

**The Honorable Randy Hultgren - Opening Remarks**  
**USIP Bipartisan Congressional Dialogue on *Human Rights: The Foundation for Peace***  
**March 20, 2018**

**Opening remarks as prepared for delivery:**

Good morning and thanks very much to the U.S. Institute of Peace for hosting this event this morning. I am pleased to join my distinguished co-chair, Jim McGovern, to speak on this topic.

Through my work on the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, I am acutely aware that violent conflict, war crimes, and the suppression of freedom of belief and expression continue to ravage the lives of people and communities around the world. As human rights advocates, you are aware of these challenges.

Incorporating human rights into foreign policy is complex, but necessary work that requires a contextual understanding of ever changing situations and crises. As we seek to mitigate or prevent intractable conflicts, we must be clear about what we are hoping to achieve. Peace and stability is impossible apart from human rights. In fact, human rights give us a clear framework for the kind of peace that we are trying to achieve. As policymakers, we must uphold the human rights framework as our guide for how we help to solve conflicts and strengthen stability around the world.

For me, that has taken the form of encouraging other governments to pursue their interests in ways that are consistent with the human rights commitments they have made through international treaties. Violating these treaties by perpetrating largescale human rights abuses destabilizes their country, their region, and ultimately hurts their credibility for partnership with other countries on the international stage. A country or government that is “stable”, or that has created so-called peace through the use of fear or authoritarianism is not ultimately a reliable ally or partner for the US. We must convince our allies that in addition to being in line with international law, human rights policies are also in their best interest.

One example of our advocacy for human rights recently got us banned from travelling to the Philippines. Co-chair McGovern and I wrote a letter urging President Trump on his visit to the country to discuss the recent, large number of extra-judicial killings taking place there. We acknowledged that the Philippines is a valuable ally, but that as such we did not want that to be used as a presumption to ignore the rule of law, or wantonly kill civilians. President Duterte expressed his outrage with us through the media, but he was reminded that Congress cares about human rights.

While we encourage governments to uphold their human rights commitments, we recognize that human rights advocacy often comes from the ground up, from ordinary people whose basic,

universal rights are being violated. These people, members of the general population, are intimately familiar with human rights because they are in an active fight to secure them for themselves, their families, and their society. Repressive governments will accuse us of forcing our will or our values upon them, but their citizens are actively advocating for the freedom to express themselves according to their own conscience.

I think one of the areas where we can make the biggest difference is by directly supporting these human rights defenders as they fight for the rights of their own people. These are people who put their own lives, and often even the freedom of their families, on the line in order to secure basic freedoms for their society. When these advocates find themselves imprisoned for their efforts, we can advocate for them by highlighting their situation, and by magnifying their message and their cause.

A few weeks ago, co-chair McGovern and I introduced H.Res.750, calling for the support of prisoners of conscience, and for President Trump to designate a Prisoners of Conscience Day to annually draw attention to these kinds of human rights heroes. This legislation seeks to strengthen the voice of religious leaders, civil society activists, lawyers, journalists, and others who have sacrificed their own freedom in the cause of universal human rights.

We must use the tools at our disposal to encourage governments to listen to the desires of their people, and at the very least to not approve or tacitly support authoritarian policies.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to our discussion.