

**Statement of Michael H. Posner, Nominee for Assistant Secretary of State
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
(July 28, 2009)**

Madam Chair and distinguished Members of the Committee,

I am honored to come before you today as the President Obama's nominee to serve as the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. I am deeply grateful to the President for nominating me to this important position and to Secretary Clinton for her great confidence and support.

With your indulgence, I would like to introduce my family - my wife Deborah Korzenik, my sons Alexander and Daniel, my daughter Hannah, my mother Elizabeth Posner and my mother-in-law Rabbi Emily Korzenik. I am blessed by their love and support. They help me in every way and strengthen my resolve to serve our country. I also want to thank Congressman Jim McGovern for introducing me today and for his kind words and generous support.

It is a humbling experience for me to appear here today. For more than 30 years I have worked to promote human rights as the Executive Director and more recently as President of a non-governmental organization, Human Rights First. Since the late 1970s, I often have looked to the U.S. government as a key ally in the struggle to protect human rights around the world. As a non-governmental advocate, I have witnessed and often benefited from the incredible power and moral authority of the United States to lead on these important but often complicated issues. The U.S. Government's potential to provide leadership on human rights democracy and the rule of law is part of what Secretary Clinton has referred to as the smart power. And if confirmed, I look forward to working with you and other members of Congress and with others in the administration to maximize U.S. influence and impact on these vital issues.

My own involvement with these issues is very much an outgrowth of my own family's experience. All four of my grandparents emigrated to this country from various parts of Europe in the early part of the 20th century. They all found their way to Chicago, where both of my parents were born. There they became part of the American Dream. But many members of their families who remained in Europe were not so lucky. My grandmother, Bella Hoffman, a Hungarian Jew, lost much of her family in the Holocaust. Many members of my father's family living in Poland also were victims of Nazi brutality. But two of my great-uncles, living in France, not only survived this horrendous period but became leaders of the Maquis, the French resistance to Hitler.

As a young boy, I heard these stories and internalized two important lessons. The first is that governments that fall into the hands of dictators and demagogues are capable of unspeakable brutality and horror. The second, more hopeful lesson is that courageous people can and often do stand up to oppression and it is our duty to help them.

My family's experience in Europe shaped my world view and deeply influenced my career path. In the mid 1970s I attended law school in at the University of California, Berkeley.

As part of my studies, I undertook an internship in Geneva Switzerland with an organization called the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). My assignment there was to research and document the abuses of human rights in Uganda under the regime of Idi Amin. For months I interviewed dozens of the victims and survivors of Amin's brutality. In piecing together the story I came to understand that literally hundreds of thousands of innocent people had been brutally murdered by Amin's agents. While conducting these often painful interviews, I wondered – where is the international outrage? I also thought often about my own family and the world's inadequate attention to the fate of European Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. I decided to devote my professional life to the cause of human rights.

As a young lawyer in 1978, I was invited to become the first full-time director of what was then called the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. In literally my first weeks on the job, I was invited to testify before this Committee by then Senator Mark Hatfield who was sponsoring legislation to impose trade sanctions against Idi Amin's Uganda. Congressman Donald Pease sponsored a companion bill in the House and together they persuaded Congress to take a stand against Idi Amin and to impose a total trade ban on Uganda. My Ugandan friends rejoiced. The United States Government, the most powerful force on this earth, had stood up to Idi Amin. Within a year Amin was ousted by his own people.

This was the first of many instances where I have seen and been part of efforts to harness the political, diplomatic and economic power of the United States Government as a force for good. I saw it in the work we did with Andrei Sakharov and other dissidents in the former Soviet Union, especially through the Helsinki process. I experienced it in the 1980s when President Reagan stood behind Philippine "people's power" and ensured a successful transition of power from Marcos to Aquino. I saw it in Northern Ireland where George Mitchell and the Clinton Administration provided a roadmap for peace through the Good Friday Agreement. And I witnessed it as the Bush Administration, working closely with Congressional leaders like Senators Cardin and Voinovich and Congressman Chris Smith, took a leading role in challenging European anti-Semitism and other racial and religious persecution through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The list goes on and on.

As this country confronts new global challenges today, a dedicated commitment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law will make us stronger and will advance U.S. national interests. As President Obama said so eloquently in his Cairo speech:

"All people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. Those are not just American ideas, they are human rights, and that is why we will support them everywhere ... governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful and secure. Suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away."

I believe that this framework can and should guide U.S. policies everywhere in the world. And while I fully understand and appreciate the Government's need to balance these concerns with other important policy objectives and interests, if confirmed, I will view my role as being a principal advocate for robust human rights and democracy policies within the Government. It will be my job to make the best case possible for why these interests are important and why adherence to these principles will advance the long term national interests of the United States.

If confirmed, I will be honored to serve our nation, dedicating myself to supporting and defending the Constitution of this great country and everything for which it stands. In doing so, I will commit to working with this Committee and the larger Congress on these important issues. And I commit to working with all of you in the spirit of bi-partisanship. The promotion of democracy and human rights here, and around the world, helps define us – and who we are as a people.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.