

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 6, 2026

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

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write with grave concerns regarding ongoing actions by the State Department to undermine U.S. leadership on human rights. Most urgently, we write regarding guidance issued in November to U.S. embassy personnel worldwide concerning the Department's congressionally mandated annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

Historically, the purpose of the Reports has been to provide Congress and the public a clear and standardized accounting of how other governments treat people within their borders, measured against international human rights law. This November guidance is a marked departure from that purpose. Rather than providing an assessment grounded in international human rights standards, the guidance directs embassy personnel to recast human rights protections as human rights abuses, while omitting critical information on violations arising from the very denial or criminalization of that care. By mandating biased reporting in support of this current Administration's ideological priorities, the State Department's guidance undermines the credibility of the human rights reports, undermines the intent of US law requiring reporting on "international recognized human right law," and weakens U.S. leadership in advancing universal human rights standards worldwide.¹ This abdication of responsibility to accurately report human rights conditions globally was further compounded by the President's decision to withdraw the United States from 66 international organizations in January 2026.²

These attempts are a deliberate effort to erase decades of global development of universal human rights standards and impose on the world an extremist, exclusionary agenda led by a few ideological elites that targets women, LGBTQIA+ people, and communities of color at home and abroad. Historically, the State Department's annual reports have been respected as a comprehensive, credible, and impartial source of information. They are essential for informing Congress, guiding diplomatic engagement, and complying with U.S. foreign assistance program requirements. This new guidance undermines each of these functions and instead hijacks control over a critical accountability mechanism to advance political ideology rather than human rights.

UN treaty monitoring bodies have repeatedly held that restricting or criminalizing abortion or erecting barriers to that care counter recommendations by the monitoring body for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and other related treaties, and can specifically violate the rights to health, non-discrimination, and others.³ Further, denial of access to abortion has been recognized as a form of

¹ 22 U.S.C. 2151n and 22 U.S.C. 2304)

² Presidential Memorandum *Withdrawing the United States from International Organization, Conventions, and Treaties that Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States* (January 7, 2026)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/>

³ Brief for United Nations Mandate Holders as Amicus Curiae in Supporting Respondents at 4, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. 215 (2022); Human Rights Committee, General Comment 36 (Article 6: right to life), U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/CG/36 (2019) para. 8; Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, General Recommendation No. 37 (2024) on

intersectional discrimination under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which requires that states take affirmative measures to address discrimination.⁴ Yet, the new guidance requires embassies to document the very inclusivity policies that protect marginalized groups as human rights violations. The State Department is not only disregarding clear international human rights law precedent but asserting interpretations that directly contradict authoritative interpretations of treaty obligations and well-settled international standards.

The 2024 version of the State Department report issued by the Trump administration in August already removed or significantly reduced sections on political freedoms, fair trial rights, privacy rights, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of movement, corruption, gender-based violence, reproductive rights abuses, and LGBTQIA+ persecution.⁵ The Administration's stated purpose for removing these metrics was to hew more closely to the congressional mandate for these reports. However, the Administration's November guidance moves beyond the salutatory requirements and aims to accelerate and entrench these omissions. The State Department incorrectly suggests that public funding for and provision of abortion is a human rights violation and evidence of "coercion in population control."⁶ This could not be further from the truth. International human rights law unequivocally prohibits coercing an individual's reproductive decisions including forced sterilization, forced abortion, and forced pregnancy. However, the Administration's conflation of government support for reproductive health care with reproductive coercion is false and dangerous. Countries' obligation to respect individual autonomy in reproductive health decisions includes an obligation to ensure individuals have access to and can afford the health care they need. Government programs supporting abortion care, as well as prenatal and maternal care, advance rather than violate human rights.

Human rights bodies also have long recognized access to abortion as essential to protect the health and lives of pregnant people. Over the past 60 years, more than 30 countries have liberalized their abortion laws in a direct attempt to address maternal deaths caused by a prohibition of that care, and only four have regressed, including the United States.⁷ Countries that incorporate this essential health care into their public health systems and safety nets are fulfilling, not undermining, their human rights obligations. These policy measures help people make the best decisions for themselves and their families.

Classifying programs that seek to improve population health as "human rights violations" could impact the funding and sustainability of evidence-based and data-driven global public health programs. Programs responsible for reducing AIDS-related mortality, preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections, improving maternal and child health outcomes, and addressing food insecurity could all be placed at risk under this guidance.

This guidance comes at a time when the State Department is also boycotting the United States' Universal Periodic Review (UPR), an essential process through which the human rights records of all 193 United Nations member states are regularly reviewed by other UN members. The UPR is among the most important and widely relied upon global tools for evaluating human rights situations in specific countries. Taken together, the boycott of the UPR and the new embassy guidance reflects a broader retreat from our human rights obligations and the global mechanisms of accountability that cannot be ignored.

equality and freedom from racial discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to health, UN Doc. CERD/C/GC/37, para. 30, 33, 37.

⁴ See GR 37, para. 30,33 and 37.

⁵ *US: Rights Report Mixes Facts, Deception, Political Spin*, Human Rights Watch (Aug. 12, 2025, at 17:38 ET), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/08/12/us-rights-report-mixes-facts-deception-political-spin>; 22 U.S.C. 2151n(d)(2) and 22 U.S.C. 2304(b).

⁶ United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* (2024).

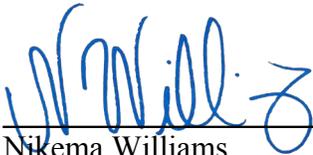
⁷ *World's Abortion Laws*, Center for Reproductive Rights, <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/world-abortion-laws/> (last visited Dec. 21, 2025).

Congress has enacted laws requiring that U.S. foreign policy be rooted in American values, which include respect for internationally recognized human rights. Doing so advances national security interests and strengthens peace and stability globally.⁸ Neglecting human rights at home and abroad sets a dangerous precedent and could give other governments around the world license to do the same. Mr. Secretary, you yourself have said:

“For over two centuries, the world has been a better place because America has strived to defend these fundamental human rights both at home and abroad. The State Department’s annual human rights report sheds light on foreign governments’ failure to respect their citizens’ fundamental rights. These violations come in all shapes and sizes, from the sexual exploitation of women and children to the denial of political rights to minorities. It is important that these nations know that the United States will stand with freedom-seeking people around the world and will not tolerate violations of their rights. Additionally, we must be mindful that American action or inaction influences tyrants’ decision to commit atrocities. During every diplomatic meeting, respect for human rights should be central to the discussion.”⁹

Multi-lateral engagement cannot be pursued unilaterally. To comply with congressional mandates and international human rights obligations, the State Department must rescind the November guidance and issue new guidance to ensure faithful reporting on human rights conditions and violations as defined by international law.

Sincerely,



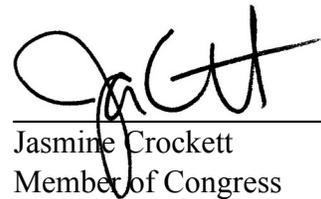
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⁸ 22 U.S.C. 2304 Sec. 502 B

⁹ Comment, Marco Rubio (Apr. 19, 2013), on *Annual Human Rights Report*.

https://www.legistorm.com/stormfeed/view_rss/404514/member/2809/title/senator-rubio-comments-on-annual-human-rights-report.html.



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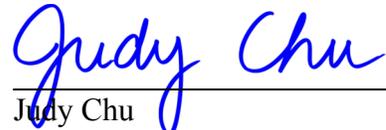
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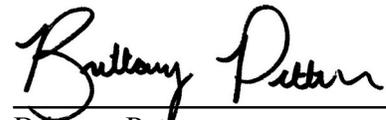
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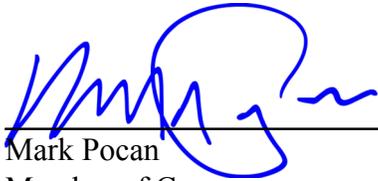
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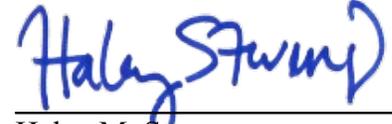
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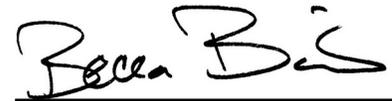
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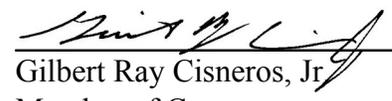
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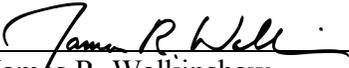
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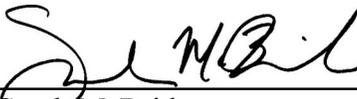
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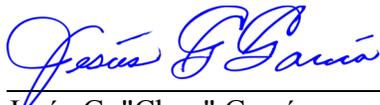

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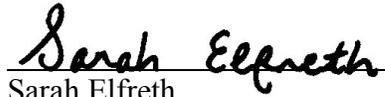

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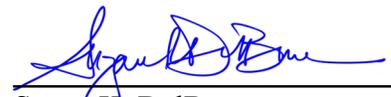
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