

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 4, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We are writing to express our grave concern about the state of democracy and ongoing human rights abuses in Uganda, as exemplified by the country's presidential and parliamentary elections on January 14, 2021, which failed to meet even the most basic international standards. We also request information about U.S. policy toward Uganda and urge you to ensure that accountability measures are pursued.

Throughout Uganda's recent electoral process, President Yoweri Museveni demonstrated the depths to which he and his ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) will go to preserve their three decades' hold on power. Under Museveni's leadership, Uganda's security forces and government officials utilized nearly every lever of state power to commit human rights abuses, repress opposition figures and voices critical of the government, and manipulate legal and constitutional processes. State authorities carried out hundreds of arrests and used violence to intimidate and silence leaders and supporters of Uganda's opposition parties, journalists, civil society representatives, and voters.

Despite repeated assurances that they intended to conduct free, fair, and credible elections, government authorities carried out numerous acts of political violence and repression, including attacks against leading opposition presidential candidate and sitting member of parliament Hon. Robert Kyagulani Ssentamu (aka Bobi Wine) and the murder of opposition activists and leaders of the National Unity Platform (NUP) and People Power Movement. Ugandan authorities also arrested and harassed prominent human rights lawyer Nicholas Opiyo and detained over a dozen members of the civil society organization Citizens Watch on Election Day for election monitoring activities, for which the Election Commission of Uganda had duly accredited them.

The U.S.-Uganda relationship has remained largely unchanged for years, spanning multiple administrations. When lawmakers, civil society, and human rights organizations have raised concerns with State Department, Department of Defense, and other U.S. officials about Uganda's human rights record and failing democracy, these agencies have generally responded with platitudes about Uganda's essential contributions to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Uganda's role in managing the peace process in South Sudan and hosting nearly one million South Sudanese refugees, its longstanding partnership with the U.S. on HIV/AIDS and other health related programs, and additional regional security and development issues. Uganda's

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

critical role in these areas is undeniably true, but this should not grant President Museveni, his government, and party - which are virtually synonymous - a free pass to commit human rights abuses at home. Therefore, we urge the Treasury Department and the State Department to utilize the authority of the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and Executive Order 13818 to designate individuals who are responsible for human rights abuses and corruption in Uganda in recent years, including as it relates to the 2020 electoral process. We also ask that the State Department review all U.S. non-humanitarian assistance to Uganda to ensure that it is not aiding or abetting corruption or human right abuses, and to ensure that human rights defenders, independent journalists, democratic political parties, and civil society organizations are appropriately supported.

Finally, we request that you provide the Foreign Relations Committee with the following information, in writing, not later than March 31, 2021:

- A detailed analysis of the U.S.-Ugandan relationship, informed by an interagency review of whether continued partnership with an increasingly brutal authoritarian leader poses risks to U.S. interests in East and Central Africa, and a plan to mitigate such risks over the next five years;
- A detailed list of all U.S. security assistance and capacity building programs for Ugandan security forces since FY 2015;
- An assessment of the U.S. government's capacity to perform end-use monitoring of all weapons sales and transfers to the Ugandan military, particularly those meant exclusively for use in Somalia, as well as efforts to prevent U.S. training and equipment from being diverted to suppress dissent within Uganda;
- A list of all current U.S. foreign assistance programs that involve a role for Ugandan government agencies in the delivery of that aid;
- A summary of corruption scandals involving the U.S. and other foreign donor aid in Uganda in the past decade and an assessment of related prosecutions;
- An overview of the U.S. government's engagement with the Ugandan government, opposition political parties, and civil society organizations concerning the 2021 elections, and how such engagement differs from previous elections;
- An evaluation of the credibility that the U.S. government assigns to the Ugandan elections held on January 14, 2021;
- An assessment of the impact that several years of violent repression and impunity for serious human rights abuses have had on the Ugandan political environment; and,
- A plan to intensify the U.S. response to human rights abuses beyond rhetorical condemnations and to work with the Government of Uganda and local non-governmental organizations to secure accountability for citizens who have been subjected to arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings.

Uganda is a young and vibrant country with enormous potential. If managed by a competent and uncorrupt government, rather than one that has time and again put its interests first, Uganda could quickly become one of the region's largest agricultural exporters, tourist destinations, energy exporters, and manufacturing leaders on the continent. Once again, Uganda could secure itself as a net exporter of security to the region and genuinely claim the mantle of being the "Pearl of Africa."

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

Sincerely,



CORY A. BOOKER



JAMES E. RISCH

CC: The Honorable Janet Yellen, Secretary, Department of the Treasury