To protect individuals who face reprisals for defending human rights and democracy by enhancing the capacity of the United States Government to prevent, mitigate, and respond in such cases.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. Menendez (for himself, Mr. Cardin, Mrs. Shaheen, Mr. Coons, and Mr. Murphy) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on

A BILL

To protect individuals who face reprisals for defending human rights and democracy by enhancing the capacity of the United States Government to prevent, mitigate, and respond in such cases.

1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
2 tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

4 This Act may be cited as the “Global Voices of Freedom Act of 2023”.

5 SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

7 Congress finds the following:
(1) Seventy-five years ago, the United Nations General Assembly, with leadership from the United States, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, done at Paris December 10, 1948 (referred to in this section as the “Declaration”), and since the adoption of the Declaration, human rights defenders have mobilized communities around the vision of a world “free and equal in dignity and rights” described in the Declaration.

(2) Twenty-five years ago, the United Nations unanimously adopted the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which calls upon all states to respect the role of individual citizens and civil society organizations in defending human rights and democratic principles.

(3) Human rights defenders advocate for human rights and democratic principles, fight corruption, support good governance, seek to end impunity, support victims of human rights violations, and speak truth to power, creating safeguards against autocratic regimes and backsliding democracies.

(4) Increasingly, human rights defenders around the world face threats and violence in retaliation for exercising their civil and political rights, and reprisals against such defenders have grown in num-
ber, scale, and sophistication, with online and digital threats evolving rapidly.

(5) According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, every year hundreds of human rights defenders are murdered and thousands more are subjected to torture, enforced disappearance, sexual violence, hate crimes, unlawful or arbitrary detention, judicial harassment, unlawful or arbitrary digital surveillance, and forced exile.

(6) Today, autocratic regimes are engaging in increasingly brutal crackdowns on human rights defenders by co-opting states or collaborating with transnational criminal organizations, paramilitary groups, and other actors to silence critical voices.

(7) Such tactics are not limited to autocratic regimes and are now used in every region of the world, accelerating a global decline in respect for human rights and democratic principles.

(8) Few attacks against human rights defenders are investigated or prosecuted, and rampant impunity has only spurred further violence, creating a chilling effect on the work of others seeking to promote human rights and democratic principles.

(9) Human rights defenders who speak up on behalf of communities that have historically faced
discrimination face the highest levels of violence, such as those advocating for Indigenous communities, environmental and climate change justice, and respect for LGBTQ+, women’s, and religious rights.

(10) Attacks on human rights defenders are not limited to individuals residing in-country, and many foreign governments engage in transnational repression, reaching across borders to target human rights defenders outside of their country of origin.

(11) Although the United States has long played a critical role in supporting human rights defenders, the United States must increase support at United States embassies, consulates, and foreign missions in order to meet the needs of the growing number of human rights defenders at risk.

(12) Diplomats of the United States often lack sufficient training or guidance on how to best respond to reprisals against human rights defenders, while human rights defenders often lack clear guidance on how to safely contact United States officials abroad and what support human rights defenders can request when threatened, imprisoned, in exile, or in hiding.

(13) Given the dramatic increase in attacks on human rights defenders globally, the current ap-
proach by the United States Government to address such attacks is insufficient to adequately respond to the threats human rights defenders face, weakening the ability of the United States to advance human rights and democratic principles at a time when authoritarianism is on the rise.

**SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

In this Act—

1. **APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.**—The term “appropriate congressional committees” means the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate and the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives.

2. **HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER.**—

   (A) **IN GENERAL.**—The term “human rights defender” means an individual, working alone or in a group, who uses nonviolent means to promote or protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, in a manner consistent with the principles described in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

   (B) **INCLUSIONS.**—The term “human rights defender” may include members of civil society organizations, journalists, activists, law-
yers, community leaders, whistleblowers, and
others.

(3) REPRISAL.—The term “reprisal” means an
act or omission that—

(A) violates, intends to violate, or encour-
gages a violation of the rights of a human rights
defender; or

(B) otherwise prevents a human rights de-
defender from carrying out his or her work.

(4) STRATEGY.—The term “Strategy” means
the Global Voices of Freedom Strategy submitted in
accordance with section 5.

(5) UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON HUMAN
RIGHTS DEFENDERS.—The term “United Nations
Declaration on Human Rights Defenders” means
the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of
Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Pro-
mote and Protect Universally Recognized Human
Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (United Nations
General Assembly Resolution 53/144 (1998)), adopt-
ed by the United Nations General Assembly on De-
cember 9, 1998.

SEC. 4. STATEMENT OF POLICY.

It shall be the policy of the United States—
(1) to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and to human rights defenders, who, often at great risk to themselves, work to protect and advance human rights and democratic principles;

(2) to integrate support for human rights defenders and their protection from reprisals as part of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, development, law enforcement, security assistance, and anti-corruption activities of the United States; and

(3) to view support for human rights defenders and their protection from reprisals as critical foreign policy interests of the United States.

SEC. 5. DEVELOPMENT OF A GOVERNMENT-WIDE STRATEGY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the President, in consultation with the heads of relevant Federal agencies, shall develop and submit to the appropriate congressional committees a comprehensive interagency strategy to support and protect human rights defenders abroad to be known as the Global Voices of Freedom Strategy.
(b) Elements of the Strategy.—The Strategy shall include detailed information on the following elements:

(1) How the United States intends to implement the policy objectives under section 4, including—

(A) specific and measurable goals;

(B) metrics to measure progress against such goals; and

(C) a timeline for implementation.

(2) An assessment of tools and resources available at United States embassies and missions to support human rights defenders, including—

(A) measures to monitor and respond to reprisals against human rights defenders; and

(B) information on implementation of the training required by subparagraph (E) of section 708(a)(1) of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 (22 U.S.C. 4028(a)(1)), as added by section 8.

(3) Bolstering the ability of United States embassies and missions to prioritize the protection of human rights defenders, including—

(A) ensuring the policy objectives under section 4 are addressed in each country-specific
Integrated Country Strategy of the Department of State;

(B) developing guidance for United States embassies and missions on assessing when and how to respond to reprisals against human rights defenders;

(C) identifying a designated point of contact at each United States embassy or mission who—

(i) reports directly to the chief of mission; and

(ii) shall be responsible for—

(I) conducting regular consultations with human rights defenders, including individuals based outside of major urban areas; and

(II) tracking patterns of reprisals and managing responses to reprisals, including by assessing the impact of such responses;

(D) integrating consideration of reprisals against human rights defenders into engagements by United States embassies and missions with the private sector;
(E) providing a secure means, where feasible, by which human rights defenders can contact each United States embassy or mission, respectively publicized on the website of each United States embassy or mission;

(F) including requests for additional resources to engage with and support human rights defenders in annual Mission Resource Requests; and

(G) acknowledging and rewarding efforts by United States diplomatic personnel to protect human rights defenders as part of annual performance reviews.

(4) Seeking to reduce impunity for reprisals against human rights defenders by strengthening accountability for perpetrators, including—

(A) using diplomatic pressure to encourage foreign governments to investigate and prosecute persons who order, plan, and carry out reprisals;

(B) using diplomatic pressure to respond to patterns of non-lethal reprisals that have an adverse impact on civic space, including the criminalization of nonviolent advocacy, smear campaigns, and illegal surveillance; and
(C) increasing support for multilateral initiatives that seek to curb the misuse of dual-use technologies by foreign governments to monitor, harass, or threaten human rights defenders and their families.

(c) IMPLEMENTATION.—In implementing the Strategy, the President shall—

(1) establish within the National Security Council an interagency working group that shall be responsible for coordinating implementation of the Strategy;

(2) require each relevant Federal agency to provide a specific implementation plan for the Strategy; and

(3) consult with human rights defenders and civil society organizations on the design and implementation of the Strategy.

(d) FORM AND AVAILABILITY.—

(1) FORM.—The Strategy shall be submitted in unclassified form, but may include a classified annex, if necessary.

(2) BRIEFING.—Not later than 30 days prior to publication of the Strategy in accordance with paragraph (3), the Under Secretary for Civilian Security,
Democracy, and Human Rights shall brief the appropriate congressional committees on the Strategy.

(3) **Public Availability.**—The unclassified portion of the Strategy shall be made available to the public, including through publication in the Federal Register.

**SEC. 6. PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AT THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER MULTILATERAL BODIES.**

The Secretary of State and the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations shall use the voice, vote, and influence of the United States at the United Nations and other multilateral bodies—

(1) to promote full participation and oppose efforts that prevent the full participation of human rights defenders and block the accreditation of bona fide human rights organizations at the United Nations and other multilateral bodies;

(2) to ensure that the United Nations bolsters the protection and safe participation of human rights defenders who are subject to transnational repression, state harassment, and reprisals;

(3) to increase monitoring and reporting to identify and track reprisals against human rights defenders, including human rights defenders who en-
gage with the United Nations and other multilateral bodies;

(4) to urge member states to engage with the mandate for the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (referred to in this section as the “Special Rapporteur”), to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur, and to take steps to implement the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur; and

(5) to support the use of targeted sanctions, censure of member states, and all diplomatic tools available to hold responsible persons that engage in reprisals against human rights defenders.

SEC. 7. ANNUAL COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES.

Section 116(f)(1) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151n(f)(1)) is amended—

(1) by redesignating subparagraph (C) as subparagraph (E); and

(2) by inserting after subparagraph (B) the following:

“(C) A description of the treatment of human rights defenders (as defined in section 3 of the Global Voices of Freedom Act of 2023), in each foreign country including patterns of reprisals (as defined in
such section) against human rights defenders residing in-country, including information on the underlying types of activities targeted and the types of tactics being used.

“(D) When feasible, details on the total number of investigations opened into reprisals against human rights defenders, including, for such reprisals, the number of prosecutions, the details of the individuals sentenced, and the percentage of individuals acquitted.”.

SEC. 8. TRAINING.

Section 708(a)(1) of the Foreign Service Act of 1980 (22 U.S.C. 4028(a)(1)) is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (C), by striking “and” at the end;

(2) in subparagraph (D), by striking the period at the end and inserting a semicolon; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(E) for Foreign Service Officers and Presidential appointees, including chiefs of mission, in missions abroad who work on political, economic, public diplomacy, security, or development issues, a dedicated module of instruc-
tion on support for human rights defenders; and”.

SEC. 9. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There is authorized to be appropriated $5,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2024 through 2028 to carry out—

(1) the Strategy and reporting requirements described in sections 5 and 7; and

(2) the training required by section 8.