



January 14, 2021

Dear President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris:

As 267 rabbis and cantors from 34 states and the District of Columbia representing all major Jewish denominations, we write today to congratulate you on your recent election and to urge you to pursue a foreign policy over the course of your administration that puts the human rights and dignity of the most vulnerable at its center. As Jews and faith leaders, our work is built on *b'tzelem Elohim*: the teaching of our tradition that every human—regardless of country of origin—is created in the divine image.

Over the last four years, the Trump administration dismantled our country's global leadership on human rights and the rule of law. It undermined the international human rights system at the United Nations, denied the dangers of COVID-19 and climate change, lauded authoritarian regimes and attacked the rights of the most vulnerable people, including women, girls and LGBTQI+ people. As a result, democratic institutions at home and abroad are under assault, nationalist movements are on the rise and rights and protections for marginalized communities are being decimated—with devastating consequences.

As Jews and faith leaders, we stood in opposition to these attacks, as we knew then and we know now that every human is deserving of the same human rights. And as supporters of **American Jewish World Service (AJWS)**—an organization rooted in Jewish values that supports 519 grantee partners that promote human rights and combat poverty in 18 countries in the Global South—we share a vision for a better and more just world with grassroots human rights activists worldwide.

Today, we stand together in the fight to rededicate the United States to the cause of global human rights.

We urge you, as the next President and Vice President, to adopt the following progressive human rights agenda for the country:

1. Reaffirm and recommit the United States to the international human rights system and diplomacy by:

- Rejoining and refunding multilateral organizations and agreements, in particular the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Paris Climate Agreement and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).
- Rejecting the Trump administration's attempts to undermine the international human rights system, including through the Commission on Unalienable Rights, its report and the Geneva Consensus, and denouncing the use of narrow definitions of religious freedom that act as a cudgel against the rights of marginalized people.
- Rebuilding and reinvigorating the State Department, United States Agency for International Development and National Security Council by appointing qualified and diverse individuals and supporting career servant experts, while bolstering the tools available to this staff to support human rights across all foreign policy.

2. Promote comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights for all people by:

- Rescinding the global gag rule (also known as the Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance policy), a draconian policy that has prevented people from accessing health care services, and committing to work with Congress to ensure a permanent legislative repeal.

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- Encouraging the repeal of the Helms Amendment, which prevents U.S. foreign assistance from supporting women, girls and LGBTQ+ individuals in accessing safe abortion services.
- Protecting and promoting the rights of LGBTQ+ people across the globe, including enforcing nondiscrimination in service delivery and directing agencies to include global LGBTQ+ funding in budget lines, and supporting the passage of legislation enshrining LGBTQ+ rights in U.S. foreign policy.

3. Restore U.S. leadership in promoting democracy and justice around the globe by:

- Using all diplomatic and economic levers to ensure the rights of minority communities, journalists and human rights defenders within repressive countries are respected, upheld and enjoyed.
- Supporting the civil and political rights of all people around the world to protest abusive governments, express their opinions and access information from government on issues of import without fear of reprisal or criminalization.
- Supporting credible domestic and international justice efforts for victims of human rights abuses in the wake of conflict or mass atrocities, including in often overlooked countries such as Burma, Sri Lanka and Nicaragua.
- Continuing the use of Global Magnitsky Act sanctions against those who commit corruption and human rights abuses and working with Congress for a reauthorization of that authority.

4. Ensure a just and robust U.S. response to international COVID-19 pandemic efforts by:

- Calling for the passage of a COVID-19 relief package containing at least \$20 billion of international funding to combat the health and human rights impacts of the ongoing pandemic worldwide.
- Rejoining the World Health Organization and participating in global efforts to secure and distribute an accessible vaccine for all.

According to our scripture, whoever destroys a life, it is considered as if they destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if they saved an entire world (*Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5*). We believe that this practical vision for respecting human rights will save lives – and repair our world.

Ensuring international justice and human rights is an active responsibility, one that we expect your administration to heed as we all seek a return to U.S. moral leadership on the global stage. It is only by ensuring that the United States is at the forefront of a progressive vision of the future for all people that we can build a more just world for the most vulnerable among us.

Sincerely,

The undersigned 267 rabbis and cantors

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