



Fact Sheet: The Obama Administration's Strategy for Supporting Democracy and Human Rights in Russia

The United States supports the efforts of all Russians, both within and outside of government, who strive to develop democratic governance and respect for universal values. Change within Russia will be internally driven. But when opportunities arise, the U.S. Government seeks to work with Russian partners to foster democracy and respect for human rights by pursuing the complementary objectives of encouraging transparent and accountable government and strengthening civil society. Our efforts are guided by and consistent with the 2010 National Security Strategy, which states that:

The United States supports the expansion of democracy and human rights abroad because governments that respect these values are more just, peaceful, and legitimate. We also do so because their success abroad fosters an environment that supports America's national interests. Political systems that protect universal rights are ultimately more stable, successful, and secure.

President Obama and his administration have developed a strategy of pursuing these goals through **dual track engagement** – simultaneous engagement with both governmental and non-governmental actors to advance democratic development and human rights promotion.

1. Government-to-Government Engagement on Issues of Democracy and Human Rights.

President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and other U.S. government officials continue to raise human rights concerns with Russian government officials. The creation of the Presidential Bilateral Commission (BPC) in July 2009 has helped to structure and facilitate routine contacts and discussions between our two governments on issues of democracy, human rights, and rule of law.

- As part of the BPC, the Working Group on Civil Society facilitates bilateral interactions on such issues as anti-corruption, migration, child protection and prison reform;
- In May 2011, Presidents Obama and Medvedev agreed to create a new BPC working group on the Rule of Law; currently in formation, which will cover prison reform, corruption, and judicial service of process.
- The Department of State and the Department of Justice are working with Russian counterparts on anti-corruption programs, assisting with the implementation of their new anti-bribery legislation and exploring best practices in public-private cooperation in combating corruption.



2. Open Government Initiative.

The U.S. Government supports Russian government efforts to fight corruption, provide more transparency about government activities, and improve the rule of law. At their meeting in Washington in June 2010, President Obama and President Medvedev issued a joint statement underscoring the need to cooperate in the following areas as part of the Open Government Initiative:

- Supporting government efforts to involve citizens in decision making and oversight, and to engage citizens in addressing problems facing municipalities and regions, including in the North Caucasus;
- Increasing use of e-government technologies to provide information, solicit citizen input and deliver government services;
- Developing information communication technology (ICT) applications that enable citizens to monitor or contribute to government performance and make it easier for the government to communicate with its constituents;
- Providing small grants to civil society organizations to work with local governments to identify and address community priorities.

3. Statements in Support of Russian Democratic Development and Critical of Human Rights Abuses.

U.S. Government officials have privately and publicly condemned abuses of human rights and democratic governance in Russia, while also providing encouragement to Russian actors who take steps to address these abuses. These public statements in support for human rights and democracy in Russia, including excerpts from major speeches by President Obama, Vice President Biden, and Secretary Clinton, can be found at: www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/c41670.htm

4. Administration Action against Human Rights Abusers.

The United States has and will continue to use the full range of legal measures to impose consequences on those involved in gross human rights abuses in Russia. Consistent with the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and the President Obama's "Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Non-immigrants of Persons Who Participate in Serious Human Rights Abuses and Humanitarian Law Violations and Other Abuses," (issued on August 4, 2011), our Administration has restricted travel to the United States of those in Russia involved in human rights abuses.

5. U.S. Government Engagement with Russian Society.

Parallel to its engagement with Russian government officials, U.S. officials engage regularly with Russian non-governmental leaders involved in strengthening democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

- During his trip to Russia in July 2009, President Obama met with hundreds of civil society leaders as well as opposition political figures.
- In June 2010, Secretary Clinton met with Russian civic leaders in Washington at the U.S.-Russia "Civil Society to Civil Society" Summit.
- Vice President Biden, Secretary Clinton and other senior U.S. government officials have made it a practice of meeting with civil society leaders and opposition political figures during their visits to Russia.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIPLOMACY IN ACTION

- In Washington, President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and other senior U.S. government officials meet regularly with civil society, human rights, and opposition political leaders to affirm support for their rights to freedom of speech, freedom of association and to a fair and democratic political process.
- As part of an ongoing dialogue, the Obama administration hosted a delegation of human rights activists from NGOs and Russia's public monitoring committee in May 2011 to exchange expertise with U.S. government and non-governmental experts on successful strategies to improve conditions of confinement in pretrial detention and prison facilities in both countries. Follow-on discussions have encouraged reforms in the area of detention and increased use of alternatives to detention.
- The U.S. Government also funds systematic work on historical memory and innovative human rights protection programs, and sponsors programs for the collection and dissemination of objective and impartial information on human rights violations.

6. U.S. Financial Support for Civil Society in Russia.

The Obama administration – working with the U.S. Congress – has continued to secure funds to support human rights, civil society, rule of law, independent media, and good governance in Russia. We have prioritized support for small, direct grants to Russian civil society organizations. Working with Congress, we continue to seek new ways to generate support for civil society in Russia.

- Since 2009, the U.S. Government has provided over \$160 million in assistance to advance democracy and promote civil society in Russia. USAID, the Department of State and the Department of Justice maintain robust programming focused on rule of law, human rights, anti-corruption, civil society, independent media, good governance, and democratic political processes.
- The Administration also supports the expansion of the work of The U.S. Russia Foundation for Economic Advancement and the Rule of Law (USRFL), which is supporting the building blocks of a vibrant civil society in Russia. The Foundation has spent over \$13 million dollars in the last two years toward building a broad-based civil society, while its Russian partners have contributed over \$5.8 million.
- On October 14, 2011, the Obama administration submitted a Congressional Notification for related to the creation of a new \$50 million fund to support Russian civil society. Once established, the new fund would provide new and long-term support to Russian non-governmental organizations committed to a more pluralistic and open society. The new fund would not require additional appropriations because the \$50 million would come from liquidated proceeds of The U.S. Russia Investment Fund. The Administration is consulting with Congress about this new initiative.

7. Promoting the Modernization of Civil Society.

The United States government supports President Medvedev's strategy for modernization of Russia. In addition to the modernization of the Russian government and the Russian economy, the Obama administration also supports the modernization of Russian civil society organizations, including by taking advantage of new technologies to make their work more effective.

- In February 2010, the State Department and the National Security Council organized a visit to Russia by CEOs from Silicon Valley companies along with other experts in high technology to share experiences and knowledge in incorporating technology into efforts to improve governance, respond



to challenges faced by civil society, and foster an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation.

- New U.S. initiatives aim to provide tools for increasing volunteerism and citizen engagement, promoting philanthropy, and empowering citizens and civic groups.
- Other new programs support expansion of traditional media content to the Internet and provide for free exchange of opinions between content providers and their audiences.
- As part of the U.S. Government's increased commitment to help civil society combat trafficking in persons, USAID is working with private partners to promote development of effective mobile technology applications to raise awareness and help civil society organizations combat trafficking in Russia.

8. Fostering Peer-to-Peer Dialogue between American and Russian Civil Society Leaders.

A credible dialogue about democracy and human rights should involve not only the American and Russian governments, but also direct communication and linkages between American and Russian non-governmental organizations and policy experts to confront common challenges and learn from different experiences faced by our societies.

- USAID has launched a U.S.-Russia Civil Society Partnership Program to build, leverage, and expand peer-to-peer relationships between U.S. and Russian civil society organizations. The program will include three conferences of civil society leaders from our two countries, a small grants competition to support collaborative projects, and an Internet resource platform that will enable participants to exchange information about their activities and publish news and event announcements.
- U.S.-funded exchange programs foster interaction between Russian and American civil society activists at the most basic person-to-person level, as do academic exchanges such as the Fulbright program.