

January 31, 2022

The Honorable Susan E. Rice
Domestic Policy Advisor
White House Domestic Policy Council
1650 17th St NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
White House National Security Council
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear Ambassador Rice and Mr. Sullivan:

We, the undersigned organizations, write to engage with the Biden Administration during this Year of Action following the Summit for Democracy to support democratic renewal at home and abroad. As the conversations shift from an international Summit to include more than one hundred unique, domestic conversations within each participating nation around each government's commitments, the groups listed below urge the United States to lead by example with proactive and meaningful engagement with civil society at home and stand ready to actively participate.

A successful Year of Action for the United States should reflect not just its international leadership on the issues of democracy and human rights, but also a robust effort domestically to implement new policies and live up to commitments already made that address the Summit's three pillars: strengthening democracy, fighting corruption, and promoting human rights. The extent to which the U.S. government works with its own civil society to craft and implement meaningful domestic commitments and demonstrate tangible steps toward a more democratic, transparent, and rights-respecting government and society will enhance the United State's credibility as a voice for democratic renewal internationally.

2022 presents critical inflection points and significant opportunities to stem the tide of rising authoritarianism, to protect and promote universal human rights, and combat corruption. Domestic and international components of the Summit for Democracy must not be viewed in silos, but rather as mutually reinforcing components of a year of global action.

To maximize collaboration between civil society and the U.S. government during the Year of Action, we strongly recommend the following:

- 1. Establish an interagency task force comprised of key domestic agencies to focus on the United States' domestic-facing commitments for the Summit for Democracy, including regular and meaningful consultation with civil society.**

Because international summit planning functionally resides within the U.S. Department of State, in partnership with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and National Security Council (NSC), the Summit for Democracy enjoys a much higher profile among global than domestic civil society. Unfortunately, this dichotomy between the domestic and

international realms in the government continues to be problematic. The Summit for Democracy presents a unique opportunity for the United States to recognize that strengthening democracy and respecting human rights at home enhances our credibility and leadership around the globe.

Many domestically focused groups, including state and local groups, that engage in areas relevant to Summit themes, including racial justice, voting rights, and fiscal transparency, were either not aware that the Summit was taking place, did not think the Summit was relevant to their advocacy, or did not know how to engage with Summit organizers.

We strongly recommend that the Administration lead by example, including by creating an interagency task force within the U.S. government to work with civil society on progress towards commitments and their implementation during the Year of Action and beyond. This taskforce could build on the experience of the Obama-Biden administration, which formed an interagency task force chaired by the Department of State and the Department of Justice to consult with civil society both for input on Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) of the United States and treaty body reviews such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), as well as implementation of the Human Rights Council and treaty body recommendations following these reviews. An additional precedent is the interagency taskforce established around the Sustainable Development Goals and their monitoring, which included the NSC, Domestic Policy Council (DPC), and domestically and internationally facing agencies. We suggest that the taskforce include representatives from the leadership of the DPC, as well as government agencies responsible for overseeing aspects of implementation of U.S. domestic commitments, including but not limited to the Departments of Justice, Labor, Treasury, and Health and Human Services.

We also encourage the Biden administration to appoint a senior-level coordinator to chair this interagency task force. In addition to facilitating inter-agency communication, civil society engagement, and collective action on domestic aspects of the Year of Action and 2022 in-person Summit, the senior-level coordinator should also ensure that U.S. domestic commitments are clearly communicated to international audiences and inform U.S. foreign policy engagement with relation to Summit themes.

2. Clarify the process for finalizing commitments and seek feedback from civil society on the United States' commitments from the Summit for Democracy.

Now that the December 9-10 Summit has concluded, the U.S. government must ensure that civil society has formal opportunities to react to what was announced at the virtual Summit, and to formally respond to draft written commitments before they are finalized. Finalizing commitments without adequate civil society consultation will send a message that civil society is not viewed as a partner alongside government and the private sector in the Year of Action.

With regard to the U.S. government's domestic commitments, we request that the Biden administration clarify if this FACT SHEET and the initiatives referenced therein are intended to

serve as the United States' domestic commitments. While we applaud many of the enumerated commitments that were previously undertaken, as well as details on new commitments related to anti-corruption, we are disappointed that the overall package excluded any mention or reaffirmation of U.S. human rights obligations. We also seek clarity on the forward-looking commitments that the United States hopes to advance during the Year of Action.

Civil society should be provided an opportunity to comment on these commitments. Moreover, any new commitments during the Year of Action, including domestic-facing ones from the United States, should be published in draft form, and civil society should be provided an open comment period of at least one month before they are finalized. During this time, all governments—including the United States—should convene civil society representatives and present the rationale for each commitment and invite further feedback. We urge the Biden administration to utilize the interagency task force proposed above as a means of convening civil society representatives and soliciting feedback for draft commitments.

3. Publish all finalized government commitments, including those from the United States, in a public tracker.

We understand that all participating countries - including the United States - will submit final written commitments following the December 9-10 virtual Summit in early 2022. These commitments, once finalized, should be made public and organized in an intuitive tracker for ease of monitoring on the State Department's Summit for Democracy event page. Commitments should be specific and measurable. Preferably, they should be presented as SMART objectives (or the equivalent) - specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound - for ease of monitoring, and the database should be searchable, sortable and downloadable.

We encourage the U.S. government to consider its forthcoming National Action Plan under the Open Government Partnership (OGP) to ensure complementarity and, where applicable, identify reforms that can be advanced under both the OGP framework and the Year of Action. Because OGP requires members to publish reforms and monitor progress towards implementation in OGP's online repository, this format should be taken into account.

4. Provide periodic updates on U.S. commitment implementation and opportunities for engagement with civil society.

All participating governments, including the United States, should work with civil society to convene regular meetings to provide updates on progress toward implementation of domestic and international commitments. These meetings should occur on no less than a quarterly basis. For the United States specifically, a U.S. government task force, under the leadership of the DPC, should convene on a quarterly or more frequent basis with civil society participants on the status of each commitment.

When possible, participating governments should use existing multilateral and domestic processes and events as a space to provide these updates, including the OGP, RightsCon (June 2022), and United Nations mechanisms such as applicable treaty body reviews, interactions with Special Procedures mandate holders, and UPRs, including submission of mid-term reports on implementation.

5. Incorporate U.S. civil society organizations as participants in global civil society working-group structure and engage civil society in the planning for the 2022 summit.

The creation of a dedicated space for domestically focused groups to co-create and monitor implementation of U.S. domestic commitments in partnership with all relevant U.S. government agencies is essential, and is our top priority. In addition, however, interested domestically focused civil society organizations should not be excluded from other areas of participation during the Year of Action, and should also be incorporated into the existing State Dept./USAID-created small group/working group structure associated with the Summit, as well as any other post-Summit civil society engagement.

In that context, we encourage Summit organizers to expand working group structures to focus more on process and deliverables (e.g., tracking summit commitments in the Year of Action), in addition to thematic areas. We also recommend that the Biden administration clarify how thematic small groups and working groups will connect to initiatives such as the “Champions Cohort.”

Engagement of domestic civil society in connection with Summit activities should also include proactive solicitation of domestic civil society feedback during preparations for the in-person Summit in 2022, particularly around the agenda, format, speakers, and themes. We urge Summit planners to continue incorporating gender, geographic, and identity diversity among Summit panelists and speakers.

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This upcoming year presents an opportunity for the United States to engage in self-reflection, learn from global experiences, and take bold action to demonstrate accountability for moments when we have failed to live up to our values at home and abroad.

We hope to see these recommendations adopted, and please see us as partners in capitalizing on reform during the Year of Action. Please don’t hesitate to reach out with any questions or comments to Lisa Gilbert at lgilbert@citizen.org, Sarah Gardiner at sgardiner@oxfamamerica.org, or Katie LaRoque at klaroque@interaction.org.

Sincerely,

Accountability Lab

Afrobarometer
Albanian Institute for Political Studies
Alliance for Peacebuilding
Amb. Norman L. Eisen (ret.), Co-chair, Transatlantic Democracy Working Group
Stephen Heintz and Eric Liu, Co-chairs, American Academy of Arts & Sciences Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship
American Civil Liberties Union
American Jewish Committee
American Jewish World Service
American Sustainable Business Network
American Oversight
Article 19
Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote)
Bridge Alliance
Business for America
Center for Civil Liberties
Center for Digital Democracy
Center for Reproductive Rights
Change the Chamber
Charity and Security Network
Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)
Coalition for a World Security Community
Declaration for American Democracy
DemCast USA
Democracy 21
Democracy Matters
The Digital Democracy Project
Digital Impact and Governance Initiative
Edfu Foundation Inc.
End Citizens United / Let America Vote Action Fund
Emgage Action
FairVote
Fix Democracy First
The Freedom Initiative
Foreign Policy for America
Fundacion Multitudes- Secretariat of the Civil Society Pillar of the Community of Democracies
Generation Citizen
Global Integrity
Government Accountability Project
Green Advocates International
Greenpeace USA
Helping Hand for Relief & Development
The Horizons Project
Humanity & Inclusion

Human Rights First
The Hunger Project
ICNL
Inclusion des Personnes Amputées et Déficiantes Motrices de Côte d'Ivoire (IPADEMCI)
Indian American Muslims Council
The Initiative Center to Support Social Action
Institute for Citizens and Scholars
InterAction
Internews
Issue One
League of Women Voters of the United States
Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Mainers for Accountable Leadership Action
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
NAACP
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Council of Jewish Women
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Open Contracting Partnership
Open Gov Hub
Open The Government
Oxfam America
Partnership for American Democracy
Partnership for Transparency Fund
PartnersGlobal
Physicians for Peace
Planned Parenthood Action Fund
Project on Government Oversight
Protect Democracy
Public Citizen
Pulte Institute, University of Notre Dame
Save the Children US
Sierra Club
Solidarity Center
Southern Poverty Law Center
Stephen F. Schneck, Retired Director, Institute for Policy Research & Catholic Studies
Transatlantic Democracy Working Group
United Nations Association of the United States of America - National Capital Division
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Vote.org
Women for Women International
World Justice Project
The Workers Circle

CC:

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Secretary of State
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