

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

January 20, 2022

The Honorable Catherine M. Russell
Director
Office of Presidential Personnel
Eisenhower Executive Building
1650 17th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Ms. Russell:

Congratulations on your appointment to become the next Executive Director of the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). As you embark on this important position, we urge you to prioritize the protection of at least 45 Cuban children arbitrarily jailed and prosecuted by the Cuban regime for their participation in the historic July 2021 protests. We urge you to demand their immediate release as one of your first actions in your new role.

The Cuban regime is prolific in its use of arbitrary detention as a tool of repression. In 2020 alone, the Observatory of Cuban Human Rights recorded 1,028 arbitrary detentions in Cuba. According to the independent non-governmental organization Justicia 11J, which is documenting the regime's repression following the July protests, the Cuban regime has detained at least 45 minors between the ages of 14 and 17 for alleged "crimes." Fourteen of those minors remain behind bars awaiting trial, according to Justicia 11J.

Human Rights Watch reports that those detained after participating in the July protests for freedom have been deliberately deprived of sleep, beaten, sexually assaulted, and held in cells without light for days. Many of those detained have also been accused of "sedition," which carries a maximum sentence greater than that for murder. One of those detained, Kendry Miranda Cárdenas, is only 17, yet Cuban prosecutors are seeking a sentence of at least 20 years.

Last November, UNICEF joined other international organizations in calling for Cuban authorities to provide more information on the reported cases of children detained in Cuba. Unfortunately, the call for more transparency has been met with extensive reports from the island, many by desperate family members on social media, of harsh sentences that continue to be handed down.

We believe that the situation in Cuba warrants the full attention and condemnation of the international community. Cuban authorities must know that their brazen acts carry consequences and are unacceptable of any country expecting to be considered a legitimate member of the international community.

Given the agency's child protection mandate, UNICEF is uniquely positioned to lead international condemnation of these unconscionable acts and to demand the release of these

youths. With more trials and sentences expected in the days and weeks ahead, we urge you to intercede on behalf of these children and their families, who are merely seeking justice and respect for the basic human rights of Cuban minors.

We are grateful for your attention in this matter and look forward to your swift action in demanding the immediate release of persecuted children in Cuba.

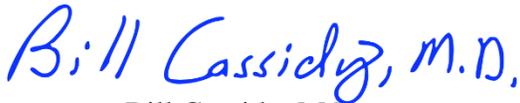
Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Robert Menendez
U.S. Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
U.S. Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
U.S. Senator