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April 6, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

Your upcoming visit to the Russian Federation comes at a particularly consequential time for bilateral relations between the United States and Russia. From Ukraine to Syria to North Korea, as well as with respect to Russian meddling in our recent presidential election, the world does not lack for crises that will require strong, smart, and patient diplomacy between our two governments.

A common thread running through these and other global challenges on your agenda relates to the fundamental logic of the Helsinki Final Act, signed between the United States and the then-Soviet Union in 1975, which affirmed “the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for the peace, justice and wellbeing necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and co-operation among...all States.”

The simple truth of the Helsinki Final Act—that how governments treat their people is inextricably linked to global peace and security—has seldom been on starker display than with respect to the behavior of the Russian government under President Vladimir Putin. Hence, it is vital that, in your discussions with Russian officials and in any public remarks you make in conjunction with your trip, you raise Russian human rights violations and those of the governments and entities that it supports.

Your visit to Moscow follows a wave of protests in late March that swept 82 cities across Russia and laid bare the high degree of public dissatisfaction with the rampant corruption of President Putin’s government. The protests resulted in what is reported to be over 1,000 arrests of opposition figures, journalists, and protesters. While in Russia, we urge you to express—both

publicly and privately—your concern over the Russian government’s crackdown on peaceful protestors.

We hope that a robust discussion of the protection of rights as a necessary component for state security will play a part in all of your talks. In particular, we urge you to raise the following issues with Foreign Minister Lavrov and other Russian officials with whom you meet:

- **Corruption.** We urge you to make clear that the United States will not condone or support Russian corruption and is working to stem the effects of foreign corruption in our country. There have been ongoing protests on the issue of corruption since 2011, including regular protests by truck-drivers and health care recipients. The March protests occurred following a high-profile report by anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny regarding the widely acknowledged corrupt practices of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. A statement from you underscoring that the United States will act to combat high-level corruption in all its forms would send an important message, not only to the Russian government, but to everyday Russians bearing the costs of corruption by the state.
- **Persecution and Killing of Gay Men in Chechnya.** It is imperative that you voice alarm over recent reports concerning the disappearances, beatings, electric shock treatments, extortion, and killing of gay (or perceived gay) men in Chechnya, which have been occurring for several weeks now under orders of members of the regional government. Reports indicate that this abuse, which appears to have intensified since February 20, has been ongoing for two years. At least three deaths have been confirmed, with a fourth possible. Such treatment of citizens by their government is abominable. We welcomed the U.S. State Department’s April 5 response to a reporter noting that the department had urged Russia to investigate these reports. We hope you will underscore this message with Russian leaders during your visit.
- **Abuses in Russia-controlled Ukrainian Territories.** As you discuss implementation of the Minsk agreements, Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, and Russia’s attempted annexation of Crimea, it is important that you raise continued human rights violations in all Ukrainian territories controlled by Russia and its proxies. In particular, now would be an important time for you to express concern over the treatment of Tatars in Crimea, who are being labeled by the Russian government as terrorist threats, disappeared, arrested, and forced into psychiatric treatment.
- **Foreign Agents Law.** Russia continues to use its so-called “foreign agents” law to target non-governmental organizations, including human rights groups, environmental groups, and groups that provide vital health and social services to the Russian people. Because

these groups function outside of Kremlin control and often criticize government policy, President Putin sees them as a threat to his hold on power. The foreign agents law and other aspects of the Russian government's crackdown on civil society undermines Russia's long-term stability and prosperity, and can help contribute to radicalization. As the U.S. government has done in the past, we hope you will urge Russian officials—both publicly and privately—to repeal the foreign agents law and end all harassment of civil society groups.

Finally, we join with the bi-partisan group of U.S. senators who have urged you to meet with members of Russia's pro-democracy opposition and civil society. Doing so would not only send a clear message that the United States stands with these brave activists in their struggle for freedom and human rights, but can also serve as an important form of protection for them at a time when Russian journalists, lawyers, and political opposition figures are being killed not only in Russia, but in surrounding countries. Vladimir Kara-Murza, an opposition figure who recently survived a second bout of poisoning in Moscow, recently noted the importance of such meetings as putting the lie to President Putin's claim that he is synonymous with Russia. Kara-Murza and activists like him know that nothing could be further from the truth. As Secretary of State, you can best express your support for the Russian people by meeting not only with members of President Putin's government, but also with those who represent Russia's future and share with us a deep commitment to the universal values of human rights.

Very respectfully,



Elisa Massimino
President and CEO