

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to convey our concern regarding the plight of political prisoners, including American citizens, detained by authoritarian regimes around the world. These individuals housed in jails, prisons and other detention facilities are particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. To ensure the health and safety of those individuals, we urge you to strongly press foreign governments to immediately release American citizens unjustly detained abroad, as well as political prisoners, on humanitarian grounds.

Detention facilities are a fertile breeding ground for COVID-19, with rampant overcrowding, lack of basic hygiene, ill-equipped medical facilities, and poor health conditions. In many authoritarian countries, these conditions are further exacerbated by inhumane conditions including malnutrition, medical neglect, and torture.

These appalling conditions put many internationally detained Americans' health at immediate risk. We welcome the recent releases of Michael White from Iran and Amer Fakoury from Lebanon, and urge that those examples become the norm, not the exception. At the same time as we mourn the loss of Mustafa Kassem and Robert Levinson, Americans who remain in detention include Austin Tice in Syria; Salah al-Haidar and Bader al-Ibrahim in Saudi Arabia; Morad Tahbaz and Siamak Namazi in Iran; Reem Mohamed Desouky, Khaled Hassan, and Mohamed Amashah in Egypt; Paul Whelan in Russia; the Citgo 6 in Venezuela; and many others. These Americans should have never been jailed in the first place, and must be immediately released.

More broadly, authoritarian regimes around the world continue to detain tens of thousands of political prisoners in the middle of this pandemic, even while some of those same governments have demonstrated the willingness and ability to release hundreds of thousands of other people from prison. For example, Iran recently released hundreds of thousands of prisoners due to COVID-19, but continues to hold high-profile dissidents in jail. Syria, Egypt, Turkey, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, Bahrain, and many other countries also continue to jail those independent voices in an effort to silence them. These prisoners of conscience should be immediately released on humanitarian grounds.

In the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, protecting the health and safety of unjustly detained Americans and political prisoners is critical. We urge you to publicly call for the release of Americans and political prisoners locked up abroad on baseless charges and raise their cases with your counterparts. This is not the time for these regimes to use people's lives as bargaining chips; it is a time to provide humanitarian relief as we face the global threat of COVID-19.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

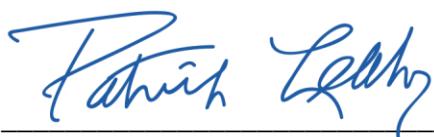
Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy



Marco Rubio



Patrick Leahy



John Cornyn



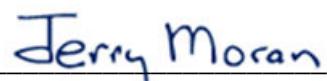
Ron Wyden



Thom Tillis



Richard Blumenthal



Jerry Moran



Marsha Blackburn

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey Jr.

Benjamin L. Cardin

Benjamin L. Cardin

Tim Kaine

Cory A. Booker

Jeffrey A. Merkley

Lindsey O. Graham

Lindsey O. Graham

Pat Toomey

Pat Toomey

Bill Cassidy, M.D.

Bill Cassidy M.D.