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Thank you for extending this invitation to us to participate in today's hearing on a topic of great importance.

As the University of Southern California's new Center on Public Diplomacy focuses on this issue, we feel this proposal could be an important contribution to strengthen media, civil society and transparency in emerging democracies.

We all know an independent press is essential for truly open and pluralistic democracy: Without independent media, governments are at best only partially transparent, the rule of law is at best incomplete, and multi-party elections cannot be truly open and free. Strengthening independent media remains among the most effective and enduring tools for promoting multiparty democracy available to us today.

Independent editors and advocates of free media across the globe are asking for assistance in many ways, including training programs, assistance with facilities and expert advice on drafting laws and constitutional provisions that guarantee a free press. It is important to respond to the full range of these requests, both to address the needs identified by leaders of emerging media in different parts of the world and to ensure these emerging media possess the means to survive and flourish in often difficult and dangerous terrain.

Many organizations in this country have been providing these forms of assistance, including U.S. government agencies such as AID and Voice of America and other government broadcasters, educational institutions across the U.S., and non-governmental organizations including the International Center for Foreign Journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Internews, and others.

An even larger number of organizations based outside the United States, in governments, in education and NGOs, are also active in this area, often with minimal resources.

In addition to government resources, we have seen support for independent media from the Knight Foundation and other foundations and non-profit institutions, from major media organizations, and even from individuals. These typically modest investments generate significant returns and sustain this valuable work throughout the world.

Scholars from Joseph Nye at Harvard to my colleague Manuel Castells at USC have long noted the importance of the free flow of information and ideas to a healthy society. And in recent years, we have seen examples of courageous independent media that made a difference in their countries' struggle toward democracy, examples including Radio B92 in Serbia and The Lusaka Post in Zambia.

B92 and The Post are also two of many examples of how support from outside their countries helped promote free media and democratic values:

When B92 was forced off the air by the Serbian government, assistance came not only from the Voice of America, which stepped in to broadcast B92 programming: in addition, European editors' groups came forward to support B92, and the Dutch streamed B92's signal onto the Internet from a server in Holland. B92 went back on the air, and you can also still hear it on the Internet, at www.B92.net.

And when the Zambian government closed The Post and threw its editor in jail, protests came not only from the U.S., but also from NGOs around the world, especially across Africa and Europe, which took up the cause. After international protests, the editor was freed and the newspaper was back on the newsstands. And as with B92, you can see the Lusaka Post on the Internet every day.

(A disclosure: these were among the campaigns that were joined by the Freedom Forum, where I worked for many years running training programs for journalists, media managers and educators in Africa, Asia, central Europe and Latin America.)

These and other cases suggest an approach that can improve the effectiveness - and the cost-effectiveness - of any coordinated American effort in this area:

U.S. assistance, even through the National Endowment for Democracy, should to the extent possible be coordinated and leveraged with assistance from other countries and from NGOs of different nations.

This should reap a number of benefits, including:

A plurality of sources of funding and in-kind assistance will only enhance the credibility of the independent media we seek to encourage,

Coordination with organizations with similar missions can reduce rivalries and competition that might be counterproductive, and

Working with other countries and international NGOs can only strengthen the ability of the Endowment to marshal resources to respond fully to the challenges of those who would shutter and control a media longing to be free.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to participate in today's proceeding. We look forward to providing you with any further information that you might find of use.