

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

March 5, 2018

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

As you embark on your first trip to Africa since your confirmation, I urge you to use this opportunity to improve the Administration's diplomatic, security, and economic investments across the continent.

Africa is a continent of incredible, untapped potential, with a tremendously talented and resilient population, and abundant natural resources. The Trump Administration has articulated an approach to the continent focused on four major themes: peace and security; counterterrorism; economic trade, investment and development; and, democracy and good governance. However, failure to properly staff the Africa bureau, inadequate budget requests, lack of strategic engagement with the continent, and poor interagency coordination all demonstrate that the Administration is not willing to commit the necessary diplomatic or development resources to meaningfully advance these objectives, letting languish years of bipartisan engagement in Africa by both the Executive and Legislative Branches.

The Administration has been far too slow in appointing key personnel to help advance our interests and initiatives. The President has not put forward a nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, and the majority of the Africa bureau's Deputy Assistant Secretaries and Office Directors remain staffed by personnel in "acting" capacities. There are no Ambassadorial nominees to Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, Central African Republic (CAR), or Tanzania. And you have eliminated the Special Envoys to Sudan and South Sudan, and the Great Lakes. These vacancies are shocking at a time when the war in South Sudan has cost untold lives, displaced four million people and shows no signs of ending. Conflicts in DRC and CAR are worsening, with devastating effects on the civilian populations; political infighting threatens security gains in Somalia; and there is democratic backsliding in Tanzania.

Additionally, the Administration's Fiscal Year 2019 budget request does not reflect a commitment to the strategy it has articulated. Overall, you propose cutting assistance and investment to the continent by 25 percent, cutting Food for Peace entirely, and slashing funding for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief by more than \$1 billion, which will cripple our ability to achieve the goal of eliminating HIV/AIDS.

High profile engagement like the President's meeting last year with African heads of State and Foreign Ministers on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly and your November meeting with African Ministers did not appear to concretely advance any of the four themes in the Administration's approach.

Similarly, UN Ambassador Nikki Haley's trip to Africa last fall was welcome, as were her messages to heads of State in Kinshasa and Juba. However, while General Waldhauser, head of U.S. Africa Command, accompanied her, there were no senior officials from the African Bureaus at the State Department or the U.S. Agency for International Development with her. And it was unclear that her message about cutting assistance and talk of reducing the number of uniformed Americans serving in peacekeeping missions were synchronized with other members of the interagency as part of an overall strategy towards solving either crisis.

Finally, Mr. Secretary, the President's offensive remarks in January about Africa showed a troubling disdain for an entire continent and its peoples that prompted a justifiable backlash. Such rhetoric from the President undermines our leadership in the world and in turn our ability to promote our interests, values and objectives. However, it is not too late to change the trajectory of the Administration's Africa policy. Your trip can be the beginning of a genuine effort to help repair U.S. - Africa relations and invigorate the Administration's approach towards the continent, but it must be followed by adequate resources and attention by yourself and seasoned diplomats, working in concert with other U.S. officials. I look forward to you briefing members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about your trip upon your return, and to working with you as we continue to pursue a robust relationship with Africa.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Ranking Member