

LEGISLATIVE WATCH

Legislative Watch reports on pending U.S. legislation relevant to human rights and humanitarian law. This list is not meant to be comprehensive.

Sudan Peace Act, S. 180/H.R. 931

Major Sponsors: Sen. Bill Frist (R-TN)/
Rep. Thomas G. Tancredo (R-CO)

Status: Referred to Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on January 25, 2001. Referred to House Committee on International Relations on March 7, 2001.

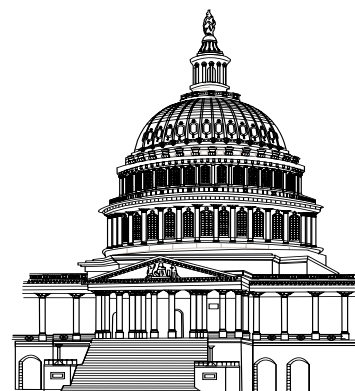
Substance: These bills denounce the Sudanese government for massive human rights violations, the ongoing slave trade, use of civilian defense forces, and general targeting of civilians during military attack. The bills proclaim U.S. disapproval of Sudan's low-intensity ethnic cleansing campaign that primarily targets Christians and animists in the south of the country. In this regard, the bills condemn Sudan's organization of irregular forces for the purpose of carrying out raiding and slaving parties against the Dinka, Nyer, and Nuba peoples. The bills also authorize the secretary of state's use of State Department personnel for supporting ongoing negotiations and eventual implementation of a peace settlement between the Sudanese government and opposition forces. In the event Sudan imposes a ban on UN air transport relief flights, these bills direct the U.S. president to develop a contingency plan outside UN auspices to provide U.S. government and privately donated relief to all affected areas.

Federal Death Penalty Abolition Act of 2001, S. 191

Major Sponsor: Sen. Russell D. Feingold (D-WI)

Status: Referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary on January 25, 2001.

Substance: This bill repeals death penalty provisions in federal statutes and prohibits the sentencing to death or execution of anyone for any violation of federal law. The bill has retroactive effect: any person sentenced to death under federal law prior to the enactment date will instead serve a life sentence without the possibility of parole. Senator Feingold advocates this repeal for a number of reasons. He notes that support for the death penalty has reached a 20-year low due to rising concerns of fairness. Numerous studies show the death penalty is implemented in a racially discriminatory manner. Defendants who kill white victims are four times more likely to be sentenced to death than defendants who kill black victims. According to a Department of Justice report released in September 2000, whether one receives the death penalty appears to be related to the color of one's skin or the federal district in which the prosecution takes place. Of the 20 defendants currently on the federal government's death row, 14 are African-American, 1 is Hispanic-American,



1 is Asian-American, and only 4 are European-American. Since the 1976 reinstatement of the death penalty, the United States has found 93 death row inmates—one out of every seven—innocent. The death penalty draws heavy criticism from abroad, especially because only five other countries—Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen—impose the death penalty on persons below the age of 18. Finally, comparative country studies indicate the death penalty is not an effective crime deterrent.

Transparency and Responsibility for United States Trade Health Act of 2001, H.R. 460

Major Sponsor: Rep. Cynthia A. McKinney (D-GA)

Status: Referred to the House Committee on International Relations on February 6, 2001.

Substance: This bill requires U.S. nationals who directly or indirectly employ one or more individuals in a foreign country to provide full transparency and public disclosure in all their operations. The bill mandates, *inter alia*, that the following information be disclosed: workers' rights, labor standards, and employee complaints; programs educating employees about dangers and safety precautions regarding workplace chemicals; environmental performance, including an inventory of released pollutants and any natural resources extracted; security arrangements with state police, military, or paramilitary forces; human rights policies; complaints from local communities; and human rights lawsuits filed against the national. In effect, the bill increases U.S. corporate accountability for activities conducted abroad by providing both domestic and foreign individuals and organizations access to vital statistics. ☺

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