

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 08, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

The upcoming December Summit for Democracy represents a significant opportunity to galvanize our allies to join our efforts to put democracy at the center of international relations. Advancing democratic principles and protecting human rights indeed is in the interest of all of our allies.

With the Summit just one month away, however, we have some outstanding questions about the initiative, including which countries have been invited and why; how the Summit will meaningfully include civil society representatives, especially from those countries whose governments are threatening or attacking independent voices; what specific commitments the United States is making to demonstrate our prioritization of human rights and democracy as central pillars of U.S. foreign policy; and what commitments we expect other countries to make.

First, we urge more clarity and transparency regarding the criteria for selecting the governments invited to participate in the Summit. Who we invite sends a powerful signal about the values and practices that we believe constitute a democracy. While democracies take many forms, and some countries are struggling to consolidate democratic institutions and practices, we must be clear about why we invited each participating government. Please provide us with the list of countries invited and the criteria used to determine why each one merited an invitation.

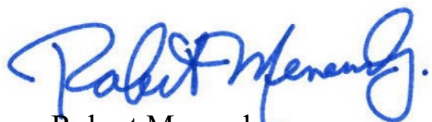
Second, we urge your Administration to explain more clearly the role of civil society at the Summit. No summit about democratic values will be successful without elevating the voices of civil society – both American and international – which must be an integral part of the planning and execution of the Summit. A defining element of any democratic system is the full participation of the people, and civil society around the globe plays an integral role in organizing citizens to participate in their government. Additionally, we have heard reports that the Administration will also convene subnational political leaders from some countries, including entrepreneurs and business leaders. Please explain what other types of participants you will invite and how the public can participate in or observe the Summit proceedings.

Third, in order for the Summit to be a success, participating governments should be asked to reflect on both the strengths and shortcomings of democratic systems and how democracies can best shore up their democratic foundations. We are especially concerned about the backsliding that is occurring in countries that are treaty allies of the United States and that previously had made great strides forward, but are now moving in the wrong direction. Every participating

government should make transparent and specific commitments to renewing democracy at home and abroad that reflect responsiveness to their citizens' demands and wellbeing. It is incumbent on the United States to model this self-reflection and the commitment to realizing democracy's unique ability to acknowledge its weaknesses and to confront them transparently. Please let us know what specific commitments you are considering announcing during the Summit that will show U.S. leadership in shoring up U.S. democracy and in providing a model and support for others. Will there be legislative action needed to implement any proposed initiatives?

Finally, we would appreciate learning more about how you envision the role of the United States Congress. As the First Article branch of our government, the Congress plays a central role in our democracy. Consequently, we expect Members of Congress will participate at the upcoming Summit for Democracy, and look forward to engaging with you in a dialogue about their roles. We look forward to your answers to the above questions.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator