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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

October 26, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to express our concerns with the continued erosion of democratic institutions in Tunisia. We urge you to coordinate with our G7 partners to condition assistance on unambiguous democratic reform benchmarks. Further, as the United States evaluates a range of tools to address Tunisia's democratic backsliding, we ask that you consider sanctions on entities that have engaged in corruption, undermining Tunisian economic and political stability for their own personal benefit.

On July 26, we underscored bipartisan congressional concerns with President Kais Saied's constitutional referendum, which represented a vast expansion of presidential powers and drastically diminished the Tunisian people's ability to elect their own government. President Saied's September 15 election law represents a further degradation of Tunisia's democratic norms, drastically diminishes the role of political parties, and creates unreasonable barriers for potential opposition candidates. In response, many of Tunisia's largest political parties have declared their intention to boycott the upcoming legislative elections.

We now urge your administration to press for synchronized efforts with our G7 partners to address the erosion of Tunisian democracy and mitigate the effects of the country's economic crisis. The United States has taken the lead to reduce economic and security assistance in response to Tunisia's democratic erosion while continuing to help Tunisians confront a broad array of economic shocks. Recent rapid assistance, for example, will support vulnerable Tunisians without legitimizing Saied's autocratic agenda.

However, many members of the G7 have not conditioned assistance on democratic reforms in the same way as the United States, resulting in uneven or contradictory messages to Tunis. The G7 must speak with a unified voice and condition assistance on clear democratic reform benchmarks, to include reinstating an independent judiciary, removing restrictions on political parties, protecting freedom of the press, and allowing unfettered election observation.

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Tunisians face more than just political uncertainty. A looming food security crisis, high inflation, and deteriorating living conditions threaten Tunisia's political and economic stability. President Saied actions have only served to centralize his own power and have failed to address the root causes of Tunisia's economic troubles. Unless the United States and like-minded partners reinforce the urgent need for a return to democratic processes and institutions, Tunisia will slide into further instability.

We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James E. Risch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "R".

JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member

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

ROBERT MENENDEZ
Chairman