



February 8, 2019

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

Re: Amnesty International USA urges Secretary Pompeo to publically raise human rights in Hungary

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to you as the leaders of Amnesty International USA and Amnesty International Hungary regarding your upcoming trip to Budapest. Under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the government of Hungary has undertaken a raft of efforts, both formal and informal, to stifle civil society and monopolize control over the media. We urge you to publicly draw attention to the Hungarian government's erosion of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Over the past two years, Hungarian authorities enacted a series of laws plainly designed to muzzle civil society organizations critical of government policy. The LexNGO2017 law put in place multiple unjust obligations on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) receiving funding from abroad. The law demands that NGOs comply with transparently punitive taxation and reporting requirements and publicly describe themselves as operating against the interests of the state. LexNGO2018, a subsequent bill, introduced criminal penalties for a range of activities protected by international law, including the provision of basic assistance to asylum-seekers.

According to the investigative outlet [Atlatszo](#), some 500 media outlets are controlled by allies of Prime Minister Orbán. The government of Hungary and its allies have not hesitated to use these outlets as a cudgel against dissenting voices. In April 2018, a pro-government weekly magazine [published a list](#) of individuals it described as

“mercenaries” paid to overthrow the government. The list included leading figures in Hungarian journalism, higher education and civil society. Individuals featured, including the staff of Amnesty International Hungary, were subjected to a torrent of online abuse for their activism.

This climate has imperiled the ability of independent organizations to operate freely in Hungary. In response to a targeted smear campaign, Open Society Foundations [left Budapest](#) in August 2018, stating that their leadership could no longer guarantee the safety of their staff. In December 2018, Central European University announced it was moving its degree program to Vienna.

The U.S. Department of State has previously noted the contraction of political space in Hungary. Department Spokesperson Heather Nauert [condemned the LexNGO2017](#) bill and the Department’s annual [human rights report](#) has drawn attention to the Hungarian government’s consolidation of media and restrictions on NGOs. Yet [recent statements](#) by senior officials have cast doubt on the U.S. government’s commitment to protecting fundamental freedoms in Hungary.

Your trip presents a critical opportunity to clarify that the U.S. government stands in defense of the civil society and freedom of expression. To that effect, we urge you to publicly speak out in defense of fundamental freedoms and human rights while in Budapest.

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact Daniel Balson, Amnesty International USA’s Eurasia advocacy director, at dbalson@aiusa.org or (202) 509-8132.



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