October 1, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We write to express our strong opposition to the omission of reproductive rights in the State Department’s annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (“Human Rights Reports”), and to urge the continued inclusion of this subsection in all such future reports.

The sudden omission of this subsection from the Department’s 2017 reports was highly problematic. Congress relies on the Department’s accurate and unbiased reporting when considering appropriations requests for foreign assistance, and when considering legislation that could shift or influence U.S. foreign policy. The private sector relies on these reports to inform resource allocation and policy decisions for years to come. Neglecting to collect and report this information has far-reaching impact on the lives of women and girls worldwide, and represents an unjustified shift in Department practices.

The International Conference on Population and Development’s (ICPD) Programme of Action, agreed to by the United States in 1994, recognized that empowering women, including by guaranteeing them access to reproductive health services, is the cornerstone of sustainable development programs. Since 1995 the Department has recognized the value of this goal, including through the work of the Office of Global Women’s Issues. It stands contrary to the Department’s own interests and mandate that its annual Human Rights Reports would exclude some of the most common deprivations of women’s reproductive rights: maternal mortality, unsafe abortion, denial of family planning and information, and discrimination and violence against women in health care settings.

For the purposes of Human Rights Reports submitted to Congress under §116(d) and §502B(b) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and §504 of the Trade Act of 1974, the Department defines “internationally recognized human rights” as those “set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreements.” It follows that the guidelines set forth by the ICPD Programme of Action (to which the U.S. and 178 other nations agreed), as well as the
recognition of “reproductive rights” by UN treaty bodies mandated to establish human rights law, must be used as a benchmark when designing Human Rights Reports.

Considering the above, we respectfully request answers to the following questions within 30 days:

1. What is the Department’s reasoning and justification behind the decision to remove information on reproductive rights, as well as detailed information on violence against women, from its Human Rights Reports?
2. Which Department officials were consulted and which officials ultimately made the decision to remove the reproductive rights subsection?
3. Has the Department retained information collected by reporting officers at overseas posts on reproductive rights in preparation for the 2017 Human Rights Reports, and does the Department plan to collect or release this information in 2018?
4. Does the Department plan to remove, or have officers been instructed to remove, reporting on women’s rights, the rights of LGBTI individuals, or any other previously included subsection from the 2018 Human Rights Reports or related submissions?

We also request that you provide:

1. All deliberative documents, internal correspondence, and instructions related to the decision to remove the reproductive rights subsection from the 2017 Human Rights Reports, including copies of the fully drafted reproductive rights subsections that were deleted from the Reports just prior to publication.
2. Instructions that have been issued to officers overseas pertaining to the drafting of the 2018 Human Rights Reports.
3. All correspondence the Department has received, including but not limited to correspondence from NGOs, citizens, other governments, and interagency channels, with regard to the deletion of the reproductive rights subsection from the 2017 Human Rights Reports.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We look forward to receiving your timely response, with accompanying materials.

Sincerely,

KATHERINE M. CLARK
Member of Congress

NITA M. LOWEY
Member of Congress

ELIOT L. ENGEL
Member of Congress

BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress
LISA BLUNT ROCHESTER
Member of Congress

DANNY K. DAVIS
Member of Congress

JOAQUIN CASTRO
Member of Congress

JIMMY GOMEZ
Member of Congress

JOSEPH P. KENNEDY III
Member of Congress

C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER
Member of Congress

FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress

JOSÉ E. SERRANO
Member of Congress

RUBEN GALLEGO
Member of Congress

PETE AGUILAR
Member of Congress

GRACE F. NAPOLITANO
Member of Congress

SETH MOULTON
Member of Congress

NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN
Member of Congress

ALAN LOWENTHAL
Member of Congress
JUAN VARGAS
Member of Congress

JOHN K. DELANEY
Member of Congress

NIKI TSONGAS
Member of Congress

ROBERT A. BRADY
Member of Congress

YVETTE D. CLARKE
Member of Congress

DIANA DEGETTE
Member of Congress

BRAD SHERMAN
Member of Congress

PRAMILA JAYAPAL
Member of Congress

ADRIANO ESPAILLAT
Member of Congress

NORMA J. TORRES
Member of Congress

DAVID E. PRICE
Member of Congress

KATHY CASTOR
Member of Congress

RICK LARSEN
Member of Congress

PETER A. DEFAZIO
Member of Congress

WILLIAM R. KEATING
Member of Congress

TIM RYAN
Member of Congress
TERRI A. SEWELL
Member of Congress

CHELLIE PINGREE
Member of Congress

GWEN MOORE
Member of Congress

GERALD E. CONNOLLY
Member of Congress

MARCY KAPTUR
Member of Congress

KAREN BASS
Member of Congress

DAVID N. CICILLINE
Member of Congress

JAMES P. MCOVERN
Member of Congress

KEITH ELLISON
Member of Congress

ADAM SMITH
Member of Congress

GRACE MENG
Member of Congress

SANDER M. LEVIN
Member of Congress

SEAN PATRICK MALONEY
Member of Congress

PETER WELCH
Member of Congress

BETTY MCCOLLUM
Member of Congress

A. DONALD MCEACHIN
Member of Congress
JUDY CHU
Member of Congress

DAVID SCOTT
Member of Congress

WM. LACY CLAY
Member of Congress

JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress

IAN SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress

FREDERICA S. WILSON
Member of Congress

THEODORE E. DEUTCH
Member of Congress

BRIAN HIGGINS
Member of Congress

PAUL TONKO
Member of Congress

DINA TITUS
Member of Congress

JACKIE SPEIER
Member of Congress

HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON JR.
Member of Congress

GENE GREEN
Member of Congress

DEBBIE DINGELL
Member of Congress
NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ
Member of Congress