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**Remarks by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice
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**“Human Rights: Advancing American Interests and
Values”**

Good afternoon, everyone. And thank you so much Elisa for your incredibly kind introduction, but even more I want to thank you for your long career fighting the good fight, and for your dedicated leadership of Human Rights First. For more than three decades, this group has been a clarion voice in defense of human dignity and the rights and freedom of people everywhere. And it really is my deep honor to be with you today.

Sixty-five years ago this month, representatives to the United Nations General Assembly came together to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – a worldwide recognition that all members of our human family are born possessing certain equal and inalienable rights. These same rights are reflected in the founding documents of the United States, and we cherish them as part of our national character. But, as President Obama has said, just because some truths are self-evident doesn't mean they are self-executing. We have to work relentlessly to make them real. We must constantly question and challenge ourselves to be on the right side of history – to do our part so that more and more of our fellow human beings can enjoy the rights and

freedoms, which are the birthright of all mankind.

Our history is filled with champions who have fought to bring us closer to our ideals – from Dr. King and the thousands who marched on Washington 50 years ago to “Battling” Bella Abzug, from Cesar Chavez to Harvey Milk and countless others. I know everyone in this room believes, as I do, that continuing their work at home and expanding it around the globe is our great commission as the inheritors of their legacy.

For me, the struggle for equal human rights is deeply personal. It’s essential to who I am as an American. I can never forget that I am the daughter of proud citizens who suffered the indignities of Jim Crow. Nor can I forget that, in 1964, the year of my birth, in many parts of this great country, people who looked like me could not vote or marry someone who looks like my husband. The unfinished battle for equality and human dignity is not only what drives me as a public servant, it is my central duty as the mother of my two children to make sure they never encounter any limitations on their dreams because of who they are or what they look like.

No one understands this profound responsibility more keenly than President Obama. From his Nobel Prize acceptance speech to his remarks at the United Nations in September, he has been clear about the principles that guide us and to which we hold ourselves accountable, even as we navigate an increasingly complex world of competing and overlapping challenges.

Make no mistake: advancing democracy and respect for

human rights is central to our foreign policy. It's what our history and our values demand, but it's also profoundly in our interests. That is why the United States remains firmly committed to promoting freedom, opportunity and prosperity everywhere. We stand proudly for the rights of women, the LGBT community and minorities. We defend the freedom for all people to worship as they choose, and we champion open government and civil society, freedom of assembly and a free press.

We support these rights and freedoms with a wide range of tools, because history shows that nations that respect the rights of all their citizens are more just, more prosperous and more secure. And while it's neither effective nor desirable to advance human rights through the barrel of a gun, we have made clear that, in the face of imminent mass atrocities, there may be times when it is appropriate to use force to protect the innocent from the very worst crimes. But, we cannot and we should not bear that burden alone.

Yet, obviously, advancing human rights is not and has never been our only interest. Every U.S. president has a sworn duty to protect the lives and the fortunes of the American people against immediate threats. That is President Obama's first responsibility, and mine. We must defend the United States, our citizens and our allies with every tool at our disposal, including, when necessary, with military force. We must do all we can to counter weapons of mass destruction, aggression, terrorism, and catastrophic threats to the global economy, upon which our way of life depends. Anything less would be a dereliction of duty.

As we seek to secure these core interests, we sometimes face

painful dilemmas when the immediate need to defend our national security clashes with our fundamental commitment to democracy and human rights. Let's be honest: at times, as a result, we do business with governments that do not respect the rights we hold most dear. We make tough choices. When rights are violated, we continue to advocate for their protection. But we cannot, and I will not pretend that some short-term tradeoffs do not exist.

Still, over time, we know that our core interests are inseparable from our core values, that our commitment to democracy and human rights roundly reinforces our national security. The greatest threats to our security often emerge from countries with the worst human rights records. Witness Iran and North Korea, which have stoked tensions with the world, in part to prolong their repressive rule at home. By contrast, when we are able to strengthen societies through our support for democracy and human rights, we plow the ground for greater cooperation among responsible nations on issues of mutual concern. So, the fact is: American foreign policy must sometimes strike a difficult balance – not between our values and our interests, because these almost invariably converge with time, but more often between our short and long-term imperatives.

During the past five years, we've employed a variety of means to spur governments to respect the universal rights of their people – and to hold them accountable when they do not.

Wherever President Obama goes, he speaks both publicly and privately to highlight human rights abuses and to help nations see that protecting the rights of their people is

ultimately in their self-interest. We use the unmatched strength of our economy to apply financial pressure, including sanctions, on those that violate human rights. We leverage our military aid and other forms of bilateral support to encourage countries to live up to their international commitments. We allocate significant resources to assistance programs that foster human rights, the rule of law and good governance. Our senior leaders engage directly with civil society, both to show our support and to hear what is really happening on the ground. And, we work closely with multilateral institutions to marshal a coordinated international response to human rights violations.

Under President Obama, we joined the United Nations Human Rights Council in the face of domestic opposition. And, for all its continuing flaws, we've succeeded in making it a more effective institution that has shed light on abuses in Qadhafi's Libya, Sri Lanka, Syria, Sudan, North Korea and Iran. And I want to salute my friend and colleague Eileen Donahoe who is a good reason and a major reason for that success in Geneva. Thank you so much Eileen. We've worked cooperatively with the International Criminal Court to foster accountability for the worst crimes. Together with our international partners, we helped to midwife the peaceful emergence of an independent South Sudan. In Cote D'Ivoire, we worked through the United Nations to arrest spiraling violence and enable the duly-elected leader of Cote d'Ivoire to take office after a despot stubbornly refused to cede power. Just recently, we backed regional diplomacy and a robust UN force to help usher the M23 militia off the battlefield in eastern Congo, yielding the promise of progress for the first time in many years.

In Burma, after long and effective pressure, including tough sanctions and persistent calls to end Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest and release political prisoners, we are now working to help Burma take steps towards inclusive democracy and national reconciliation. In the Western Hemisphere, we joined in beating back efforts to limit the autonomy of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its special rapporteur for freedom of expression. And, backed by a UN Security Council mandate, we led, with our partners in NATO and the Arab League, an unprecedented international intervention to prevent mass atrocities in Libya.

Around the world, we call to account the world's worst abusers, from Iran to Syria, from Eritrea to Zimbabwe, from North Korea to Sudan. These governments crush the rights of their people and use the tyrant's toolkit of repression to retain power. Some have systematically slaughtered their own citizens, as in the genocide in Darfur.

In Syria, even as we provide humanitarian assistance and make rapid progress toward eliminating the threat of chemical weapons, our work continues to end the violence that has claimed more than 100,000 lives and to see the perpetrators of atrocities held accountable. In Iran, as we test the potential for a diplomatic resolution to the nuclear issue, we are mindful that another key test is whether we begin to see progress on human rights. We call on the government to allow the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran to visit the country. Our sanctions on Iran's human rights abusers will continue and so will our support for the fundamental rights of all Iranians. The Iranian

people deserve the same right to express themselves online and through social media as their leaders enjoy.

Closer to home, we note modest steps toward economic reform in Cuba, but we condemn continued arrests of human rights activists and other government critics. As we mark the fourth year of his imprisonment, we call on the Cuban government to release our innocent, jailed compatriot, Alan Gross. Ultimately, it will be the Cuban people who drive economic and political reforms. And that's why President Obama has increased the flow of resources and information to ordinary citizens. The Cuban people deserve the full support of the United States and of an entire region that has committed to promote and defend democracy through the Inter American Democratic Charter.

These extreme examples are in many ways the most clear-cut. They are egregious cases, where the weight of our concern and the tenor of our relationship make it easier to chart a clear policy course. In other countries, it is more difficult to disentangle our competing interests and to give full primacy to our values. So, let me talk a bit more about these tougher cases.

In this new century, there are few relationships more complex or important than the one between the United States and China. Building a constructive relationship with China is crucial to the future security and prosperity of the world as a whole. We value China's cooperation on certain pressing security challenges, from North Korea to Iran. Our trade relationship, one of the largest in the world, supports countless American jobs. And that's precisely why we have a stake in what kind of power China will become, and that is

why human rights are integral to our engagement with China.

So the United States speaks clearly and consistently about our human rights concerns with the Chinese government at every level, including at this year's summit between President Obama and President Xi at Sunnylands. U.S. officials engage their Chinese counterparts directly on specific cases of concern – like that of Liu Xiaobo and Xu Zhiyong – as well as about broader patterns of restrictive behavior. And we voice our condemnation publicly when violations occur.

The Chinese people are facing increasing restrictions on their freedoms of expression, assembly and association. This is short-sighted. When people in China cannot hold public officials to account for corruption, environmental abuses, worker and consumer safety, or public health crises, problems that affect China as well as the world go unaddressed. When courts imprison political dissidents who merely urge respect for China's own laws, no one in China, including Americans doing business there, can feel secure. When ethnic and religious minorities – such as Tibetans and Uighurs – are denied their fundamental freedoms, the trust that holds diverse societies together is undermined. Such abuses diminish China's potential from the inside.

The same is true of Russia. We often can cooperate with Russia on nonproliferation, arms control, counterterrorism and other vital interests. But, as we meet these mutual challenges, we don't remain silent about the Russian government's systematic efforts to curtail the actions of

Russian civil society, to stigmatize the LGBT community, to coerce neighbors like Ukraine who seek closer integration with Europe, or to stifle human rights in the North Caucasus. We deplore selective justice and the prosecution of those who protest the corruption and cronyism that is sapping Russia's economic future and limiting its potential to play its full role on the world stage.

In the Middle East and North Africa, we are navigating the security challenges of the Arab Spring and helping partners lay the foundations for a future rooted in greater peace, opportunity, democracy and respect for human rights. In Egypt, we said we could not conduct business as usual with the interim government after it used large-scale violence against civilians and detained opposition leaders earlier this year. So, we withheld the delivery of some major weapons systems pending progress towards democratic reforms and inclusive governance. We have a stake in promoting inclusive politics in Egypt to avoid driving government opponents into the arms of extremist groups and condemning the country to further instability. We have spoken out about the deleterious impact the new demonstrations law and its heavy-handed enforcement is having on freedom of assembly in Egypt, and we will continue to urge non-violence and progress on Egypt's roadmap towards an inclusive and stable democracy.

Bahrain is a long standing partner in the region. As home to our Fifth Fleet, a stable Bahrain is of great strategic importance to the United States. So we serve both our principles and our security by pressing for national reconciliation between the government and the opposition. We are discouraging actions on both sides that sharpen

religious divisions or escalate violence. And, through concrete actions, including withholding portions of our military assistance, we are urging the government to lift restrictions on civil society, to treat members of the opposition in accordance with the rule of law, and to engage in a deliberate reform process.

Our commitment to Israel's security is unprecedented and enduring. Thus, in the West Bank, we condemn incitement and violence against Israelis. At the same time, we reject settler violence against Palestinians. The daily humiliations of administrative detentions, land confiscations, and home demolitions must end for a culture of peace to take root.

Even as we address such pressing national challenges, the United States continues to lead in promoting a global human rights agenda for the 21st century. This starts with our intensive efforts to protect and empower women and girls. No society can reach its full potential when half its people are held back. That's why, through the Equal Futures Partnership, we're working with countries around the world to fulfill specific commitments that elevate the status of women, such as developing constitutional protections for gender equality or extending benefits for women-owned businesses.

A full third of women – one in three – experience either sexual or physical violence in their lifetimes. Gender-based violence is an affront to human dignity, but it also threatens public health, economic stability, and the security of nations. So, as part of our commitment to end this scourge, we're helping equip first responders to protect women and girls from rape as soon as conflicts or disasters occur, and

we're launching a cabinet-level task force to raise awareness and coordinate our efforts to combat violence against women and girls.

No one--no one--should face discrimination because of who they are or whom they love. So, we are working to lead internationally, as we have domestically, on LGBT issues. This summer, President Obama championed equal treatment for LGBT persons while standing next to the President of Senegal, a country that is making progress on democratic reforms, but like too many nations, still places criminal restrictions on homosexuality. President Obama met with LGBT and other civil society activists in St. Petersburg, Russia to discuss the restrictions they face in Russia. At the UN Human Rights Council and in regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States and the Pan American Health Organization, the United States has fought for and won support for resolutions that recognize the rights and protect the safety and dignity of LGBT persons. We created the Global Equality Fund to protect LGBT rights and those who defend them.

To support embattled civil society, which is the engine that drives greater transparency and accountability everywhere, including here in the United States we founded and are working through the Open Government Partnership to develop and share best practices. We're coordinating with the Community of Democracies to pressure repressive regimes. The State Department led the creation of the Lifeline partnership, which provides emergency assistance to civil society organizations. We are reaching out directly to all of you in the NGO community to learn about how we can best support and train your sister organizations around

the world. And, our support for young leaders across Africa focuses, in part, on empowering those who are committed to working for an Africa that is buttressed, as President Obama said, by “strong institutions” rather than by “strongmen.”

This isn't an exhaustive summary of our efforts. From Rakhine State in Burma to Jonglei State in South Sudan, we are working to protect vulnerable civilians, especially minorities, to heal rifts in communities, and to press for accountability so that the worst forms of violence do not go unpunished. The modern-day slavery of human trafficking remains a stain on our collective conscience, and President Obama has redoubled our efforts to end human trafficking in all its forms.

We are promoting internet freedom while still guarding against threats from those who would use the connective power of new technologies to harm us. And, as part of our comprehensive strategy to help prevent genocide and mass atrocities, we're developing the tools and partnerships that can warn us before violence ignites and strengthen our capacity to respond. For example, to take on the deteriorating situation and increasing violence in the Central African Republic, we're working this week at the UN to support African Union forces protecting civilians, to provide humanitarian assistance, and to investigate human rights abuses so the perpetrators can be held accountable.

Finally, our commitment to human rights means we must live our values at home. And, here too, our work is not nearly complete. If we are not walking the talk, we undermine the United States' ability to lead internationally. President Obama has an extremely strong record of

promoting human rights domestically — from the first bill he signed into law as President, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, to his support for voter protection, and his commitment to full equality for our LGBT brothers and sisters and for repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell. This Administration is deeply committed to ensuring that all men and women are treated equally.

In 2009, as UN Ambassador, I was proud to sign, on behalf of the United States, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. But, almost five years later, as you know, we are still urging the Senate to approve this convention. I am very glad you'll be hearing tomorrow from the great former Senator Bob Dole, who has been a relentless advocate for this cause. We need Congress to join with us to show that America doesn't just press other nations to abide by international treaties and norms while we stand on the sidelines. Rather we must lead by example.

That is why too President Obama remains deeply determined to close the detention facility at Guantanamo. We have new envoys at the Departments of State and Defense dedicated to this cause. In August, we completed the first successful detainee transfers under the onerous restrictions that Congress enacted in 2011, and we expect to announce more transfers in the near future. We continue to urge Congress to remove these restrictions, which have severely hampered our efforts to close the Guantanamo detention facility. And I want to thank Human Rights First and your coalition for your energetic support for closing Guantanamo.

More broadly, after over a decade of war, we continue to

transition from a perpetual war footing while robustly protecting America's interests and security around the world. Earlier this year, President Obama announced new guidelines governing the use of lethal force in our counterterrorism operations outside areas of active hostilities, including the use of drones. Congress is briefed on every strike taken, and we are committed to sharing as much information as possible with the American people about our efforts. Over time, continued progress against al Qaeda and associated terrorist groups should reduce the need for such actions.

More recently, President Obama directed a review of our signals intelligence collection. Intelligence saves lives – American lives and those of our allies and partners. We are committed to continuing to collect such information to meet our critical security needs. At the same time, we recognize that, in many countries, surveillance is an instrument of repression, which is why we must use the unprecedented power that technology affords us responsibly, while respecting the values of privacy, government transparency, and accountability that all people share.

In closing, I want to stress that our nation, and we in the Obama Administration, benefit enormously from groups like Human Rights First. Your analyses, your perspectives – and, yes, your criticisms – help shape and improve our decision making. It may be decades before we see how all the challenges and choices of today play out. But, the promise we make to you is this: The United States will keep working every day to uphold the rights and freedoms that belong to all the people of this earth.

Over the last 20 years, I've seen up close the evil that humans can perpetrate against one another – from churchyards in Rwanda to dirt camps in Darfur, from war-torn Sarajevo to burned-out death traps in Tripoli. More recently, I chaired meetings in the Situation Room after the Assad regime unleashed the world's largest chemical weapons attack in 25 years. I've seen the worst of man's inhumanity. But I also know the bewildering resilience of the human spirit. In so many unlikely places, I've seen the hope that pushes its way to the surface, unbidden, in the most dire circumstances.

I often think of the little boy, just 3 or 4 years old, whom I met in 1994 while visiting an IDP camp in war-torn rural Angola. I didn't get his name. He was just one in a group of curious kids who came out to greet our delegation. He had short legs, a distended belly, and only a torn, dirty t-shirt to cover his little body. Looking around at his hellish surroundings was enough to sap the hope out of the most optimistic person. But that little boy defied logic. He just glowed -- with a smile so innocent and infectious I will carry it to my grave. As I moved toward him, drawn almost involuntarily, I suddenly realized I had nothing of worth to offer him, except perhaps the well-worn baseball hat on my head. When I took it off and set it on his unsuspecting head, he just beamed, radiating nothing but joy. The poet Emily Dickinson tells us that, "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul." So, for me, hope will always be that young boy's smile.

Everything I've seen and done in my career since then has only left me more convinced of the common yearnings that stir in all of us. I have no idea what happened to that little

boy in Cuito, Angola, but there are millions more just like him all over the Earth—each deserving of the same rights, the same security, and the same hope that our own children enjoy. Their future is bound up with our own. It is for their sake, and ours, that we stand fast for human rights. For their sake, and ours, we hold resolutely to our founding principles in this complicated and often dangerous world. And, it is for the sake of our common humanity and our shared future, that, even if imperfectly, we keep striving each day to build a world that is more just, more equal, more safe, and more free.

Thank you all very much.