

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

During your upcoming visit to the Russian Federation, we urge you to visibly prioritize engagement with civil society activists and messages of support for the universal human rights values they advance. Such a show of U.S. leadership on democratic and human rights principles comports with our international and regional commitments, while also reflecting a precedent established by many of your predecessors.

While in Moscow, Secretaries Powell, Rice, Clinton, and Kerry all met with civil society activists in roundtable receptions at Spaso House that were widely covered in both the Russian and international press. Russian civil society representatives have frequently underscored the value of such meetings in providing a public platform to affirm and amplify the issues on which they work, often at great personal risk.

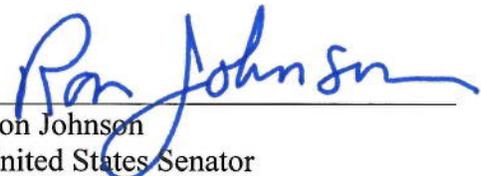
Since his last election in 2012, President Putin's regime has executed a calibrated and far-reaching crackdown on civil society activists, journalists, opposition politicians, and others working to promote a more transparent, accountable government in Russia. This includes using laws against "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations" to restrict the work of NGOs working on human rights and related issues, as well as harassment and violence, sometimes lethal, against individual activists, journalists, and others who exercise their fundamental rights.

As both the United States and Russia have agreed to as outlined in the Helsinki Final Act, both Russia and the United States have recognized that the protection of human rights within states is fundamentally linked to security among them. Given the Russian Federation government's negative trajectory on respecting the rights of all its citizens, we believe it is both germane and critical to the U.S. for you to discuss these issues with civil society and government counterparts during your trip, urging accountability and an end to human rights violations in Russia.

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Ron Johnson
United States Senator