



Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

Office of International Labor Affairs

U.S. Labor Diplomacy

The Labor Officer Function

Labor Officers in U.S. overseas missions play an integral role in advancing worker rights and helping the U.S. government to understand and respond to rapidly changing labor market conditions across the world. Labor Officers' reporting and expertise also help inform U.S. policy on a wide range of issues, from development assistance to trade agreements. These officers serve as key contacts for U.S. companies and labor organizations. The Office of International Labor Affairs (ILA) in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor helps to coordinate the Labor Officer function of the State Department and supports labor reporting officers through outreach and training.

Overview of the Labor Officer Function

The State Department has included dedicated Labor Officers since the 1940s. The function of these officers has changed significantly over the years, but each U.S. mission overseas continues to have a Foreign Service Officer covering labor issues, and 40 missions have dedicated Labor Officers. The responsibilities of these officers include:

- Researching and reporting on key labor issues, including worker rights and labor relations;
- Advocating for improved worker rights standards and delivering labor demarches to host governments;
- Cultivating contacts with labor organizations, governments, and companies;
- Developing, supporting, and monitoring labor-related technical cooperation programs;
- Assisting Washington-based agencies in developing effective labor-related programming; and
- Contributing to the development of overall USG economic policies.

Labor Diplomacy Around the World

The labor portfolio varies significantly from country to country, and it can include issues of forced labor, unemployment, labor unrest, political developments, and many others. Labor Officers work across a range of issues to shape policies related to international labor affairs and support overall U.S. foreign policy. Notable initiatives in 2010 include:

- In Egypt and Tunisia, the Labor Officers have maintained close contact with independent labor unions and helped to inform diplomatic approaches to the labor sector;
- In China, the Labor Officer improved dialogue with the government on worker rights and led Embassy Beijing's engagement in the 2010 U.S. – China Human Rights Dialogue;
- In Brazil, the Labor Officer has supported the implementation of bilateral initiatives on promoting racial equality and advancing the status of women;
- In Pakistan, the Labor Officer organized a conference on bonded labor, which brought together Pakistani participants to discuss joint approaches to tackling bonded labor; and
- In Colombia, the Labor Officer provided critical reporting to Washington that contributed to the development of a Labor Action Plan related to the U.S. – Colombia FTA. This plan expands the protection of labor leaders and organizers, bolsters efforts to punish perpetrators, and strengthens labor laws and enforcement in Colombia.

Contact For more information about the work of the State Department's Office of International Labor Affairs, please contact labor@state.gov