

ROBERT MENENDEZ, NEW JERSEY, CHAIRMAN

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, MARYLAND
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
TIM Kaine, VIRGINIA
EDWARD J. MARKEY, MASSACHUSETTS
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON
CORY A. BOOKER, NEW JERSEY
BRIAN SCHATZ, HAWAII
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND

JAMES E. RISCH, IDAHO
MARCO RUBIO, FLORIDA
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN
MITT ROMNEY, UTAH
ROB PORTMAN, OHIO
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY
TODD YOUNG, INDIANA
JOHN BARRASSO, WYOMING
TED CRUZ, TEXAS
MIKE ROUNDS, SOUTH DAKOTA
BILL HAGERTY, TENNESSEE

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

March 28, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

I write with deep concern about the Ugandan government's troubling human rights record, particularly its continued use of torture against civil society activists and political opposition members, and ask you to take meaningful actions to respond. President Yoweri Museveni has long relied on torture, violence, and illegal detention to punish his critics and tamp down dissent. In the run up to Uganda's 2021 presidential election, for instance, Ugandan security forces illegally detained and tortured opposition presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu and numerous other opposition party members, some of whom remain in custody.

In January, Uganda media reported yet another case of torture – that of novelist Kakwenza Rukirabahaija who was arrested in December 2021 and tortured by Ugandan security forces for criticizing President Museveni and his son, Lt. Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, on Twitter. According to Mr. Rukirabahaija, Lt. Gen. Muhoozi personally participated in at least one interrogation session. No one, however, has been held accountable for these crimes, or for numerous instances of other security force abuses such as the 2016 Kasese massacre in which more than 100 men, women and children were killed, or the 2020 killing of 54 civilians protesting the arrest of Mr. Kyagulanyi during the course of his election campaign.

President Museveni's disregard for basic democratic and human rights norms is inconsistent with U.S. values and foreign policy goals. Museveni has twice changed the Ugandan constitution to remain in power in perpetuity, impeded democratic processes, turned a blind eye to rampant corruption, and subjected civil society activists and opposition party members to illegal detention, violence, and torture with impunity. Despite this troubling track record, Uganda remains one of the top recipients of U.S. foreign aid and security assistance. While the U.S. has issued statements and expressions of concern after human rights violations come to light, such statements are insufficient. Personal targeted sanctions would have a greater impact.

Unfortunately, the few sanctions that have been announced publicly– such as the one in December 2021 against Maj. Gen. Abel Kandiho and one in 2019 against former Police Chief Kale Kayihura – came too little, too late. Credible allegations of torture implicating Kandiho, for instance, stretch back more than a decade. Kayihura, meanwhile, was credibly accused of numerous human rights violations during his tenure as Inspector General of Police from 2005 to

2018 but was only subjected to U.S. visa restrictions more than a year later, after he fell afoul of Museveni and was removed from his post.

President Museveni cares deeply about his reputation and his standing with the United States. U.S. actions can have an impact. With this in mind, I ask you to publicly sanction senior Ugandan officials implicated in corruption or gross violations of human rights, and provide a list of detention facilities known to be used by Ugandan security forces for illegal detention and torture, as well as the units that operate these facilities and the senior officials responsible for their operation, as a basis for imposing additional personal targeted sanctions. In addition, I also ask that you provide a list of units and security force members in Uganda barred from receiving U.S. training and assistance under the Leahy Laws as these individuals may also be subject to sanctions for human rights abuses or undermining democratic processes.

Finally, I am troubled by President Museveni's potential inclusion in the U.S. – Africa Leader's Summit announced for 2022. Extending invitations to leaders who benefit from corruption, show a lack of commitment to democracy, or trample human rights norms will undermine the important work this administration is doing in Africa and around the world to promote democracy, combat corruption, defend human rights, and advance the values and interests of the United States. The United States must take consistent, decisive action to signal our unflagging support for democracy, human rights, anti-corruption, and the rule of law. I urge you to carefully consider whether an invite should be extended.

I stand ready to work with you to develop a close and robust relationship with Africa.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "M".

Robert Menendez
Chairman

Cc: Secretary Blinken, Secretary Yellen