

August 6, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

So many people advocate today in the name of “human rights” that social goals are often confused with God-given fundamental or unalienable rights, a problem leading to less individual freedom, not more. Clarification of human rights is the first step in an effective strategy to protect human rights around the world. For this reason, we welcome your announcement of the U.S. Commission on Unalienable Rights which will ground U.S. foreign policy on human rights in America’s founding principles of individual dignity and freedoms, later reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As America’s founders state in the Declaration of Independence, unalienable rights are based in natural law and include “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Rights like freedom of conscience, speech, and belief are “natural” or “God-given” because they’re inherent to all human beings—we are born with them. These rights are to be *protected* by the government, not given by the government, as demonstrated in the U.S. Bill of Rights.

In like manner, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognizes man’s inherent dignity and that “the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Human rights are the foundation of our common dignity, and when we protect this foundation, we then have the freedom to advocate for our goals, ideologies, and political preferences.

However, the foundation of human rights is being watered-down by activists around the world promoting political ideology and identity group goals as “human rights.” Examples of this type of activism include: the right to a clean environment, the right to free university education, the right to internet access, the right of access to abortion as healthcare, and even the right to not be offended (in direct conflict with the clear right to freedom of expression). This dilution undermines fundamental principles, including the fact that *all* people are equal and have common dignity. While many such activists are busy furthering their policy preferences as “rights,” they ignore clear and expressed human rights like that protected by Article 18 of the UDHR—the right to choose and change one’s faith—which is still heavily suppressed in far too many countries around the world.

Ideological activism presented as “rights” distracts from the fundamental purposes of protecting human rights. This critically undercuts the focus on the *real* victims of human rights abuse such as—a pregnant Sudanese woman imprisoned for her Christian faith and forced to give birth with her legs in shackles, men in Syria and Iraq being thrown off buildings to their death, a girl being

shot in the head for simply wanting to go to school, and the millions of Uyghur Muslims detained, imprisoned, and oppressed because of their faith.

A diluted human rights narrative allows totalitarian and authoritarian governments the guise of promoting social or economic benefits as “human rights,” while simultaneously becoming egregious violators of fundamental human rights themselves as they censor freedom of the press, oppress religious minorities, or imprison political dissidents. The UDHR called for “the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear ...”

Fundamental human rights are for all people—regardless of their background, socio-economic status, or beliefs, and we believe the U.S. Commission on Unalienable Rights can bring focus back to protecting needful victims of human rights abuse. For these reasons everyone—including the most prominent human rights organizations—should get squarely behind this commission.

We applaud you and your staff for your “fresh thinking” approach to U.S. foreign policy. Thank you for committing the time, resources, and effort to protecting the fundamental human rights of all people.

The U.S. Commission on Unalienable Rights can do more than clarify and help remedy human rights abuses; it has the potential to reassert the *right* kind of American leadership on the world stage. We have seen this before: Eleanor Roosevelt led and chaired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights drafting committee. We are grateful for your leadership in creating the U.S. Commission on Unalienable Rights to continue America’s legacy in defending universal human rights around the world.

The world is better and freer when America leads.

Sincerely,

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Concerned Women for America

Kay Coles James  
President  
The Heritage Foundation

Tony Perkins  
President  
Family Research Council

Gary L. Bauer  
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American Values

Carrie Lukas  
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Ralph Reed  
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Faith & Freedom Coalition

The Honorable J. Kenneth Blackwell  
Former, U.S. Ambassador  
United Nations Human Rights Commission

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cc: Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
House Foreign Affairs Committee