

Chairman Russ Carnahan
Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight

Opening Statement

Fulfilling the Promise of Peace: Peace, Human Rights and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and Bosnia

September 16, 2010

The chance to live in peace—free from violence, discrimination, oppression, intimidation and fear—is a fundamental human right. As a global leader, defending and supporting peace and human rights is an historic priority for the United States, and reflects our deep belief in equality and rule of law.

As Members of Congress, representing various communities often hailing from diverse backgrounds—many of whom came to this country in search of peace and equality—we understand keenly the importance of the U.S. role in promoting peace abroad. We also understand the solemn responsibility we have to all of our citizens to help build a secure world and uphold our core American values.

Today, the U.S. is deeply involved in helping to advance peace and reconciliation efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, where brave Americans and our allies are fighting insurgents and working with the local people to stabilize those countries.

This week, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is meeting again with Israeli and Palestinian leaders in order to help negotiate an agreement that would lay the framework for a sustainable peace.

In many other parts of the world the U.S., along with our international partners, is engaged in many types of valuable peace-building, peacekeeping, and humanitarian work. This makes us stronger and safer at home, as well.

Back in St. Louis my neighbors and I look out for each other and this strengthens our community. The U.S. also needs strong, safe neighbors where peace is stable and lasting, and human rights are respected without question, so that we can focus instead on growing jobs and rebuilding our economy.

While the current critical efforts in which we're engaged weigh heavy on all of us in Congress to deliver effective results, we cannot and must not forget the commitments we made to help bring about lasting peace and protection of human rights in Northern Ireland and Bosnia.

Both of these countries have come a long way from their darkest days of conflict, and in both the U.S. has played a major role in advancing peace-building and reconciliation.

In regard to Bosnia, the U.S. was instrumental in brokering the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995, and has been consistently providing diplomatic, financial and military resources toward the peace process. Aid to Bosnia since 1993 totals over \$2 billion aimed at institution-building, policing to fight organized crime and terrorism, an independent judiciary, and reconciliation efforts, among other key programs.

However, in the last 15 years Bosnia has outgrown the Dayton Accord that was intended to, and effectively did, establish a structure to bring about an end to the war. The task ahead for Bosnia is to reform its constitution and government institutions, and engage in more serious nation-building efforts in order to take its rightful place among democratic nations in key international and regional organizations such as the EU and NATO.

With elections coming up in Bosnia in October there is a real opportunity for the Bosnian people to take on this challenge. The role of the international community and of the U.S. in particular, must evolve and mature, and it must be the Bosnians themselves who lead the way, but the U.S., in coordination with the EU, can continue to play an important role in supporting them.

In regard to Northern Ireland, the Clinton, Bush, and now Obama Administrations have been instrumental in brokering and supporting the 1998 Good Friday Peace Agreement. Earlier this year Secretary Clinton helped advance the agreement on devolution of policing and justice powers.

In addition, the U.S. has provided approximately \$500 million in aid to Northern Ireland since 1986 through the International Fund for Ireland to support dialogue and reconciliation, and social and economic development in the areas most affected by sectarian conflict.

The nature of the relationship between the U.S. and Northern Ireland is evolving into one that is more focused on continuing to promote peace through economic development. Secretary Clinton's appointment in 2009 of the first U.S. Special Economic Envoy to Northern Ireland reflects this principle. And, as we know, strong markets abroad mean more opportunities to put American workers back to work at home producing the quality goods and services people want.

An integral part of this remains to be vigilant in supporting ongoing peace and reconciliation efforts in Northern Ireland. Especially efforts aimed at building confidence within and among the communities, with respect for Northern Ireland's unique history.

Growing up in St. Louis I was always taught the value of my word. As Americans, we believe in seeing our commitments through, and our troops in the field, past and present, are our best example of this belief in commitment.

We have committed money, resources, and time over many years in order to uphold those core American values of peace, freedom, equality, democracy, and human rights. We have a responsibility to our friends, and to our own citizens, to ensure that these efforts advance and endure. We must continue to help fulfill the promise of peace.

I am eager to hear from our witnesses on how the U.S. can be most effective in doing so moving forward. And now I would like to recognize our Ranking Member, Representative Rohrabacher, for his opening statement.