

To the Senate Majority and Minority Leaders:

We are a diverse coalition of leading NGOs and experts supporting U.S.-UN engagement to advance human rights. We write to urge a swift vote on the nomination of Keith Harper to be the U.S. Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Council.

Advancing respect for human rights is a pillar of U.S. foreign policy, and the United States should be using every avenue to do so. The Human Rights Council is the UN's principal intergovernmental human rights body; American leadership at the Council is critical and has made a demonstrable difference.

For example, the recent – and long overdue – international drive for accountability for crimes against humanity perpetrated by the regime in Pyongyang was catalyzed in large part by bold U.S. leadership in the Council in 2013 to establish a Commission of Inquiry to report on human rights abuses in North Korea. The Council has also recently addressed volatile country situations in Syria and the Central African Republic as well as extended the mandate of a special rapporteur to investigate human rights violations in Iran. The Council has proven to be a valuable source of leverage for the U.S. to assert the universal values of human rights, particularly in countries where our relationships are limited.

With only five sessions left in the second U.S. term as a Council member, it is critical that the U.S. delegation be well-positioned to guide and lead negotiations. At the Council's next session in June, several priority issues will be on the agenda, including South Sudan, Belarus, and combating human trafficking, and the outcome of the debates likely will be influenced by whether the U.S. delegation will have ambassadorial leadership.

There is an additional urgency to considering Mr. Harper's nomination now. The first World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) – one of the most important human rights meetings in 2014 – will be held in September. On May 9, Indian Tribes and indigenous groups from

around the country will participate in a critical planning session at the State Department. It would be highly unfortunate for this consultation to take place in the absence of an Ambassador, and particularly striking for it to proceed without Mr. Harper, himself an American Indian who has represented the National Congress of American Indians. He would bring much needed expertise and great credibility to the State Department for this meeting and for WCIP planning generally.

The absence of a confirmed U.S. Ambassador to the Council weakens efforts to fight for American interests as well as to collaborate strategically with likeminded allies and partners. It has been a full year since Mr. Harper's original nomination. We urge the Senate to take swift action on Mr. Harper's nomination – and to do so before May 9 – so that the United States may be most ably represented on the Human Rights Council and strengthen its delegation to the United Nations, particularly as we approach the World Conference.

Sincerely,

Elisa Massimino, President and CEO, Human Rights First
Peter Yeo, Executive Director, Better World Campaign
Stephen Rickard, Executive Director, Open Society Policy Center
Wade Henderson, President and CEO, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Kerry Kennedy, President, Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights

Chad Griffin, President, Human Rights Campaign
David J. Kramer, President, Freedom House
Jennifer Windsor, Trustee, Freedom House
Suzanne Nossel, Executive Director, PEN American Center
Pamela Merchant, Executive Director, Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA) Ted Piccone,
Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

Chris Whatley, Executive Director, United Nations Association of the United States of America
Paula Boland, Executive Director, UNA-NCA
Melinda Kimble, President, Americans for UNESCO
Stephen McInerney, Executive Director, Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

Don Kraus, President & CEO, GlobalSolutions.org
Matteo Mecacci, President, International Campaign for Tibet
Mark Bromley, Council Chair, Council for Global Equality
Ambassador Michael Guest
Cory Williams, Co-Founder, Darfur and Beyond
Paul Ronan, Director, The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative
Gabriel Stauring, Co-founder and Director, Stop Genocide Now
Husain Abdulla, Executive Director, Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain