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September 28, 2005

The Honorable the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice United States Department of State 2201 C Street NW Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

Today, September 28, is the third annual celebration of International Right to Know Day, which commemorates the genesis of a global movement to protect the right of individuals and civil society to access information held by their governments. As you know, open government transparency is an indispensable ingredient in the recipe for democratic governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld recently emphasized this point in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed: "As more citizens gain access to new forms of information . . . it will be that much more difficult for governments to cement their rule by holding monopolies on news and commentary."

Millions of activists, media outlets, and ordinary people in more than 60 countries around the globe use right-to-know laws every day to make a difference in their communities and their world—and billions more are still struggling for this right. We commend the State Department and the officials in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) for recently including in its tasking for the human rights country reports a question regarding access to government information in each of the countries that is evaluated. We ask you, Madam Secretary, to direct the inclusion of a separate category in the annual country reports that would analyze government transparency practices and freedom of information laws. Such prominent treatment will help bring this issue to the forefront department-wide.

Since 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights officially set forth the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers," it has come to be universally-recognized in the international human rights regime. The right to information has since been included in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the American Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Most recently, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, in the first case considering the right to access public information under Article 13 of the American Convention, found this right had been violated when the government denied environmental groups information about a major logging project.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this critical issue and its importance to the Department of State's role in endorsing and preserving the human rights of all people around the world.

Sincerely yours

Thomas S. Blanton Executive Director

Meredith Fuchs General Counsel

Cc: Ms. Paula J. Dobriansky, Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs

Mr. Glyn T. Davies, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor