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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

April 20, 2021

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to you ahead of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Conference of States Parties to express bipartisan support for enforcing the international norm against the use of chemical weapons. In particular, there must be consequences for the Government of Syria's illegal chemical weapons use.

Since joining the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 2013, the Assad regime has failed to fulfill its basic legal obligations under the CWC. Moreover, according to findings documented and established by OPCW and United Nations (UN) investigations, the Assad regime has continued to use chemical weapons against innocent civilians in Syria, even after purportedly dismantling its chemical weapons stocks in 2014. The OPCW and the UN do not attribute these attacks to rogue elements or terrorist groups, but instead link ongoing chemical weapons attacks directly to Syrian regime officials. Additionally, numerous internationally recognized human rights groups have extensive photographic and eyewitness evidence of illegal chemical weapons attacks by the Assad regime. We note that the Russian Federation continues to provide well-documented essential military support to enable these heinous activities, and continues to obstruct the work of the OPCW.

Due to the Assad regime's clear violations of its obligations under the CWC and shocking crimes against the Syrian people, the United States should move to suspend Syria's rights and privileges at the OPCW, including its ability to vote and hold office during this week's Conference of States Parties. These rights should not be restored until Syria fully complies with its CWC obligations and accounts for its attacks on the Syrian people. The United States should use all diplomatic tools available to garner support among OPCW voting partners and countries for Syria's suspension. Should the United States fail to achieve consensus at the OPCW, we urge you to force a vote on the question of suspending Syria, and force countries to be on the record about their view of Syria's blatant violation of international law regarding the use of chemical weapons.

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Thank you for your attention into this important matter. We look forward to staying in touch with you on this topic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Risch".

JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert Menendez".

ROBERT MENENDEZ
Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Rubio".

MARCO RUBIO
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational
Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights,
and Global Women's Issues

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeanne Shaheen".

JEANNE SHAHEEN
Chair
Subcommittee on Europe and
Regional Security Cooperation