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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

March 16, 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:

As our nation and the world comes to terms with the scope of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is apparent that the U.S. government response to address this global threat has thus far fallen far short. I am similarly concerned that the State Department has not responded with the urgency or focus required to protect our citizens abroad and diplomatic personnel.

I recognize that thousands of dedicated State Department personnel at home and abroad are working around-the-clock to help address the health risks facing U.S. citizens and their families, facilitate their return to the U.S., and work to contain the spread of COVID-19 globally. However, the Department's has not put forth a coordinated, robust response which I fear puts the health of its own employees at further risk, and further jeopardizes the health and well-being of the American people.

Last week, according to public reports, at least one State Department embassy employee tested positive for COVID-19—and may well have worked during a period when they were infectious. However the Department has failed to provide any details or the Department's response to protect personnel and the surrounding community. I understand that even after the Department knew there were multiple positive cases in several different locations, the Department failed to provide any guidance for employees or their families on COVID-19, and, as the blog *Diplo pundit* noted, the Department's Visa Alerts page—a pivotal source of information for international travelers—remained empty for days even after the Department was aware of positive cases and was downgrading certain Consular functions.

I am also concerned about the lack of transparency regarding the Department's contingency planning for pandemics such as COVID-19.

Despite repeated requests from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Department has failed to provide any basic information or substantive responses on issues critical to the health and safety of our diplomatic corps and the American people they are on the front lines to serve. These are not just theoretical questions. They bear on the Department's ability to function and to serve the American people, including providing vital services for Americans overseas during this unprecedented global health crisis, and helping to protect those in the United States.

Therefore, I request that you provide the following information immediately, and continue to provide updates on a rolling and prompt basis:

1. An immediate status update on the number of suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases of Department personnel;
2. The current operating status of all overseas posts and contingency plans for further spread of COVID-19;
3. A copy of all Department guidance provided to employees and overseas posts regarding up-19, including how such guidance is being communicated to personnel;
4. A copy of the Department's current response plan for any suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 involving Department personnel;
5. The current guidance to personnel for going into work or working remotely; and
6. A detailed briefing on the Department's continuity of operations plans.

In addition, I request that you arrange for my staff to be briefed immediately on each of these concerns in detail, and that you be prepared to appear before the Committee to discuss these issues with Congress and the American people.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Robert Menendez
Ranking Member