

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 923

Recognizing the critical importance and contributions of global civil society in advancing human rights, condemning the use of political imprisonment as a tool of repression, and calling for the release of political prisoners across the world in commemoration of Human Rights Day on December 10, 2024.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 10, 2024

Mr. COONS (for himself and Mr. TILLIS) submitted the following resolution;
which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the critical importance and contributions of global civil society in advancing human rights, condemning the use of political imprisonment as a tool of repression, and calling for the release of political prisoners across the world in commemoration of Human Rights Day on December 10, 2024.

Whereas the Senate passed S. Res. 731, which designated December 10, 2018, as “Human Rights Day”;

Whereas December 10, 2024, marks the 76th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a landmark document that established the inalienable

rights to which all humans are entitled, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property ownership, birthplace, or other status;

Whereas, in light of immense difficulties, civil society and civil society organizations contribute to the promotion, protection, and advancement of human rights, democratic governance, and rule of law across the world every day;

Whereas the state of global human rights and civil liberties has declined during the past 2 decades, with Freedom House notably tracking 18 consecutive years of decline in rights and freedoms around the world;

Whereas Freedom House reports that political rights and civil liberties in 2023 diminished in 52 countries and improved in only 21 countries;

Whereas, since 2016, 91 countries have proposed or enacted more than 260 legal measures affecting civil society, of which 72 percent have restricted human rights;

Whereas increasing restrictions on civil society organizations directly impedes the ability of such organizations to advance human rights advocacy and democracy-building work and obstructs the rights of citizens to exercise freedom of speech and assembly;

Whereas the Department of State estimates that 1,000,000 individuals find themselves unjustly behind bars as political prisoners for exercising human rights and fundamental freedoms, because of their race, religion, or ethnicity, or due to their private relationships;

Whereas political imprisonment is employed by authoritarian actors as a tool for limiting political and social dissent,

stifling freedom of expression and assembly, and undermining public participation in free and fair elections;

Whereas authoritarian countries operate vast networks of political prison camps and labor camps used to indiscriminately detain thousands of individuals;

Whereas countless political prisoners in these detention facilities are subjected to torture, inhumane conditions, enforced disappearance, or other forms of abuse;

Whereas, according to Freedom House, throughout 2023, widespread problems with elections, including violence and electoral manipulation, drove deterioration in rights and freedoms across the world, especially in countries that experienced pre- and post-election violence;

Whereas, in many countries, political opposition figures and civil society members continue to be unjustly detained for their role in demanding free and fair elections and leading peaceful democratic protests in opposition to illiberal regimes;

Whereas anti-corruption prosecutors and pro-democracy activists are arbitrarily imprisoned on baseless charges for their advocacy of greater judicial independence and transparency in countries where judicial systems are weaponized against human rights advocates;

Whereas religious minorities, religious freedom advocates, and missionaries are unjustly targeted, detained, and repressed for exercising their freedom to believe or not to believe and advocating for those same freedoms for others;

Whereas the Department of State has determined that religious minorities continue to be victims of genocides relating to religious freedom;

Whereas women face significantly higher risks of harassment and imprisonment when participating in civil society and political advocacy and heightened vulnerabilities to mental and physical abuse during arrest, questioning, and imprisonment;

Whereas authoritarian governments and nonstate actors around the world enforce systems of impunity and discrimination to systematically dismantle women's and girls' access to their civil liberties and imprison female human rights defenders and members of civil society who speak out against such oppression;

Whereas journalists face political imprisonment for fighting to report the truth, advocating for greater protections for freedom of press, and holding governments accountable to their citizens;

Whereas, during 2023, according to Reporters Without Borders, nearly 800 journalists were jailed and 45 were killed for simply doing their jobs: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate—

2 (1) expresses support for Human Rights Day
3 and recognizes its global significance;

4 (2) recognizes the critical importance and con-
5 tributions of global civil society in advancing human
6 rights, democracy, and the rule of law;

7 (3) condemns the use of political imprisonment
8 as a tool of repression to restrict civil liberties and
9 human rights;

10 (4) calls upon governments that are unjustly
11 detaining individuals for their human rights and civil

1 society advocacy work to immediately and uncondi-
2 tionally release these political prisoners;

3 (5) encourages the Department of State to con-
4 tinue robust campaigns to advocate for the release
5 of political prisoners and to leverage all necessary
6 diplomatic tools in support of such advocacy, includ-
7 ing by—

8 (A) coordinating with other executive agen-
9 cies on priority cases of political prisoners for
10 any principals or high-level United States offi-
11 cials traveling to specific countries where a
12 known case requires attention or diplomatic
13 intervention;

14 (B) working with congressional partners,
15 such as the Senate Human Rights Caucus and
16 the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, to
17 coordinate advocacy on priority cases for mem-
18 bers of Congress, including advocacy preceding
19 official congressional travel;

20 (C) consulting with civil society and non-
21 governmental organizations in countries with
22 priority political prisoners' cases on plans of en-
23 gagement and advocacy;

24 (D) supporting bilateral and multilateral
25 engagement with allies and like-minded coun-

1 tries on issues involving the global protection of
2 human rights, democratic governance, and the
3 rule of law; and

4 (E) working with multilateral organiza-
5 tions and fora to devise joint efforts to advance
6 human rights and democracy; and

7 (6) encourages the Bureau of Democracy,
8 Human Rights, and Labor, in collaboration with the
9 Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage
10 Affairs, to devise joint strategies to deter authori-
11 tarian regimes from using their judicial systems
12 (particularly arrests, detentions, and sentencing) as
13 tools to silence dissent or for political leverage.

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