

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 1, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write today to express our strong opposition to the State Department's deletion of the reproductive rights subsection in the 2017 annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices ("Human Rights Reports") and to urge you to include the reproductive rights subsection in all future reports. These reports provide an overview of human rights practices in nearly 200 countries, and as then-acting Secretary of State Sullivan claimed in April 2018, are "the most comprehensive and factual accounting of the global state of human rights. They help our government and others formulate policies and encourage both friends and foes to respect the dignity of all individuals without discrimination." Unfortunately, the 2017 reports failed to live up to that standard.

Previously, the Department's annual Human Rights Reports contained a subsection that detailed countries' common deprivations of women's reproductive rights, which are integral and fundamental to human rights and personal dignity. These sections detailed maternal mortality rates, unsafe abortions, denial of family planning services and information, and discrimination and violence against women in health care settings.

By removing the "reproductive rights" subsection, the State Department has made it more difficult for Congress to gauge the human rights records of nations seeking U.S. assistance and to set foreign policy properly. The elimination of a comprehensive "reproductive rights" section effectively ignores and undermines these critical rights and allows nations that propagate human rights violations that negatively affect the health and safety of women to act with impunity.

The International Conference on Population and Development's (ICPD) Programme of Action, which was agreed to by the United States in 1994, recognized that unreasonable restrictions or obstacles to women's reproductive rights make it difficult for women to realize their full range of human rights. These rights include rights to life, health, freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, nondiscrimination and equality, privacy, and information, among others. Empowering women, the ICPD noted, including by guaranteeing them access to reproductive health services, is the cornerstone of sustainable development programs. Since 1995 the Department, particularly through the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues has recognized the value of empowering women by ensuring access to and protection of all of their human rights, including reproductive


rights. Failing to include accurate reporting on these rights will hinder the ability of the Department to fulfill its mission.


Given the importance of having a comprehensive understanding of the reproductive rights in the annual Human Right Reports, we ask that you reinstate the subsection in the upcoming 2018 Reports. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to working with you.

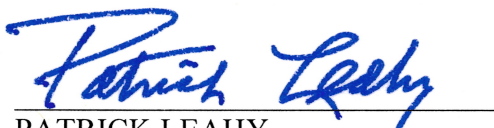
Sincerely,


ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senate


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate

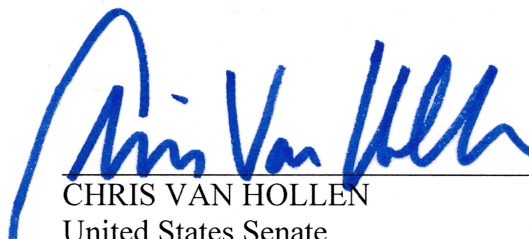

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United States Senate



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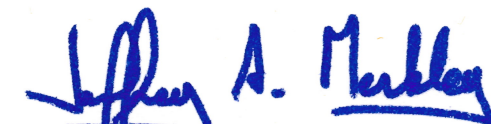

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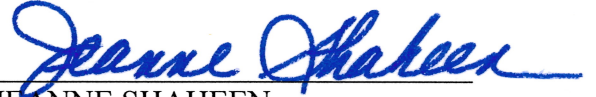
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