

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Senate Majority Leader

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader

Senator James E. Risch  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

Senator Bob Menendez  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

Senator Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Rules & Administration

Senator Amy Klobuchar  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Rules & Administration

December 8, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Democratic Leader Schumer, Senator Risch, Senator Menendez, Senator Blunt, and Senator Klobuchar:

We are writing in strong support of [S. Res. 725](#), a resolution establishing the Senate Human Rights Commission, introduced by Senate Human Rights Caucus co-chairs Senator Chris Coons and Senator Thom Tillis. If passed, this resolution would establish the Senate Human Rights Commission and authorize \$200,000 per year for the Commission's activities.

Since its launch in 2014, the Senate Human Rights Caucus (the Caucus) has become a critical platform and resource for the Senate and Congress to promote respect for and protection of human rights around the world. The Caucus has held briefings on a wide range of issues, such as the persecution of the Rohingya, human rights in Iran, and threats to religious minorities, and it has also served as a catalyst for individual actions in support of human rights by numerous Senators.

The Senate Human Rights Commission would serve as a counterpart to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (Lantos Commission) in the House of Representatives. The Caucus and the Lantos Commission already work together effectively and frequently. For instance, at the beginning of this year, the Caucus formally joined the Lantos Commission's Defending Freedoms Project, which works with a number of non-governmental organizations to advocate for the release of prisoners of conscience around the world. But the Caucus does not have dedicated staff or resources like the Lantos Commission, which limits its capacity. In establishing a Senate Human Rights Commission, the Senate would strengthen collaboration between governmental and non-governmental bodies – including through projects like the Defending Freedoms Project – that bolsters U.S. leadership on human rights around the world.

Together, the Lantos Commission and the Senate Human Rights Commission will complement, not replicate or infringe upon, the traditional work of Congressional committees by holding public and private briefings on human rights issues that transcend the jurisdictions and interests of multiple committees and raise awareness of topics that the committees and personal offices may not have the bandwidth to cover. A full time, fully staffed Senate Commission will also serve as an important platform for civil society to share their concerns and recommendations with Congress.

We urge you to support the resolution that would, if passed, establish the Commission and provide \$200,000 to allow the co-chairs of the Commission to hire dedicated, full time, personnel thus greatly increasing the volume and effectiveness of the work currently undertaken by the Caucus, reinforcing its expertise, and amplifying Congress' important voice on human rights and foreign policy.

Since the early 1970s, Congress has led the U.S. Government's focus on and commitment to fundamental human freedoms as a core part of its foreign policy. The need for Congressional leadership on these issues around the world has never been more critical: crises from Yemen to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the Philippines

and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are rolling back progress on protecting rights and freedoms painfully secured since the establishment of the United Nations, in many cases with U.S. support. This trend has serious implications not only for the millions of people directly impacted, but also for U.S. foreign policy objectives and U.S. national security.

The investment in a Senate Human Rights Commission will pay off in lives saved, freedoms restored, and rights protected, respected, and fulfilled. For these reasons, we respectfully request your support for S. Res. 725.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International USA  
Africa Faith and Justice Network  
Amazon Watch  
American Jewish World Service  
Arakan Institute for Peace and Development  
Center for Victims of Torture  
Chinese Human Rights Defenders  
Church World Service  
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
Council for Global Equality  
Earthrights International  
Engage Action  
Ethiopian Community Development Council  
Freedom House  
Freedom Now  
Front Line Defenders  
Global Justice Center  
Global Witness  
HIAS  
Human Rights Campaign  
Human Rights First  
Human Rights Foundation  
Human Rights Watch  
Institute for Asian Democracy  
International Campaign for the Rohingya  
International Interfaith Peace Corps  
International Refugee Assistance Project  
International Rescue Committee  
Invisible Children  
Justice For All  
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Never Again Coalition  
No Business with Genocide  
Oxfam America  
Pax Christi Metro New York  
Peace Direct  
PEN America  
Physicians for Human Rights  
Presbyterian Church (USA)  
Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)  
Refugee Council USA  
Refugees International

Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights  
Scholars at Risk Network  
Sister Parish  
The Burmese Rohingya Association North America  
The Sentry  
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants  
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee  
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries  
United Stateless  
United States Campaign for Burma  
Vietnam Human Rights Network  
Watch Democracy Grow  
Washington Office on Latin America  
21Wilberforce