

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

June 12, 2018

The Honorable Nikki Haley
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Dear Ambassador Haley:

We write to express our deep concern regarding the findings included in the United Nations report by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights released on June 1, 2018. Specifically, the report notes, “in a rich country like the United States, the persistence of extreme poverty is a political choice made by those in power.” The report also notes several instances in which the U.S. holds an unfortunate distinction compared to our global peers. The Special Rapporteur illustrates how the United States “is alone among developed countries in insisting that, while human rights are of fundamental importance, they do not include rights that guard against dying of hunger, dying from a lack of access to affordable health care or growing up in a context of total deprivation.” We believe the massive levels of deprivation outlined in the report – as well as the immense suffering this deprivation causes – are an affront to any notion of the unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Given the breadth of poverty outlined in the report, these rights are simply illusory for millions in this country.

The UN report highlights the contrast between those with immense wealth and the more than 40 million people living in poverty, including millions living in “Third World conditions of absolute poverty.” In addition, the Special Rapporteur notes that the U.S. is the only country in the world that has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This treaty protects the economic, health, and social rights of children. It is shameful that more than 13 million children live in poverty in this country and that, on any given night, more than 1 in 5 homeless individuals are children. More than 1.3 million students experienced homelessness during the 2015-2016 school year. The U.S. has the highest youth poverty rate and highest infant mortality rate among comparable nations. These findings sound a call to action we must heed. We urge your Administration to immediately submit the Convention on the Rights of the Child treaty to the Senate requesting its ratification.

We agree with the report’s conclusion that, despite the Administration’s rejection of the economic and social rights recognized in key treaties the U.S. has ratified, this does not negate our obligations under international human rights law to uphold them. These rights include not only the right to education, health care, and an adequate standard of living, but demonstrate our sacred responsibility to provide a safety net for those in need. Inequality is a severe threat to human rights, and while these problems have been decades in the making, this Administration is making things worse. We agree with the report’s conclusion that the Administration’s \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts “overwhelmingly benefited the wealthy and worsened inequality.”

The report also highlights additional crises facing our country today, including persistent discrimination, counterproductive drug policies, abhorrent access to sanitary water and wastewater, environmental pollution, and voter disenfranchisement. This report shines a light on this country's discriminatory treatment of communities of color, indigenous populations, women, children, people with disabilities, and citizens living in U.S. territories – problems often observed by the Special Rapporteur in developing countries yet all too evident in the U.S. today. This discriminatory treatment is inconsistent with our treaty obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which the U.S. has ratified. The report highlights horrendous conditions and a lack of basic necessities in areas across the country. From Alabama, where failing wastewater systems have created a health crisis, to the desperate conditions in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, to deep poverty in West Virginia – Americans are suffering.

The good news is, these are problems we can address. We agree with the Special Rapporteur that “with political will, [extreme poverty] could readily be eliminated.”

The report recommends, for example, that “a movement to eliminate bail bonds....needs to be embraced by anyone concerned about the utterly disproportionate negative impact of the justice system on the poor.” It further recommends that we recognize, as a nation, that taxes are “not only in [our] interest, but also perfectly reconcilable with a growth agenda.” We must recognize health care as a human right. We must also address inadequate access to banking services, ensure that all citizens have access to clean water and sewage services, and work to improve internet and transportation access, particularly in rural communities.

It is our sincerest hope that you will relay the findings of this UN report to President Trump and that this Administration will take action to reduce poverty and uphold our international human rights treaty obligations. We urge the Administration to present Congress with a plan to enact the recommendations made in this report to address appalling rates of child poverty, destructive economic policies that benefit the wealthy over the working poor, criminalization of the poor, and lack of access to basic necessities in rural and underserved communities. We stand ready to work with you on such a plan.

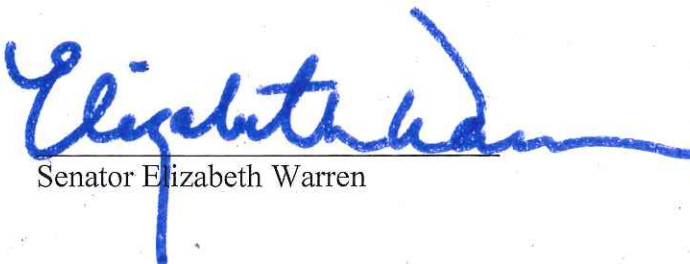
Sincerely,



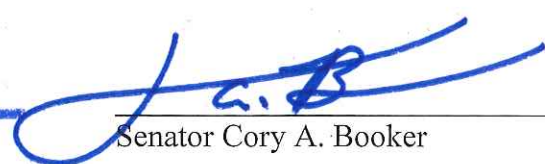
Senator Bernard Sanders



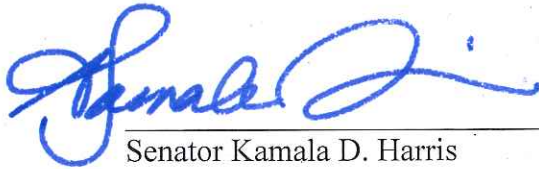
Representative Terri A. Sewell



Senator Elizabeth Warren



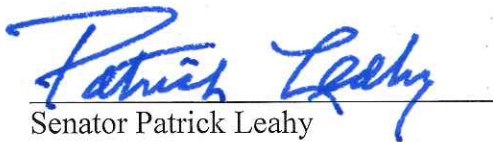
Senator Cory A. Booker



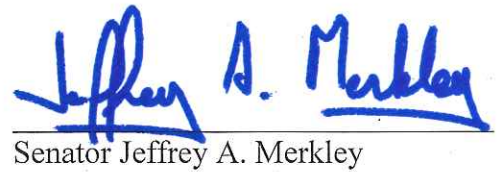
Senator Kamala D. Harris



Senator Dianne Feinstein



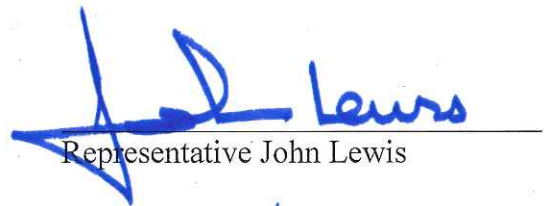
Senator Patrick Leahy



Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley



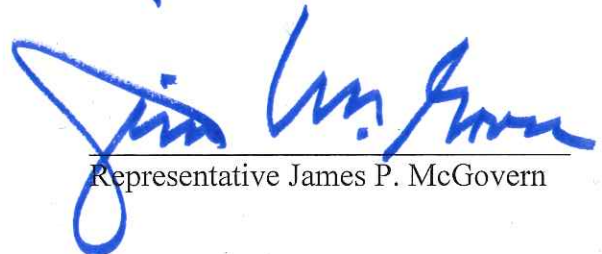
Representative Barbara Lee



Representative John Lewis



Representative Yvette D. Clarke



Representative James P. McGovern



Representative Earl Blumenauer



Representative Danny K. Davis



Representative Ro Khanna



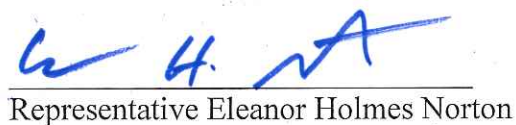
Representative Sheila Jackson Lee



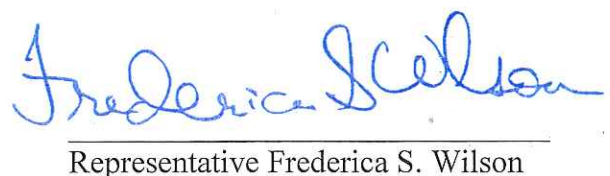
Representative Raul M. Grijalva



Representative Mark Pocan



Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton



Representative Frederica S. Wilson