

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 8, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President:

The world will mark the 69th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Human Rights Day this December 10. On this momentous occasion, we write to ask that you recommit our country to upholding human rights as one of our founding principles, and respectfully call on other countries to do the same.

Since its ratification nearly 70 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been a beacon of hope for the world's most oppressed peoples. The declaration serves as the basis of our country's human rights policy and the United States has continued to rely on its legal significance and international standing to advance human rights across the globe. However, for much of the past year, our national voice on international human rights issues has been largely silent.

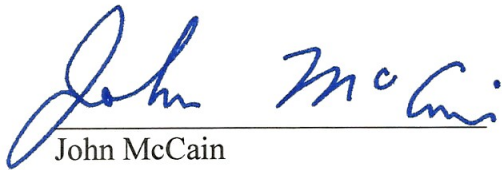
This was strikingly apparent during your recent trip to Asia, where our delegation failed to raise major human rights concerns or name dissidents who languish in dark prisons across the region for no other reason than their brave defense of democracy and human rights. The Administration's silence combined with confusing statements from Secretary Tillerson, who has suggested that our country's fundamental values can be separated from the foreign policies we pursue, sows confusion both at home and abroad. At this time of increasing uncertainty and growing security challenges, it is imperative that we reassert the United States' commitment to our human rights obligations, and ask other countries to join us in reaffirming the centrality of human rights as the cornerstone of peace and security.

Sadly, disregard for fundamental freedoms and human dignity has too often become the norm. Iran, Turkey, Russia, Egypt, and Venezuela currently hold scores of political prisoners, torturing them and trampling on their fundamental freedoms. Sri Lanka, Burma, and China continue to repress their religious and ethnic minorities. Security forces in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo have unlawfully detained and tortured civilians. The Philippines has reported an unprecedented number of extrajudicial killings by police. LGBT individuals are deprived of their basic human rights in dozens of countries. Worse still, at this time of growing human rights abuses, human rights organizations are being shut down at an alarming rate by countless repressive governments around the world.

These are only a few of the many instances in which America's voice cannot remain silent. Protecting human rights at home and abroad is important not only to our national character, but also to our security interests as countries that respect their citizens are less likely to breed terrorism and are better able to focus on political and developmental problems that otherwise undermine stability. Governments who respect human rights also serve as more capable and reliable partners when facing common security threats, and they help provide business climates in which bilateral trade and investment interests grow.

As President, we need your voice in strongly asserting our country's respect for human rights at home and abroad. We ask that you use the upcoming anniversary of the Universal Declaration to reaffirm that no government can be legitimate if it abuses the people it is meant to serve – and that this rule is universal, without exception.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John McCain". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being more prominent than the last name "McCain".

John McCain
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ben Cardin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ben" being more prominent than the last name "Cardin".

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator