizations under threat or attack, and has been a critical tool in the DRC and throughout the continent. In fact, Africa has received the most support from Lifeline over the past five years—almost 40% more than any other region. Such demand demonstrates how important this fund is for advancing our democratic equities.

In response to the mounting repression in the DRC, we believe that people within the DRC government have an individual responsibility to uphold human rights. We have repeatedly made clear that the United States is prepared to impose targeted sanctions against individuals responsible for human rights violations or violence. We believe the voices of the Congolese people should determine the future of Congo.

I'd like to highlight two final issues: fighting kleptocracy and holding security forces accountable for human rights abuses. The Panama Papers are a stark reminder of the pervasiveness of corruption and the need for strong anti-corruption efforts. In too many countries, the rent-seeking opportunities of elected office provide lucrative incentive for entrenched rulers to steal from state coffers and cling to power. Unfettered access to state-owned or managed resources not only personally enriches rulers with ill-gotten gains, but it provides leaders with the means to buy the loyalty needed to sustain power. The nexus of corruption and entrenched leadership requires sustained high-level attention and pressure. Following the anti-corruption conference in the UK last week that Secretary Kerry participated in, we will work closely both with African countries that signed specific pledges on tackling corruption to help them advance those efforts, and with civil society organizations across the continent to expose leaders who benefit from corrupt practices at the expense of their own people.

Further democratic consolidation in Africa is also dependent on rights-respecting security forces that answer to civilian governments and protect, rather than target, citizens. This is, unfortunately, a persistent challenge across the continent, and one that we raise regularly with our government counterparts as part of our efforts to build strong democracies and meaningful security partnerships. Assistant Secretary Malinowski underscored these concerns repeatedly during a four-day visit to Kenya in early April, and I have raised them in recent conversations with the Governments of Nigeria and the Central African Republic. In countries where security forces have questionable human rights records, citizens require access to justice, in order to hold both states and other citizens accountable for breaches of the law.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, along with my colleagues from the State Department and USAID, we will continue to advance a democracy strategy with a strong emphasis on respect for inclusive, legitimate politics, human rights and protection for civil society. To do this, we need the resources to support our diplomatic and foreign assistance efforts and we appreciate your support. We will continue to work with African leaders and citizens that seek to strengthen and

sustain democratic governance and protect and promote universal human rights. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today. I look forward to your questions.