

November 17, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20451

The Honorable Christopher Landau
Deputy Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
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Dear Secretary Rubio and Deputy Secretary Landau,

As former senior-level State Department officials and ambassadors who served in both Democratic and Republican administrations,¹ we write to express our dismay over the actions the Department of State has taken—in coordination with the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security—to subject foreign students and faculty to surveillance, arrest, detention, threats of visa revocation, and deportation based on their scholarship, public writings, statements on social media, expressions of opinion, and participation in lawful protests.

Since its founding, the United States has championed the values of free speech and association, enshrining these principles in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and setting a standard for the world. The United States is unique among Western democracies in our stated commitment to protecting these freedoms,² which are intended to prevent government censorship and suppression of dissent and have been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court for decades.

The United States long branded itself a leader on these issues on the global stage as well. We have affirmed these principles when evaluating other countries' human rights records, including their surveillance of online activity, restriction of online content, and weaponization of the law to stifle dissent – a tradition that continued through President Trump's first term.³ Over many presidential administrations, these U.S. government assessments have contributed in important ways to our government's decisions about diplomatic relationships, financial support, and foreign policy decisions.⁴

¹ Signers' listed roles reflect service as an ambassador or as a deputy secretary, under secretary, assistant secretary, or their equivalent; many signers have held additional positions at the Department of State and other significant positions of public service.

² See David Inserra, "Freedom of Speech is Worth Celebrating, as Europe Ramps Up Prosecution of 'Hate Speech,'" *Cato at Liberty*, July 3, 2025, <https://www.cato.org/blog/freedom-speech-worth-celebrating-europe-ramps-prosecution-hate-speech>; and Polona Car and Beatrix Immenkamp, *Hate Speech: Comparing the U.S. and EU Approaches*, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2025, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/772890/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)772890_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/772890/EPRS_BRI(2025)772890_EN.pdf).

³ See, e.g., U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (hereinafter "2019 Country Reports"): Singapore, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SINGAPORE-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>, 8-13; and 2019 Country Reports: Ethiopia, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ETHIOPIA-2019-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>, 12-13.

⁴ See Anne Frederick et al., "What are the U.S. Department of State Human Rights Reports?," Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 25, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-are-us-department-state-human-rights-reports>.

The United States' last evaluation of its human rights record for the United Nations, which was issued near the end of President Trump's first term, observed that the U.S. Constitution guarantees that all persons are entitled to the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and petition.⁵ The report also noted that these fundamental rights would be vulnerable if the government could "punish individuals because of differences of opinion" or "prohibit speech on the basis of its content or the speaker's viewpoint." Unfortunately, the United States recently withdrew from the Universal Periodic Review process that produces these reports, and the U.S. government is now undertaking precisely those actions about which it previously warned.⁶

Students and faculty at American universities have now been arrested, detained, and even deported in retaliation for their speech and other expression, frequently without basic due process.⁷ The State Department has instructed consular officers to conduct intensive reviews of protected speech on social media, with the express purpose of punishing visa applicants and holders for their lawfully-expressed views.⁸ These actions all have the same effect: punishing free speech and association and side-stepping due process while depriving the American people of the opportunity to hear a diverse range of views and stripping the United States of one of its greatest sources of soft power.

While officials have sought to justify many of these actions in the name of foreign policy, they do not serve the United States' international interests.⁹ To the contrary, our diplomatic relations and global stature are suffering as a result. The United States is giving up its position as a magnet for the best and brightest and a center for robust discourse and learning,¹⁰ and the consequences are concrete: foreign students are pursuing their education in other countries,¹¹ conferences are

⁵ United States, National Report Submitted in Accordance with Paragraph 5 of the Annex to Human Rights Council Resolution 16/21, Universal Periodic Review: United States of America, August 13, 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3883284?ln=en&v=pdf>, 3.

⁶ See Andrew R.C. Marshall and Olivia Le Poidevin, "U.S. Withdraws From Key UN Human Rights Report, Draws Criticism from Rights Advocates," Reuters, August 29, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-withdraws-key-un-human-rights-report-draws-criticism-rights-advocates-2025-08-28/>.

⁷ See, e.g., Olivia Diaz and Ben Finley, "Georgetown Scholar Recalls Terror and 'Mockery of Due Process' in Immigration Jail," Associated Press, May 23, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/badar-khan-suri-georgetown-immigration-case-65e9a9675c29ebe91b39eb647d1d6f18>; Yash Roy, "A Palestinian Student Leader at Columbia Was Steps Away From His Final Citizenship Interview. He Instead Faces Deportation," CNN, April 15, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/14/us/mohsen-mahdawi-columbia-university-trump>; John Hudson, "No Evidence Linking Tufts Student to Antisemitism or Terrorism, State Dept. Office Found," *Washington Post*, April 13, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/04/13/tufts-student-rumeysa-ozturk-rubio-trump/>; and Edward Wong et al., "Trump Administration Seeks to Expel a Green-Card Holder Over Student Protests," *New York Times*, March 10, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/10/us/trump-rubio-khalil-columbia-student-protests.html>.

⁸ Nahal Toosi and Eric Bazail-Eimil, "State Department Unveils Social Media Screening Rules For All Student Visa Applicants," *Politico*, June 18, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/06/18/social-media-screening-student-visas-00413160> [<https://aboutblaw.com/biDF>].

⁹ See Findings of Fact & Conclusions of Law, *American Association of University Professors v. Rubio*, No. 1:25-cv-10685 (D. Mass. 2025) (noting that multiple high-profile foreign faculty and students were targeted in the name of foreign policy).

¹⁰ See Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961, Pub. L. 87-256, 75 Stat. 527, 101 (describing value of educational and cultural exchange).

¹¹ See, e.g., Vivian Wang, "As Trump Tightens Visas, China Woos World's Science Graduates," *New York Times*, September 26, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/26/world/asia/china-tech-workers-visas-us-h1b.html>; Sylvia Hui, "College Applications Rise Outside U.S. as Trump Cracks Down on International Students," Associated Press,

moving abroad,¹² and scientific research and innovation will suffer.¹³ The loss of foreign students and scholars will significantly diminish the United States' competitiveness, our scientific leadership and, in turn, our economic power, and our legacy of educating foreign leaders from around the world. It will also impose over a billion dollars in financial costs on U.S. institutions of higher education and the economy overall.¹⁴

As George Shultz, President Reagan's Secretary of State and a three-time cabinet member for President Nixon, observed, "Diversity, debate, contrast, [and] argumentativeness are what we as a people thrive on."¹⁵ We urge you to honor the legacy of the State Department by halting the targeting of foreign students and faculty, including under the guise of foreign policy. By doing so, you can reverse the damage to our peerless colleges and universities and to our country and restore America's role as a global leader on democracy and free speech—values upon which we all can agree.

Respectfully,

Ambassador Bernadette M. Allen (ret.)

Ambassador to Niger, 2006-2010

Ambassador Frank Almaguer (ret.)

Ambassador to Honduras, 1999-2002

Ambassador James Keough Bishop (ret.)

Ambassador to Somalia, 1990-1991

Ambassador to Liberia, 1987-1990

Ambassador to Niger, 1979-1981

Ambassador Barbara K. Bodine (ret.)

Ambassador to Yemen, 1997-2001

The Honorable Carol Moseley Braun

Ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa, 1999-2001

U.S. Senator for Illinois, 1993-1999

August 6, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/international-students-visas-trump-uk-dubai-6fd432398ce4c87f49a89c9c39421dec>.

¹² See, e.g., Miryam Naddaf, "Scientific Conferences Are Leaving the U.S. Amid Border Fears," *Nature*, May 22, 2025, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-01636-5>.

¹³ See, e.g., Stuart Anderson, "Half Of The 2025 U.S. Nobel Prize Winners In Science Are Immigrants," *Forbes*, October 9, 2025, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stuartanderson/2025/10/09/half-of-the-2025-us-nobel-prize-winners-in-science-are-immigrants/>.

¹⁴ NAFSA: Association of International Educators, "Fall 2025 International Student Enrollment Outlook and Economic Impact," accessed November 17, 2025, www.nafsa.org/fall2025report; and Dick Startz, "International College Students Matter for the Economy," Brookings Institution, May 30, 2025, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/international-college-students-matter-for-the-economy/>.

¹⁵ George P. Shultz, "The Writer and Freedom," Secretary of State Address Before PEN International Conference, Current Policy No. 782, U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, DC Current Policy, January 12, 1986, 1, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.319510029377631&seq=2>.

Ambassador Aurelia Brazeal (ret.)

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Ambassador to Kenya, 1993-1996

Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia, 1990-1993

Ambassador Kenneth C. Brill (ret.)

U.S. Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations in Vienna, 2001-2004

Ambassador to the Republic of Cyprus, 1996-1999

Ambassador Steven A. Browning (ret.)

Ambassador to Uganda, 2006-2009

Ambassador to Malawi, 2003-2004

Ambassador Edward Brynn (ret.)

Ambassador to Ghana, 1995-1998

Ambassador to Burkina Faso, 1990-1993

Ambassador Glyn T. Davies (ret.)

Ambassador to the Kingdom of Thailand, 2015-2018

U.S. Permanent Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations in Vienna, 2009-2011

Ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis (ret.)

Acting U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, 2023

Ambassador to the United Nations for Special Political Affairs, 2011-2014

Ambassador Norman Eisen (ret.)

Ambassador to the Czech Republic, 2011-2014

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Director of Policy Planning, 2016-2017

Chief of Staff, U.S. Department of State, 2015-2017

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Ambassador to Mongolia, 2015-2017

Ambassador Gordon Gray (ret.)

Ambassador to Tunisia, 2009-2012

Ambassador Nina Hachigian (ret.)

U.S. Representative to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2014-2017

Ambassador Jeffrey Hovenier (ret.)

Ambassador to Kosovo, 2022-2024

Ambassador Michael Stephen Hoza (ret.)

Ambassador to Cameroon, 2014-2017

Ambassador Harriet Isom (ret.)

Ambassador to Cameroon, 1993-1996

Ambassador to Benin, 1989-1992

Ambassador Jeanine Jackson (ret.)

Ambassador to Malawi, 2011-2014

Ambassador to Burkina Faso, 2006-2009

Ambassador Janice L. Jacobs (ret.)

Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, 2008-2014

Ambassador to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, 2006-2007

Ambassador Susan S. Jacobs (ret.)

Ambassador to Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands, 2000-2003

Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins (ret.)

Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, 2021-2024

Ambassador, Special Envoy and Coordinator for Threat Reduction Programs, 2009-2017

Ambassador Deborah K. Jones (ret.)

Ambassador to Libya, 2013-2015

Ambassador to Kuwait, 2008-2011

Ambassador Ian Kelly (ret.)

Ambassador to Georgia, 2015-2018

U.S. Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2010-2013

Ambassador Laura E. Kennedy (ret.)

Ambassador to Conference on Disarmament, 2010-2013

Ambassador to Turkmenistan, 2001-2003

Ambassador John M. Koenig (ret.)

Ambassador to Cyprus, 2012-2015

Ambassador Lisa Kubiske (ret.)

Ambassador to Honduras, 2011-2014

Ambassador Carmen Lomellin (ret.)

U.S. Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States, 2009-2014

Ambassador Niels Marquardt (ret.)

Ambassador to Madagascar and the Union of the Comoros, 2007-2010

Ambassador to Cameroon, 2004-2007

Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, 2004-2006

Ambassador G. Dennise Mathieu (ret.)

Ambassador to Namibia, 2007-2010

Ambassador to Niger, 2002-2005

Ambassador Luis G. Moreno (ret.)

Ambassador to Jamaica, 2014-2017

Ambassador Wanda Nesbitt (ret.)

Ambassador to Namibia, 2010-2013

Ambassador to the Ivory Coast, 2007-2010

Ambassador to Madagascar, 2001-2004

Ambassador John R. Phillips (ret.)

Ambassador to Italy and San Marino, 2013-2017

Ambassador Michael C. Polt (ret.)

Ambassador to Estonia, 2009-2012

Ambassador to Serbia and Montenegro, 2004-2007

Ambassador Charles Ray (ret.)

Ambassador to Zimbabwe, 2009-2012

Ambassador to Cambodia, 2002-2005

Ambassador James C. Rosapepe (ret.)

Ambassador to Romania, 1998-2001

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Special Representative for the Secretary's Office of Global Health Diplomacy, 2013-2014

Ambassador to Mozambique, 2009-2012

Ambassador to Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands, 2006-2009

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Ambassador to the Czech Republic, 2022-2025

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Ambassador to Haiti, 2006-2009

Ambassador to Algeria, 2000-2003

Ambassador Teresita C. Schaffer (ret.)

Ambassador to the Maldives and Sri Lanka, 1992-1995

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Ambassador to Brazil, 2009-2013

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Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, 2011-2015

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Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, 1993-1996

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Jake Sullivan

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The Honorable Tom Udall

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U.S. Senator for New Mexico, 2009-2021

U.S. Representative for New Mexico's 3rd District, 1999-2009

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Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, 2010-2011

Ambassador Alexander Watson (ret.)

Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, 1993-1996

Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, 1989-1993

Ambassador to Peru, 1986-1989

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Ambassador Ross Wilson (ret.)

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Ambassador to Turkey, 2005-2008

Ambassador to Azerbaijan, 2000-2003