Promoting Religious Freedom During the Campaign Against Terrorism": The Hon. Paula Dobriansky Written Answers to Follow-up Questions

November 27, 2001 1. In its interaction with the Government of Indonesia, how is the United States addressing (1) the continuing presence of the Laskar Jihad, whose apparent efforts to clear the Moluccas and now parts of Sulawesi of Christians (responded to in turn by Christian militias) have led to the killing of thousands in intercommunal conflict and (2) the tacit or active support for this group by elements of the Indonesian security and military forces?A: We continue to be very concerned by the sectarian violence that has occurred for over two years between Muslims and Christians in the Moluccas and Central Sulawesi. While both Muslims and Christians have perpetrated horrific acts of violence on one another's communities, outside extremist groups such as the Muslim group Laskar Jihad have exacerbated local conflicts. Laskar Jihad seems to be largely responsible for the most recent round of violence in Central Sulawesi. In fact, hundreds of armed Laskar Jihad fighters are reported to have entered the province from the Moluccas to increase sectarian violence in Sulawesi.The United States has consistently and forcefully urged the government of Indonesia, at the highest levels, to take concrete action against all individuals and groups who perpetrate violence. The U.S. ambassador to Indonesia has raised the issue of the most recent sectarian violence in Central Sulawesi with the Indonesian Security Minister. The U.S. government has strongly advocated that the Indonesian government act to remove outside extremist groups such as Laskar Jihad from conflict areas. The U.S. has also urged the government to ensure the professionalism and neutrality of security forces.2. There have been reports that the U.S. is taking a "second-look" at its position on Russian human rights abuses in Chechnya following the events of September 11. How, if at all, has the U.S. position on this issue changed?A: Our objectives on Chechnya remain the same: a political settlement, protection of human rights and accountability, and access for humanitarian assistance groups.
The President and the Secretary have both noted the continued emphasis we place on Russia's respect for human rights in Chechnya and its need for a political settlement.
We see President Putin's recent offer and Mr. Maskhadov's acceptance of direct contacts as an opportunity that could lead to talks on a political settlement.We will do what we can to encourage both sides to come to an agreement, and while there are moderate factions in Chechnya interested in a political settlement, it is also clear that there are elements in Chechnya with ties to foreign terrorist groups. The former clearly need to distance themselves from the latter.3. The governments of some countries that violate religious freedom claim that religious groups also practice or support terrorism. As it interacts with countries in the Campaign Against Terrorism, how does the United States separate legitimate efforts to contain violence from illegitimate repression of religious freedom?A: Our message to governments that violate religious freedom is that religion is not a cause of terrorism; to the contrary, a guarantee of religious freedom is one of the most effective antidotes to terrorism. It is no surprise that countries in which religions flourish - where freedom of religion and conscience is valued and protected - are countries inhospitable to terrorism. By the same token, extremism in the name of religion tends to take root where religious freedom does not exist. This is one reason we will press the transitional government of Afghanistan to guarantee the right to freedom of religion.No authentic religion teaches violence against innocents, but virtually every religion has been plagued by those who misappropriate its teachings for their own illegitimate ends. In our campaign against terrorism, we will work hard to ensure that governments understand the fundamental difference between religion, which can contribute to civil society in a profoundly productive way, and extremism in the name of religion, which all governments have a responsibility to resist. There are few methods more effective in resisting extremism than protecting religious freedom.