

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

February 21, 2023

The Honorable Anthony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20523

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power:

Ahead of the second Summit for Democracy, I write to urge you to prioritize labor and worker rights in this year's Summit and in all of the State Department's and the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) work to bolster democratic principles and human rights across the globe. From Hong Kong to Belarus to Bangladesh, attacks on international labor rights are part of the playbook to undermine democracy and rollback individual freedoms. The Administration should integrate and elevate labor in the planning and execution of the Summit and use it to build momentum to strengthen critical State and USAID labor programming.

Specifically, the Administration should prioritize the participation of representative labor leaders at the upcoming Summit for Democracy. Labor participation at the Summit should reflect the challenges facing workers globally, including threats to freedom of association, closing civic space, rollbacks of worker rights, and gender-based violence in the workplace. It should also capture the diversity of the labor movement, including migrant domestic workers and LGBTQI+ individuals, and elevate the importance of workers' voices in democratic processes.

The Administration should also use the second Summit for Democracy to highlight the progress of the Multilateral Partnership for Organizing, Worker Empowerment, and Rights (M-POWER) during the Summit's first year of action and to build on its promise. M-POWER is the most significant effort the Biden Administration has made to date to advance worker rights as a foreign policy objective. I urge you to ensure that M-POWER succeeds as a long-term initiative of the Summit and to keep the State Department and USAID at the forefront of M-POWER's efforts.

At the Summit for Democracy and beyond, I urge the State Department and USAID to end their longstanding neglect of labor diplomacy, but instead elevate freedom of association and worker rights as key pillars of U.S. foreign policy. The Summit should spur Embassies and Missions to ensure labor is a component of country strategies. In the context of the Summit, Embassies should demonstrate solidarity by conducting outreach to workers and unions, convening events on labor rights, and raising labor as a key topic with foreign government counterparts. Moreover, the State Department and USAID should prioritize labor by devoting significant, sustained resources to programming seeking to improve labor conditions and to expand the organizing and bargaining capacity of workers in both formal and informal employment.

Finally, I urge the Administration to delay no longer, but instead finalize and release its comprehensive strategy on global labor to enhance inter-agency coordination efforts to protect, promote, and enforce international labor rights. This strategy is a necessary step to ensure a cohesive, all-of-government approach to prioritizing labor rights in U.S. foreign policy.

Labor rights are essential to the health of democracies. In the face of mounting challenges, we must do all that we can to empower workers around the world. Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez." The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Menendez
Chairman