

**Opening Statement**  
**Senator Benjamin L. Cardin**  
**SFRC Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs**  
**March 21, 2013**

I am pleased to welcome everyone to the first hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs for the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. This will be the first in a series of hearings examining different elements of the Administration's "Rebalance to Asia" policy. This policy realigns U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military resources toward the Asia Pacific Region to help create a regional set of norms that lead to greater peace, stability and economic growth in Asia.

The rebalance to Asia is not about containing China but rather includes building a constructive relationship with China. It is not just about military presence; it is a strategy to strengthen alliances; deepen partnerships with emerging powers; empower regional institutions to resolve conflicts peacefully; and empower the region economically. This hearing will focus on what the Rebalance means for democracy, good governance and human rights, particularly in Southeast Asia.

In recent weeks, President Obama has reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to rebalancing to Asia and underscored the region's critical importance to U.S. prosperity and security. He understands, as do we, that the U.S. and Asian economies are tied together and that as they grow, our opportunities do too. Asia accounts for more than one-quarter of global GDP, and over the next five years, nearly half of all growth outside the United States is expected to come from Asia. Southeast Asia, in particular, has a rapidly expanding middle class and highly educated labor pool; it is a largely untapped market which includes the world's fourth most populous country, Indonesia. It is estimated that by 2025, Asia will account for almost half the world's economic output.

We must also engage with Asia to protect our security interests. The threat of nuclear proliferation lingers over the Korean peninsula. Disputes over territorial and historical claims persist. And ensuring free navigation along crucial maritime trade routes and the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas is in the national interest of the United States. These are all good reasons for us to pay more attention to the East Asia Pacific (EAP) region.

But we must remember as we “Rebalance to Asia” that the fundamental respect for the human rights of every person, every woman, man and child, is the underpinning to security and prosperity. Good governance which includes a respect for human rights is key to economic growth. As President Obama has said, “History offers a clear verdict: Governments that respect the will of their own people, that govern by consent and not coercion, are more prosperous, they are more stable, and more successful than governments that do not. . . Prosperity without freedom is just another form of poverty.”

Rule of law, a fair system of justice, and transparent governance which allows for a strong civil society are the basic structures which allow a nation’s citizens to have a voice, to live in freedom and to build their prosperity. We must strengthen these elements for our Rebalance policy to succeed.

Combating corruption and fostering good governance which respects human rights and the rule of law is a daunting task, but we have made good progress and will continue to work with our partners and allies in the region both on a bilateral basis and with regional organizations such as the Association of South East Asian Nations, known as ASEAN and the Pacific Island Nations Forum to institutionalize and solidify reform. ASEAN has taken first steps toward recognizing the importance of protecting human rights with the formation of the Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and the 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration. But, as I know many of our ASEAN partners themselves recognize, these first steps are just that, first steps. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how we can support ASEAN’s next steps to create concrete mechanisms which will improve human rights.

And the signs of progress are encouraging. The number of democratic countries in the world has expanded from 30 in 1974 to 117 today. Over the past 30 years, the East Asia-Pacific region has also become more democratic, with the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Mongolia, Taiwan, Indonesia and Timor-Leste joining the family of democracies. The past two years have seen moves towards greater political freedom in Burma, long one of the region’s most authoritarian systems. Helping Burma have free and fair elections in 2015 will be a top U.S. government priority.

Helping democratic states build institutions that deliver effective governance, and deepen the legitimacy of their democratic systems is critical. We will continue to encourage free and fair elections throughout the region as Malaysia and Cambodia hold parliamentary elections this year and Indonesia holds its third direct democratic presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014. But elections alone are not enough; we must make sure that institutional structures that underpin a successful democracy are strengthened, from the judiciary to the bureaucracy to the legislature.

To build momentum for democratic reform, it is critical to end sub-national ethnic conflict. Peace and stability are essential to democratic progress, for protecting human rights, for safe migration and for combating trafficking in persons. The peace process in the Philippines is a good example, where a long-standing conflict in Mindanao now has a peaceful settlement and path forward following negotiations which Malaysia facilitated between the parties, civil society and government monitors.

As we encourage peaceful, democratic reform and good governance, we must continue to push for protecting universal human rights by combating child labor and trafficking in persons, protecting religious freedoms, and empowering women. U.S. efforts to work with allies and friends in East Asia and the Pacific to prevent trafficking in persons in the region are beginning to pay off; in 2012 four EAP countries have moved off of the State Department's Tier 2 Watchlist as a result of these concerted efforts. We must keep up these vigorous efforts to protect human rights.

And we must remember that women's rights are human rights. Women are the barometer of a nation's success, and of its stability. In my previous role as Chair of the Subcommittee on International Development and Foreign Assistance, the successful integration of gender equity into our foreign aid programs was one of my main priorities. I welcome President Obama's March 19 nomination of Ms. Cathy Russell, former Chief of Staff to Dr. Jill Biden, to the important post of Ambassador at large for Global Women's Issues at the Department of State. I look forward to her confirmation hearing and to continuing what has been a strong partnership with the Obama Administration and the State Department on promoting gender equity and on all of these issues in the East Asia region. I now yield to ranking member, Senator Rubio, for opening remarks.