

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

February 3, 2022

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write with regard to the absence of U.S. ambassadors to important missions in the Indo-Pacific region. There is a strong and bipartisan consensus around the special importance of the Indo-Pacific region to the promotion of core U.S. interests and values. For this reason, we respectfully ask that you move to fill the remaining vacancies in this region with qualified individuals as soon as possible.

In particular, we are disappointed that your administration has not yet named nominees to serve as U.S. ambassador to key treaty allies the Kingdom of Thailand and the Republic of the Philippines. Thailand has been our ally for nearly 200 years and has an incredibly important role to play in Southeast Asia. They are a vital partner in providing cross-border humanitarian assistance to Burma, have been a leader on supporting the Mekong River partnership, and are a critical U.S. security partner in the Indo-Pacific. The Philippines remains a steadfast ally, and one we must support as it faces growing coercion from the People's Republic of China (PRC), especially in the South China Sea. The Philippines is critical to joint counter-terrorism efforts and our broader regional security interests. Thailand and the Philippines are both important trading partners and we have deep people-to-people ties with both countries. However, we are concerned that Thailand has not returned to full democracy since the 2014 coup, and as Bangkok's ties with Beijing have grown, so too have concerns about democratic backsliding. In the Philippines, President Duterte has jailed opposition figures, tried to eliminate a free media, and has had law enforcement commit human rights violations in support of his anti-narcotics campaign. It is imperative that we have ambassadors in place to push our allies to honor their commitments to human rights. Media reports suggest there is growing impatience in these countries with the lack of an ambassador, and that some partners may be drawing the wrong conclusion about what this absence means for the U.S. commitment to their countries and to the region as a whole.

Likewise, the United States has not had an ambassador to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) since January 2017. ASEAN is Southeast Asia's foremost multilateral organization, providing the region its sole platforms for broad discussion of pressing strategic issues. The PRC and Russia have sought to undermine the role of the East Asia Summit as the premier leader-led forum for strategic discussions in the Indo-Pacific even as we have collectively faced unprecedented cross-border challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. ASEAN is also an invaluable partner in efforts to return Burma back to its path to democracy

and provide humanitarian assistance for more than 14 million Burmese citizens who desperately need it. It is essential that the United States remain closely engaged with both ASEAN as an institution and with its member nations individually. Our engagement cannot be done as effectively without an ambassador who interfaces with ASEAN on a daily basis and represents the President of the United States in that capacity.

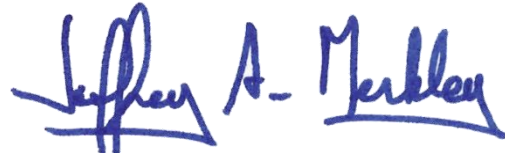
While we have full faith in the career Foreign Service Officers who have been leading these missions and promoting U.S. interests as chargés d'affaires, it is past time to nominate qualified leaders to serve as ambassadors.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey A. Merkley', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator