

United States International Council on Disabilities

February 11, 2015



The Honorable Robert Corker
United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Washington, DC 20510

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David Morrissey
Executive Director

Dear Senator Corker,

Congratulations on assuming the Chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. The U.S. International Council on Disabilities (USICD) is impressed with the scope and breadth of issues the committee will address this coming year. We were especially interested in the now postponed hearing, *The National Interest: Articulating The Case For American Leadership In The World*, with Henry Kissinger. Like you, other members of the Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate as a whole, and many Americans, USICD supports American leadership in the world. One way to promote our leadership is to export U.S. expertise, acquired over more than four decades, in disability rights. We would like to partner with you and the committee to make that export of expertise widespread, constant, and targeted.

Over the last few years you have expressed your commitment to individuals with disabilities – sharing your view that the Americans with Disabilities Act serves as the gold standard for other nations, and that you believe the U.S. should utilize bilateral initiatives to promote disability rights. We understand your position and hope you will work with us to create and secure strong, concrete steps from the Department of State to make more of the latter happen.

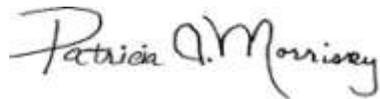
There is a range of conflicts around the world resulting in more people with disabilities, especially young people. U.S. nation building initiatives have failed to, or only tangentially, considered accessibility issues. Numerous countries around the world are trying to address the expectations of human rights protection of their increasingly vocal citizens with disabilities. Simply put, the U.S. needs to do more.

We urge you to take three actions. First, hold a hearing on how to strengthen the U.S. export of expertise related to disability

rights. Second, propose legislation to make the Office of the International Disability Rights Advisor in the Department of State permanent, with authorization of sufficient standing (i.e., ambassadorship for the director), staff, and funding to influence State's position on disability rights and establish the Office as a resource for other departments that engage in international work (e.g., Department of Defense). Third, ask Senator Alexander, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, to offer an amendment to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to extend the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability to U.S. overseas financial commitments.

We stand ready to work with you on these suggestions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia A. Morrissey". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Patricia A. Morrissey, Ph.D.
President