

Statement of

The Honorable Tom Coburn

United States Senator
Oklahoma
November 14, 2007

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Hearing: "No Safe Haven: Accountability for Human Rights Violators in the United States" Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law

United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary

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Today marks an important milestone for the United States Senate, as this is the first hearing Congress has ever held to examine the enforcement of human rights laws in the United States. I look forward to hearing testimony from government and advocate witnesses whose expertise will undoubtedly shed light on this issue and whose insight will help lay the groundwork for future legislation from the Subcommittee on Human Rights and the Law.

Although the subcommittee was created less than one year ago, under the leadership of Chairman Durbin, it has already produced powerful results. Four previous hearings have allowed this subcommittee to explore specific areas of human rights law, including genocide, human trafficking, child soldiers, and the unintended effects of a law meant to bar from the United States those who have given "material support" to terrorists. Those hearings have resulted in bipartisan legislation that will allow the United States to better hold accountable human rights perpetrators who may have entered this country. Moreover, one hearing resulted in immigration relief for a witness who was victimized by terrorists in her home country and then inadvertently denied safe haven in the United States.

Thus, in addition to being active, this subcommittee has been productive in a truly meaningful way. At least part of the reason for its success is the bipartisan cooperation that has characterized its activities. As ranking member, I have cosponsored every bill proposed by the Chairman. The Genocide Accountability Act passed the Senate by UC, and both the Trafficking in Persons Accountability Act and Child Soldiers Accountability Act were recently reported from the Judiciary Committee without opposition. By working together to reach reasonable goals, this small subcommittee has made notable progress in the realm of human rights enforcement in the United States.

It is my hope that today's hearing will lead to further progress by helping to identify other loopholes that can be closed with legislation. By hearing from the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security -- two agencies leading U.S. human rights efforts -- we can better identify obstacles that prevent human rights violators from being brought to justice. By talking to those who have been on the front lines of these issues, Congress will be better equipped to provide the tools that law enforcement needs to identify, remove, or prosecute individuals who have violated the most fundamental human rights and who should not be living freely in the United States.

According to testimony that has been submitted by our DHS witness, there are approximately 1,000 suspected human rights abusers from 85 different countries currently in this country. Although the government has made significant progress against these violators -- ICE reports more than 100 arrests and 238 removals -- more should be done to eradicate these perpetrators. To the extent that Congress can alleviate jurisdictional or statutory barriers that stand in the way of this goal, it is the responsibility of this subcommittee to identify those barriers and propose solutions to overcome them.

While today's oversight hearing is the first of its kind in Congress, I hope and expect to have more in the future. An open dialogue must be maintained in order to further our progress in the field of human rights. At a minimum, we

must ensure that no perpetrator of these offenses ever finds safe haven in the United States. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about ways to meet that goal.