

Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

March 7, 2018

Nikki R. Haley, Ambassador
United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Dear Ambassador Haley:

As Members of Congress committed to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women globally, we write to express our support for the United States' constructive participation in the 2018 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This year, the CSW is considering the priority theme "challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls." We urge the United States to work with other Member States toward actionable policies that address the full spectrum of rural women's and girls' human rights and realities such as access to education and reproductive health services and support for LGBTQ rights. We also ask that the U.S. Delegation to the CSW reflect these priorities.

Each year, the CSW is the primary global forum to establish global norms, advance policies, and assess progress or challenges to achieving full women's rights. To that end, we urge the U.S. to build on existing agreements and not roll back international commitments that are rooted in human rights and embrace the full diversity of women.

You have stated your support for women's and girls' right to obtain education and contraceptive services and support for LGBTQ rights. However, we are extremely concerned by your efforts to use United Nations negotiation spaces over the past year to undermine existing commitments, including your attempts to remove references to sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights. If women cannot make decisions about their own bodies, lack the resources to control their reproduction, and are denied the ability to freely make decisions about their sexuality, there are consequences which threaten their educational attainment, economic prospects, health, and, in some circumstances, their lives. We know that ensuring access to comprehensive reproductive health care, including family planning, is essential to reducing maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, a key focus of the U.S. government's international development investments. Any effort to roll back existing commitments and agreements would have detrimental effects on the health and rights of women and girls around the world. We urge you to not stand in the way of a CSW outcome that upholds or advances existing political commitments.

In addition, the delegation representing the U.S. at the CSW sends a critical signal about the United State's priorities, both here in the United States and around the world. At last year's CSW, we were extremely concerned by the inclusion of the Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam), a Southern Poverty Law Center-designated hate group, on the U.S. delegation. As we wrote to you last year, we were appalled by the inclusion of a group with an extensive history of promoting anti-LGBT and anti-reproductive rights policies and rhetoric worldwide to represent the U.S. at the CSW. While we understand these members of the delegation do not necessarily speak on behalf of the U.S. government, we strongly believe that giving an official platform to groups like C-Fam does not represent your stated commitment to promoting American values, including the human rights of all people.

As such, we strongly urge you to send a delegation to the CSW that includes respected experts and members of civil society. Specifically, we encourage you to include individuals with substantive professional expertise on this year's CSW theme, namely the challenges facing rural women and girls. We also urge you to include individuals who support the mission of the CSW, have a demonstrated commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women, and are working to uphold the human rights of all people -- and not to elevate the voices of extreme hate groups like C-Fam.

The CSW is strongest when Member States are able to negotiate a robust outcome that considers the complete experience of women and girls around the world. We urge you to support comprehensive policies that account for the full range of challenges and opportunities that face women and girls globally. We welcome any opportunity to discuss U.S. engagement at the CSW with you further.

Thank you for your consideration.


Sincerely,


BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress


JAN SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress


BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress


RO KHANNA
Member of Congress


GWEN MOORE
Member of Congress


LOIS FRANKEL
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Eliot L. Engel

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Eleanor Holmes Norton

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Sean Patrick Maloney

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ALAN LOWENTHAL
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DINA TITUS
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CAROL SHEA-PORTER
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