April 11, 2018

The Honorable Bob Corker  
Chairman  
Foreign Relations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert Menendez  
Ranking Member  
Foreign Relations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Corker and Ranking Member Menendez,

This week’s nomination hearing for Michael Pompeo for the position of Secretary of State is an important opportunity for Congress to reassert the essential diplomatic and humanitarian role of the State Department.

Refugees International (RI) has used its voice to advocate for vital resources to protect and provide life-saving services to more than 65 million displaced people and 10 million stateless people worldwide. RI is a humanitarian advocacy organization committed to the rights and well-being of those fleeing war, ethnic cleansing, persecution and violence, without distinction as to race, religion or country of origin.

In this respect, we hope you will ensure that the nominee addresses the following serious concerns.

First, we are troubled that Mr. Pompeo has unreasonably suggested complicity of American Muslims and American Muslim leaders in acts of violence and terror undertaken by individuals who purport to be acting in the name of Islam. We worry such statements have stoked prejudice and fear and have helped to enable a climate that encourages bias against Muslim refugees in particular, and the Muslim community in general.

Second, we are deeply concerned by Mr. Pompeo’s positions and statements in support of measures that amount to torture. As you know, a significant number of forcibly displaced persons are victimized by torture, and the capacity of the United States government – not to mention American-based organizations like Refugees International – to work effectively to end torture against vulnerable populations is severely compromised when the United States government is perpetuating and publicly justifying such acts.

Third, we are deeply concerned by the nominee’s positions on the U.S. refugee admissions program. We appreciate the need for careful safeguards in the refugee admissions process, but we also note that no population of arrivals to the United States receives as vigorous screening as do refugees, and since 9/11, not one resettled refugee in the United States has been responsible for an act of terror resulting in the loss of an American life. Thus, we are concerned that Mr. Pompeo’s prior support for proposed legislation that would effectively shut down U.S. refugee resettlement may reflect a hostility to refugee resettlement that is inimical to U.S. values and interests.
Finally, given our organization’s significant and substantial efforts to promote resilience to minimize displacement from extreme weather events and climate-related disasters, we are troubled by Mr. Pompeo’s skepticism regarding climate change and the significant threat it presents to human security.

In conclusion, we believe any individual confirmed for the position of Secretary of State must be prepared to renounce undifferentiated verbal attacks on any religious community in the United States as well as torture in any form; to endorse the continuation of a vibrant U.S. refugee resettlement program in which officials do not make judgments about admission based on religion or country of origin; and to recognize the connection between an increase in the incidence of disasters resulting from natural hazards and the importance of addressing climate change. We trust that Members of the Committee will ensure that each of these concerns are addressed during the hearing.

Sincerely,

Eric Schwartz
President