

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room S-230
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, Room 232
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
U.S. Capitol Building, Room S-224
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, Room 204
Washington, DC 20510

February 28, 2017

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Leader Pelosi:

As civil society organizations committed to multilateral cooperation as a means to creating a better, safer world, we urge you to support strong U.S. leadership at the United Nations, including by fully meeting our nation's financial obligations to the organization. Continued engagement with the UN is critical to advancing a number of core U.S. foreign policy objectives, including securing recent gains in international development, delivering lifesaving humanitarian assistance, combating terrorism, encouraging the peaceful resolution of conflict, and promoting universal human rights.

The world is currently facing upheaval on a range of fronts. Devastating conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and South Sudan, among others, have killed hundreds of thousands of people and forced millions more from their homes, climate change and its destabilizing impacts continue to mount, and public health challenges new and old underscore the need for enhanced global cooperation. Given the complex and transnational nature of these challenges, and the finite resources available to address them, it is clear that the UN must rededicate itself to reforming its operations and management practices so it can be more nimble, responsive, and effective. The U.S. has gained an important ally in this effort in the new Secretary-General, António Guterres, who as UN High Commissioner for Refugees from 2005 to 2015 gained a well-deserved reputation for results-oriented and forward-looking leadership.

Now is the time to engage robustly and constructively with Mr. Guterres to achieve these ends, and avoid counterproductive actions, such as withholding financial support for the UN, that will only isolate the U.S. from its international partners and stymie efforts to achieve real and sustainable reform. This viewpoint has been articulated by both Republican and Democratic Administrations for decades. Earlier this month, for example, during her confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Ambassador Nikki Haley stated repeatedly that she opposed the "slash-and-burn" approach to UN funding advocated by some observers. Furthermore, in 2005, when Congress was considering legislation to tie the payment of U.S. dues to reform, a bipartisan group of eight former U.S. Ambassadors to the UN—including Jeane Kirkpatrick, John Danforth, Richard Holbrooke, and Madeleine Albright—[authored a letter](#) opposing the proposal. "Withholding our dues to the UN is the wrong methodology," the letter argued. "When we last built debt with the UN, the United States isolated ourselves from our allies within the UN and made diplomacy a near impossible task."

The UN is very often, in conjunction with the U.S., the world's first responder in times of crisis and need. Each year, UN humanitarian agencies like the World Food Program, UN Children's Fund, UN Refugee Agency, and UN Population Fund provide food and nutrition assistance, clean water, vaccines, maternal health care, and other critical services to tens of millions of people affected by conflict or natural disasters worldwide; organizations like the UN Development Program work to fight poverty and build more resilient communities; UN peacekeepers stabilize fragile states, protect civilians, and support peaceful transitions of power; and the World Health Organization seeks to ensure global coordination to prevent and respond to disease outbreaks. Through the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN also plays a unique role in ensuring a coherent and effective response to emergencies, helping to strengthen and systematize efforts by an array of actors on the ground, including national governments, NGOs, and UN agencies themselves.

By partnering with the UN on these initiatives, the U.S. not only advances its own interests and values, but also helps share the financial burden for responding to global crises and long-standing challenges with other countries, thereby saving U.S. taxpayers money in the long-run. That is why both Republicans and Democrats have recognized the value of various UN activities over the decades, from peacekeeping to humanitarian response to development assistance. It is therefore imperative that the U.S., while pushing for necessary reforms, continues to maintain its seat at the table by fully funding its dues payments and providing robust levels of voluntary contributions to the UN system. To do otherwise risks forfeiting the United States' long-held position of leadership at the UN, potentially hollowing out UN programs and activities that are squarely in U.S. national interests, ceding control to countries that deny the universality of human rights and liberties, and empowering countries that are not committed to a stronger, more effective, or more accountable United Nations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

1. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
2. Alianza Americas
3. Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, Yale Law School
4. Amazon Watch
5. American Jewish World Service
6. American Public Health Association
7. American Red Cross
8. Americans for UNESCO
9. Amnesty International USA
10. Athletes for Hope
11. Baha'is of the United States
12. Better World Campaign
13. Bread for the World
14. CARE USA
15. Center for Civilians in Conflict
16. Center for Health and Gender Equity
17. Center for International Environmental Law
18. Center for Reproductive Rights
19. Church and Society – The United Methodist Church
20. Church World Service
21. Coalition for Peace Action
22. Colombia Human Rights Committee
23. Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach
24. Communities in Transition
25. Disability Rights International
26. Episcopal Relief & Development
27. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
28. Franciscan Action Network
29. Friends Committee on National Legislation
30. Friends of the Earth - United States
31. Friends of UNFPA

32. Girl Up
33. Global Health Council
34. Grieboski Global Strategies
35. Helen Keller International
36. HIAS
37. Human Rights Advocates
38. Human Rights Campaign
39. Human Rights Watch
40. Humanity United
41. Indian Law Resource Center
42. InterAction
43. International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD)
44. International Center for Research on Women
45. International Crisis Group
46. International Human Rights Clinic, University of Chicago Law School
47. International Justice Network
48. International Justice Project
49. International Refugee Rights Initiative
50. International Rescue Committee
51. International Women's Health Coalition
52. IntraHealth International
53. Invisible Children
54. Islamic Relief USA
55. J Street
56. Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights
57. John Snow, Inc. (JSI)
58. Justice Strategies
59. Latin America Working Group
60. Management Sciences for Health
61. Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
62. Mercy Corps
63. Mercy-USA for Aid and Development
64. National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
65. National Council of Churches, USA
66. National Religious Campaign Against Torture
67. Nothing But Nets
68. Norwegian Refugee Council USA
69. Oxfam
70. PATH
71. Pathfinder International
72. Peace Direct
73. Peace is Loud
74. PEN America
75. Planned Parenthood Federation of America
76. Population Council
77. Presbyterian Church (USA)
78. Project on Middle East Democracy
79. Protect the People
80. Refugees International
81. Saferworld
82. Santa Clara Law - International Human Rights Clinic
83. Save the Children
84. Shot@Life
85. Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
86. STAND: The Student-led Movement to End Mass Atrocities
87. TB Alliance
88. The Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation
89. The Hunger Project
90. The International Corporate Accountability Roundtable
91. The International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights
92. U.S. Fund for UNICEF
93. Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
94. United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
95. United Nations Association of the United States of America
96. United States Pharmacopeial Convention
97. Universal Access Project
98. Washington Office on Latin America
99. WaterAid
100. White Ribbon Alliance
101. World Education, Inc.

cc: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson
cc: Ambassador Nikki Haley