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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

January 13, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

I am writing to express my concern about the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act and the potential for the establishment of a nationwide National Register of Citizens in India. The law to grant citizenship based on religion violates India's international legal obligations and its constitution, which guarantees the rights to equality and nondiscrimination. The citizen registry has already disproportionately affected Muslims in India. These efforts threaten India's long history of secularism and democratic values.

During travel to India last October, I met with civil society activists who expressed deep concern about the trajectory of these policies and its negative impact on the future of democracy in India. The government's efforts in Assam has left effectively 1.9 million persons, primarily Bengali-speaking Muslims, stateless. The government appears to now be extending this effort across the country. Despite the government's claims that the citizenship bill seeks to protect religious minorities, its failure to include Muslim groups facing persecution in neighboring countries, such as Pakistan's Ahmadiyya and Burma's Rohingya, signal an anti-Muslim intent. This message has been further reinforced by Home Minister Amit Shah who has vowed in public to expand the checks used in Assam in other states and use the citizenship law to purge India of "infiltrators" and "termites" appearing to refer to Muslims in India.

Moreover, I am concerned by reports of injuries and deaths of peaceful demonstrators protesting the citizenship act and national register. The police have a responsibility to protect citizens. However, videos uploaded to social media and reports have revealed the police have illegally detained, arrested on false charges, beat, and opened fire on peaceful protesters—violating India's international human rights obligations. In addition, I am alarmed by reports that the central government is building mass detention centers to house individuals who cannot prove their citizenship, essentially Indian Muslims.

The situation in Kashmir has also not normalized since the abrogation of Article 370 of the constitution in August. The five-month Internet shutdown in Kashmir is the longest ever in a democracy, and has left people's lives, jobs, and the economy in a more dire situation.

I urge the Administration to engage the Indian government at the highest levels on these concerns, press for a swift reversal of these policies and practices, and ensure protection of the human rights of all persons in India regardless of their religion. The United States must remain steadfast in defending democratic values, freedoms, and human rights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Menendez
Ranking Member