

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 18, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C. Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

I write to express my shock and concern over recent reports of abuse of migrants and refugees in Libya. Recent press reports have shown predatory human traffickers subjecting people to torture, sexual abuse, inhuman living conditions and other atrocious forms of violence. Recently released video footage captures the heartbreaking moment when young migrants outside of Tripoli are auctioned at market to the highest bidder in a deplorable example of modern-day slavery. These rampant abuses and illegal slave markets call for a strong and unified response from the United States and our allies.

Libya has become a major staging area for the transit of non-Libyan migrants seeking to reach Europe. Data collected by migration observers and immigration officials suggest that many migrants from sub-Saharan Africa transit remote areas of southwestern and southeastern Libya en route to Europe. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that migrants transiting through Libya to Italy increased 25% in the first five months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. According to the same report, an estimated 700,000 to 1,000,000 migrants live in Libya, many vulnerable to the abuses previously mentioned.

Although the State Department has designated Libya a “special case” in the Trafficking in Persons Report due to political instability, we must hold perpetrators and Libyan authorities accountable. The 2017 Trafficking In Persons Report noted the government’s lack of political will, institutional capacity, and resources to proactively identify and protect trafficking victims. With Libyan officials questioning the veracity of recent news reports, we must continue to send an unequivocal statement that the United States will hold authorities accountable for their efforts – or lack thereof – to end the scourge of human trafficking.

While I commend Ambassador Haley for noting that what is happening in Libya “should shock the conscience of us all,” we must do more. The United States has long supported a unified, stable Libya with a capable government, but in times like this it is critical that we reassert our commitment to promoting human rights, including ending modern day slavery. I urge you to raise this issue with the appropriate Libyan officials as soon as possible and work with our allies to pursue a solution.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator