

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 17, 2020

Mr. John Barsa  
Acting Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development  
Ronald Reagan Building  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Acting Administrator Barsa,

As Senators who care deeply about the work of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the diversity of its staff, we are concerned with the potential impacts of comments attributed to two recent USAID appointees on the reputation of the United States, Agency morale, and the crucial question of diversity in U.S. government workplaces. It is of the utmost importance that personnel in leadership positions at the Department of State and USAID are above reproach in espousing the values of the American people worldwide and showing respect for their colleagues. It is equally important that employees hear from their leadership at the USAID an unequivocal commitment to addressing institutional prejudices.

In late May, multiple publications reported on the appointment of Mark Kevin Lloyd to serve as USAID's religious freedom advisor. While serving as a field director for the 2016 Trump campaign, it came to light that Lloyd had a past of making and sharing Islamophobic posts to his social media accounts. According to the press, these posts include one that called Islam a "barbaric cult." A meme shared four days after the Orlando terrorist attack in 2016 said that potential gun buyers should be forced to eat bacon. Another post said "those who understand Islam for what it is are gearing up for a fight." Lloyd does not seem to have changed his views – as recently as May 2020, reporters found social media posts where Lloyd accused President Obama of ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and stated that those who believe Islam is a peaceful religion "don't understand history."

More recently, *ProPublica* and other outlets reported on the appointment of USAID's new deputy White House liaison, Merritt Corrigan. Corrigan has a highly problematic history of homophobic and misogynistic commentary, positing in one social media post that liberal democracy is a front in a war waged by "those who fundamentally despise not only our way of life, but life itself." In a separate post, Corrigan stated "our homo-empire couldn't tolerate even one commercial enterprise not in full submission to the tyrannical LGBT agenda." While previously serving as an employee of the Hungarian Embassy in Washington, D.C., Ms. Corrigan tweeted that Hungarian President Viktor Orbán – a demagogue notorious for his assaults on both liberal democracy and LGBT rights – is a "shining champion of Western civilization." In October 2019, Ms. Corrigan wrote an op-ed in the London-based publication *The Conservative Woman* stating that "it's time for women to return to the home," which in her estimation is "where we rightfully belong." She further referred to women's bodies as "once the sacred possession of husbands who could protect and serve us."

Acting Administrator Barsa, you released a statement on June 8 defending recent appointees to the Agency – including Lloyd and Corrigan – that alleged the pair had been targeted by “unwarranted and malicious attacks.” Your statement made no mention of the divisive and deeply problematic statements made by both Lloyd and Corrigan.

The appointment of Lloyd and Corrigan risks alienating the hardworking staff at USAID – not only women, Muslims and members of the LGBT community – but any employee that is justifiably dismayed that people who hold these views were appointed to represent the world’s premier international development agency. We were gratified to see the April 2020 report from USAID on the initiatives it has undertaken to improve diversity in the USAID workforce, but we are confounded by the counterproductive decision of appointing two people whose views are so antithetical to American values of tolerance and equality, and to USAID’s stated commitment to those values. We urge you to immediately investigate both individuals’ past statements and to terminate their employment at USAID should these reports be accurate.

Sincerely,

CC: Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State



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Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



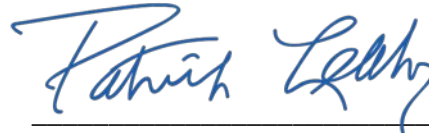
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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



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Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator