

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 17, 2020

Secretary Steve Mnuchin
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20220

Secretary Mike Pompeo
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Mnuchin and Secretary Pompeo:

We write to urge the Administration to issue a worldwide temporary general license that supports humanitarian trade related to COVID-19 for the duration of the pandemic. This license would cover items such as testing kits, respiratory devices, personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitizer, and medicine, which are critical for slowing the spread of coronavirus globally.

The pandemic has laid bare the ways in which our broad application of sanctions is undermining public health systems,¹ imposing sweeping economic penalties that restrict commerce in the material and equipment necessary to respond to the coronavirus and harming ordinary people. Blocking or slowing the flow of medical resources neither enables an effective outbreak response around the world, nor does it serve our national security interests.

In April, Secretary Mnuchin issued guidance that emphasized Treasury's "commitment to [the] global flow of humanitarian aid" and the humanitarian exception to U.S. sanctions during COVID-19.² While the United States has provided medical supplies, technical assistance, and other health-related humanitarian aid³ to combat the coronavirus in countries around the world, current Administration policies have also impeded normal commerce in material that countries need to combat the pandemic. Existing humanitarian exceptions are insufficient⁴ to encourage risk-averse banks and businesses to conduct entirely allowable transactions. A temporary general license would give exporters, banks, and humanitarian organizations confidence that they would not be penalized for sending supplies critical to coronavirus relief, increasing the chance that humanitarian assistance reaches people who need it.

In making this decision, we urge you to consider the bipartisan precedent set by previous Administrations for issuing similar licenses to address humanitarian crises. For example, in 2003 the George W. Bush Administration issued a temporary license allowing relief supplies to enter Iran after a devastating

¹ The Nation, "How Trump's Foreign Policy Puts Troops at Risk of Covid-19," Ken Klippenstein, April 22, 2020, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/iran-coronavirus-sanctions/>.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Underscores Commitment to Global Flow of Humanitarian Aid in Face of COVID-19 Pandemic," April 9, 2020, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm969>.

³ U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Assistance for Coronavirus (COVID-19)," <https://www.state.gov/foreign-assistance-for-coronavirus-covid-19/>.

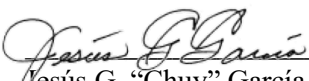
⁴ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Coercion in the Time of Coronavirus," Jarrett Blanc, April 8, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/08/coercion-in-time-of-coronavirus-pub-81495>.

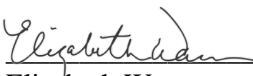
earthquake.⁵ These licenses have been issued by both Republican and Democratic presidents as need arose around the world.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres observed that “we are only as strong as the weakest health system in our interconnected world.”⁶ The coronavirus is a global public health emergency and economic crisis with no respect for international borders – and defeating it will require global cooperation. As long as there are poorly controlled outbreaks anywhere in the world, we cannot fully protect ourselves from the virus. Consistent with this reality, the Treasury Department should issue a worldwide temporary general license, built off past precedent and tailored to fit the extraordinary needs of the present moment.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of this critical matter and look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


Jesús G. “Chuy” García
United States Representative


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Eases Restrictions To Assist Humanitarian Relief Activities For Earthquake Victims In Iran,” December 31, 2003, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/js1076.aspx>.

⁶ United Nations, “Transcript of UN Secretary-General’s virtual press encounter to launch the Report on the Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19,” March 31, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2020-03-31/transcript-of-un-secretary-general%E2%80%99s-virtual-press-encounter-launch-the-report-the-socio-economic-impacts-of-covid-19>.

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Colin Allred
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Earl Blumenauer
United States Representative

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