

For the Record

*From remarks by Richard V. Allen,
assistant to the president for national
security affairs:*

All too often, we assume that everyone means the same thing by human rights, that disagreements over human rights are basically disagreements over the best way to *implement* a human rights policy. . . .

Human rights in the proper sense of the term are the rights guaranteed to men under law in any civilized or humane society. These include, most fundamentally, the rights not to be deprived arbitrarily of life, liberty or property, and the right not to be subjected to humanly degrading treatment such as torture or exile under brutal conditions. . . .

Our support of human rights around the world should not be confused with a policy of indiscriminate promotion of our own political system or institutions. There would be no point in denying that we consider democratic or representative government better than the available alternatives. Because we believe, or perhaps even because we know that our way is best, we may fervently wish that all nations adopt institutions similar to our own. But we are too sensitive to the vast differences in the historical and cultural experience of different societies, and the manifold obstacles many nations face in maintaining even a modest level of political stability, to try to impose our own institutions on them. We are convinced that to do so would be neither right nor wise. . . .

The notion of economic and social rights is a dilution and distortion of the original and proper meaning of human rights, and we need to identify it as such. It serves as a convenient excuse for those regimes and movements which do not respect ordinary civil and political rights; not surprisingly, it has been taken up by the Soviet Union and its allies and surrogates as a way to defend the dismal human rights record of most communist governments.