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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 28, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write regarding your upcoming meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, at the G20 Summit in Osaka. I appreciate the importance of our partnership with Saudi Arabia on critical national security priorities, and encourage you to use this opportunity to address actions from the Kingdom that are fundamentally at odds with U.S. foreign policy and values and undermine international stability.

I hope that you use this opportunity to communicate to the Crown Prince that the United States will not stand for Saudi Arabia's rash foreign policy and human rights abuses, both within the Kingdom and abroad. Failing to raise these issues risks sending the dangerous message that the United States is walking away from our core values of respecting human dignity, and partnering with nations who share our interests.

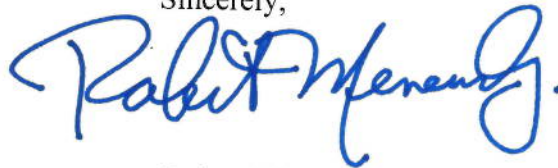
You must insist that the Saudis and their coalition in Yemen stop dropping bombs, U.S.-origin and otherwise, on Yemeni civilians and civilian infrastructure, which account for the majority of civilian deaths in Yemen. According to recent figures, at least 70,000 Yemenis have died from the fighting since 2016 and the UN has warned that over a quarter million could die by 2020. I urge you to tell the Crown Prince that it is unacceptable that U.S.-origin weaponry, meant to defend Saudi Arabia from regional aggressors like Iran, has instead been turned on some of the most vulnerable and desperate people on earth. The Senate has been clear in that regard, most recently by passing an unprecedented 22 resolutions of disapproval for weapons sales, including precision-guided munitions to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Next, you must insist that Saudi Arabia release human rights defenders and other dissidents it has swept up in its crackdown on Saudi civil society. Far too many people are being held, including Raef Badawi, a writer and activist who has been sentenced to 10 years in prison suffering from maltreatment. Despite the Crown Prince himself granting women the permission to drive, the government has imprisoned and tortured Loujain al-Hathloul, an activist who played a central role in the lifting of the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia. There is also Dr. Walid Fitahi, a U.S. citizen who has been stripped of his U.S. passport by Saudi authorities and tortured.

Finally, you must also insist on full accountability for the abduction, murder, and dismemberment of Jamal Khashoggi and inform the Crown Prince that the United States will fully hold accountable all those responsible. The Administration's actions to date have sent the Kingdom a precarious message—that even if senior officials are responsible for a heinous, premediated murder, they will not suffer any consequences. This cannot stand. Your repeated failure to raise this issue personally signals weakness and erodes the protection of human rights around the world.

The United States stands as a bulwark in defense of human rights and the rule of law. Our moral weight must be brought to bear on injustices around the world, even when they come at the hands of important strategic partners like Saudi Arabia. I urge you to have these difficult but crucial conversations during your meeting with Crown Prince bin Salman. To do otherwise not only emboldens those who would violate those principles but diminishes U.S. standing in the world.

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
Ranking Member