



July 1, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

You have stated your intention to forge a positive relationship between the United States and Russia. We write on the eve of your summit meeting with President Dmitry Medvedev to express our belief that such a relationship requires a commitment by both countries to democracy and human rights and to urge you to reiterate that these values, which you have called universal, are inextricably linked to humane behavior at home and responsible behavior abroad. Furthermore, we ask you to meet with human rights, civil society, labor and opposition political party leaders while you are in Moscow.

Since Vladimir Putin became President in 2000, Russia has been on a downward spiral away from the democratic and economic reforms made in the 1990's after the collapse of communism. Human rights activists, opposition political party leaders, lawyers and journalists are targets of brutal, even deadly attacks. Freedoms of speech and the media are increasingly limited by the state and the Kremlin has asserted growing authority over the economy, especially the energy sector.

We urge you to challenge Russian leaders about the lack of political and economic freedom in Russia. In your Cairo speech you stated that the freedom of speech, the ability to choose one's own government and way of life, the rule of law and transparency "are not just American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere." Moreover you noted the connection between democracy and security, asserting that "governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful and secure." This principle gained even more salience as Russia's invasion of Georgia last year revealed the lengths to which it will go to assert a sphere of influence in the region.

For decades, the United States was a beacon of hope to those behind the Iron Curtain who longed for their freedom. As you stated in Prague, after the Iron Curtain was lifted "freedom spread like flowing water. Just as we stood for freedom in the 20th century, we must stand together for the right of people everywhere to live free from fear in the 21st."

As you go forward, we hope that you will maintain a clear-eyed assessment of Russia's intentions and keep the above principles in mind in order to ensure that the effort to "reset" U.S.-Russian relations does not come at the expense of the Russian people or Russia's neighbors.

Sincerely,

Stephen Biegun
Max Boot
Ellen Bork
William Courtney
Larry Cox
Lorne Craner
Larry Diamond
Nicholas N. Eberstadt
Eric Edelman
Jamie M. Fly
Jeffrey Gedmin
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