

United States International Council on Disabilities

May 16, 2018

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The U.S. International Council on Disabilities (USICD) congratulates you on your appointment as Secretary of State.

There are at least a billion people with disabilities globally. The degree to which they are meaningfully included as active members of their societies is a reflection of their countries' commitment to the values of equality, respect, and non-discrimination which are central to U.S. foreign policy. We urge you to continue the longstanding tradition of promoting American experience in disability rights overseas through our embassies, USAID missions, grants, contracts, and development programs.

USICD looks forward to working with you and Congress to secure, recapture, and strengthen the United States' position regarding disability rights internationally. We urge you to take three important actions to strengthen U.S. leadership going forward:

- First, ensure that the position of Special Advisor for International Disability Rights, is filled. Ideally, an Office of International Disability Rights would be headed by a Special Advisor / Ambassador-at-large for International Disability Rights, with sufficient standing, staff, and funding to be effective. Such an entity has the potential to be a significant force multiplier within the Department, raising the profile of disability rights with foreign interlocutors, and serving as a technical resource to enhance the important work of posts and the inter-agency in sharing American disability rights experience and expertise internationally. USICD requests that you appoint a person with lived experience of disability into this currently-vacant position as early in your tenure as possible. It is simply too crucial a role to leave unstaffed.
- Second, ensure that the position of Disability Advisor at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is also filled. This too should be a senior position with sufficient standing, staff, and funding to be an effective catalyst for implementing and updating USAID's twenty-year-old policy of disability inclusion across USAID programs.
- Third, affirm through the issuance of policy or other appropriate mechanisms that the foreign aid, development, and diplomacy programs of the United States Government will not discriminate against people with disabilities, will be accessible to people with disabilities on an equal basis with others, and that U.S. funds will never be spent overseas to build facilities that are inaccessible or that segregate people with disabilities from mainstream community life. Our foreign aid must be accessible and appropriate to people with disabilities, reflecting the values expressed in the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act.

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There is no time to waste. It is a matter of human dignity, but it is much more. When CNN Hero, Brad Blausler, was providing pediatric wheelchairs to children in Iraq on his own time, Secretary Gates said his work was one of the most important humanitarian efforts in Iraq. The good will promoted by this work ensured that areas were safer for our troops for months afterwards; so much so that General Petraeus asked Brad to stay in Iraq until the end of the war, even though his contract had ended. The experience of disability is part of the human condition in all countries, and the potential for impactful stories that send a positive U.S. message of peace is immense.

As President Trump noted in his statement for the 2017 International Day of Persons with, “As Americans, we must set the global standard for ensuring those with disabilities are treated with the dignity and respect that all people deserve. Working with other nations, we will advance the rights of people with disabilities around the world.” Standing up for the rights of people with disabilities, and especially women with disabilities, is part of what makes America great. We are ready, willing, and able to work with you on achieving this promise, and request the opportunity to meet with you and other senior State Department leaders to discuss this important component of U.S foreign policy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia A. Morrissey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Patricia A. Morrissey, Ph.D.
President and Chair of the Board

Cc: Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights
Senate Foreign Relations Committee