

# Hypocrisy characterizes US human

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Dawn

WASHINGTON: Hypocrisy characterized much of US human rights policy during George W. Bush's first year as president, particularly in his "war against terrorism" following the Sept 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW). In its 2002 World Report released here on Wednesday, the group charged that Bush's anti-terrorist campaign "risks reinforcing the logic of terrorism unless human rights are given a far more central role."

Bush's support for repressive allies in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia, his softening of criticism for Russia's repression in Chechnya, and his relative indifference to violent abuses against civilians in other regions of the world, particularly Africa, showed double standards which only foster resentment abroad, according to the report.

"(A)s seen from Washington, violence becomes intolerable based not

on WHETHER civilians are attacked but on WHOSE civilians are attacked and who is doing the attacking," noted the report which added that other western nations tended to follow Washington's lead. "Such a message hardly helps to build broad support for human rights."

Post-Sept 11 curbs on civil liberties here at home - especially Bush's authorization for military commissions to try suspected terrorist leaders and the singling out of young men from the Middle East and North Africa for special attention by law enforcement agencies - undermined Washington's credibility as a force for human rights, HRW said. The 670-page report, which includes summaries of important human rights developments from November 2000 through November 2001 in 66 countries around the world, stressed that there were major advances in the human-rights field, as well as serious setbacks arising in par-

ticular from the ongoing anti-terrorist campaign, during the year.

On the positive side, according to the report, the surrender of former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic for trial before the International Criminal Tribunal at the Hague; the indictment in Chile of former President Augusto Pinochet; and the judicial decision in Argentina that invalidated country's amnesty laws were among the more positive events in the year. The report also noted the rapid progress made toward the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC), with 47 of the 60 needed countries having ratified the treaty; the entry into force of the protocol outlawing the use of child soldiers; the highlighting of caste-based discrimination at the World Conference Against Racism; and the speed and success with which the international community defused looming ethnic conflict in Macedonia as major achievements in

2001.

It said the demise of the "abysmal" Taliban regime in Afghanistan "creates an opportunity for positive change" but added that the international community must ensure that Western-backed victors in the US-led war break with their own record of past "atrocities" and that those responsible are kept out of power.

The negative side of the ledger was also pretty full, however. Aside from the human rights issues raised by the "war against terrorism," HRW pointed to the slow progress in creating war crimes trials in Cambodia and Sierra Leone; the failure to bring to justice the architects of the 1999 atrocities in East Timor; and the continuing suffering of civilians in civil wars and political violence in Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Indonesia, and Sudan.

HRW also scored the failure of

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trade ministers at the World Trade Organisation meeting in Qatar in November to give the protection of labour rights a significant place on the agenda for a new round of global trade negotiations to be launched this year. But the main concern of this year's report was the many impacts of the war against terrorism on respect for human rights.

At the core of any successful fight against terrorism, according to the report, must be strong adherence to fundamental human rights principles, beginning with the rejection of the basic tenet of terrorism itself: that the killing of civilians may be an acceptable political act. "The fight against terror must reaffirm the principle that no civilian should ever be deliberately killed or abused," according to HRW's executive director, Kenneth Roth. "But for too many countries," he added, "the anti-terror mantra has provided a new reason to ignore

human rights."

In particular, the war against terrorism has already led to "opportunistic attacks" on civil liberties by many have which enlisted in the US-led "coalition," mainly by touting their internal struggles as battles against terrorism, according to the report.

Thus, Israel has repeatedly argued that it faces in the 16-month-old Palestinian intifada its own civil war which justifies tough repression, including selected assassinations against the uprising's suspected leaders. US failure to rein in Israel for abuse of Palestinians or to restructure UN economic sanctions to minimize suffering of Iraqi citizens suggest to many in the region "that the West's commitment to human rights is one of convenience, to be forsaken when abuses are committed by an ally or in the name of containing a foe," according to the report. —Dawn/InterPress Service.