



THE PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
IN GENEVA

August 10, 2020

Meskerem Techane
Chair Rapporteur of the Working Group
on Discrimination Against Women and Girls

Dainius Puras
Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment
of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health

Dubravka Šimonovic
Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women,
its Causes and Consequences

Dear Special Rapporteurs,

Thank you for your correspondence dated May 22, 2020. Please find Washington's response to your letter enclosed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daniel A. Kronenfeld".

Daniel A. Kronenfeld
Human Rights Counselor

SUBJECT: U.S. Response regarding COVID and Access to Abortion

We received your bizarre and inexplicable letter of May 22, 2020, regarding alleged undue “restrictions taken in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic impeding access to abortion services” in the United States.

As United Nations human rights mandate holders, you are undoubtedly aware that international human rights law does not recognize any “right to abortion.” The United States is disappointed by and categorically rejects this transparent attempt to take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to assert the existence of such a right. This is a perversion of the human rights system and the founding principles of the United Nations.

And this is not just our opinion. For further clarification on this matter, we refer you to the following statement from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in his letter to the United States Agency for International Development of June 1, 2020, regarding the UN’s Global Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and promotion of abortion during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“In providing [critical support under the Global Humanitarian Response Plan], and in accordance with its Charter, the United Nations does not intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State. Thus, health care is provided with full respect to national laws. It does not promote, much less impose, abortion on anyone, nor is it intended to do so.”

We are particularly disappointed that you have chosen to waste the limited time and resources of your mandates on such spurious allegations, rather than focusing your energies on areas where your attention is most appropriate and warranted. For instance, the Chinese Communist Party is currently directing the use of forced abortion, forced sterilization and forced birth control in Xinjiang. These are actual human rights abuses, implicating millions of women and girls and their health, on an industrial scale, targeting a vulnerable ethnic and religious minority. Yet the United Nations system — including the Secretary-General, the Human Rights Council, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights — has been notably quiet on this topic, even as they find ample opportunity to opine on matters of American domestic political concern.

One of the reasons that the United States and others increasingly see the UN’s human rights system as utterly broken is the tendency of its self-appointed guardians to label certain policy preferences as “rights” — a practice that devalues the entire human rights enterprise and leads to absurd outcomes such as the above-referenced letter. At the same time, we see violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a massive scale that generate little or no comment by these same guardians.

If you truly are concerned about the integrity of the United Nations human rights system, we urge you to reconsider the approach that has led you and your colleagues to this sad point, so far from the noble purpose for which this institution was founded 75 years ago.