

Promoting Religious Freedom During the Campaign Against Terrorism": Dr. Judith Siegel Oral Testimony

November 27, 2001 DR. SIEGEL: Thank you. I'm very proud to be here, and your work is very important work. In the interest of the question period, let me--you can rely on my written testimony. I'd like to just highlight a few of the points that I think are more important in understanding the role of public diplomacy in this work. First of all, and I'm going to use my own words to some extent just to give you a context for what you see in the written statement. Let me say that public diplomacy is the way that the United States communicates in public fora around the world, through exchange programs, information programs. You heard the Fulbright program mentioned earlier. That probably would be the flagship exchange program. These programs were administered for many years in USIA, which four years ago became part of the State Department. The way many of us like to think about public diplomacy programs is they are the way that we project the American values abroad. For the exchange program, they are also the way that we understand foreign cultures within the U.S. I'll read from part of the testimony, and then we can have a question period. Obviously, we have a great number of public diplomacy programs that are both longer term and shorter term. In all instances they aim at explaining to foreign audiences the American experience and demonstrating the benefits to American society of our long tradition of religious tolerance and religious freedom. Preaching about religious freedom and tolerance directly to areas and countries of the world, where for cultural and historical reasons there has not been such a tradition, we have found is far less effective than demonstrating the value of religious freedom to society through example, and the American example is the preeminent example throughout the world. Foreign return programs, as I've mentioned, include the exchange of academics, educators and students in the Fulbright Program exchanges, international visitor exchanges that bring emerging leaders to the U.S. for a few weeks to learn about U.S. institutions and practices firsthand, and these programs typically include home hospitality with Americans throughout the country. That's a very powerful tool, for the world to see how we live here. And various other kinds of exchange programs involving NGO professionals and organizations, the People To People Program, the youth exchange programs. And these programs, exchange programs, are bilateral. The information activities--and I currently work on the information side--tend to focus on a shorter time frame and by law operate abroad only. Under the U.S. Speaker Specialist Program--some of you may have heard of it in the past as the AMPAR program. We send American experts abroad to talk with foreign audiences about American society and U.S. policies. We have created a universally recognized Web brand on the Internet with scores of active pages that deal with all aspects of U.S. policy. Let me say--because I mentioned that the information programs operate abroad only where in the kind of anomalous, for want of a better term, situation where we don't publicize our website address in the U.S. Obviously, you know, if you had the address you could find our website. If you clicked onto Yahoo! you would find it too, and you went through some of our subject matters. I can provide it to the staff if anyone is interested to logging onto our site. I brought one of our Web products along to show you the reality of what we do, which has actually been pretty exciting in the few years that I've worked on it. On the Web we publish a monthly electronic journal which can be downloaded in what's called Adobe Acrobat. This month we published a journal called "Religious Freedom is a Human Right." And I brought copies for those of you who would like to see it. So we deal on the Web with all aspects of U.S. policy, and we find that we can respond on short notice to new policy initiatives. For example, we put up, following 9-11, as people call it, we put up a photo gallery called "Muslim Life in America." It's a very extensive photo gallery with a little bit of text that's being used all around the world to show mosques in America, to show Muslim family life in America, which is a way that public diplomacy can demonstrate religious diversity in the U.S. We also have a worldwide network of reference and research specialists who respond on a real-time basis from questions from embassies abroad. We have an active traditional publications program. We're coming out in a few weeks, when it comes back from the printers, with--we call them Democracy Papers, 13 papers on various aspects of American democracy that are used around the world. And more and more we're finding ourselves on a 24/7 schedule with these materials. Of special note I would say recently has been a dramatic rise in our use of digital video conferencing, where American experts who can't travel abroad or for other reasons, speak to foreign audiences through digital videos. Because countries where violations of religious freedom occur are often especially resistant to direct programming on the topic, much of our effort approaches the topic more broadly, emphasizing all forms of social tolerance. An accurate description of programs that deal with religious freedom is best, I think, made under a number of rubrics including American values and institutions, conflict resolution, rule of law, et cetera, as my colleagues here have talked about. The way we talk about religious values, describing the kind of social and political life that nurtures and support religious freedom, and then the testimony goes on to give you some specific examples from the Fulbright Program, from the other programs, from our websites, but I think you can look at that later and it might be more useful, with so many of us here, to give more time for questions. One final thing I want to say, although I'm representing the State Department here, public diplomacy is conducted throughout the government. Since 9-11 we've been working much closely with the Defense Department on a number of initiatives, and as we pursue these subjects, we would be happy to join with the Defense Department to bring more information from your colleagues in Defense to your attention.