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NGOs Identify Human Rights Abusers, Corrupt Actors for Sanctions Under U.S. Bill

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Washington, D.C.—Human Rights First today called on the Trump Administration to use the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act to levy targeted sanctions against individuals in 15 cases from around the world who have engaged in significant human rights violations and grand corruption. The call came in a letter and package of materials delivered to the secretary of state and secretary of treasury.

The letter and materials reflect the work of dozens of human rights and anti-corruption NGOs, coordinated by Human Rights First, that have worked together over many months to assemble case files on alleged crimes spanning 15 countries. The information provided to the U.S. government today calls for individuals from Azerbaijan, Bahrain, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mexico, Panama, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam to be placed under sanctions.

“The Global Magnitsky Act is the most innovative, far-reaching tool ever created to deter human rights violations and corruption,” said Human Rights First’s Senior Vice President for Policy Rob Berschinski. “This law allows the U.S. government to deny financial resources and travel to some of the worst criminals on the planet. NGOs, activists, and victims have assembled and handed to the government compelling evidence of crimes like rape, torture, and widespread fraud. Now the Trump Administration needs to act.”

In the letter, addressed to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin, the consortium of NGOs called for targeted asset freezes and visa restrictions against the perpetrators named in their case files:

“The cases we have elected to highlight come from every region of the world, and involve horrific stories of torture, enforced disappearance, murder, sexual assault, extortion, and bribery,” wrote the consortium. “The implicated perpetrators vary in power and influence, and their victims range from full-time human rights activists to members of religious minorities to students demonstrating against injustice. In cases dealing with acts of significant corruption, victims often include entire societies.”

The Global Magnitsky Act is the most comprehensive human rights and anti-corruption sanctions tool in U.S. history. Passed with bipartisan support and signed into law in December 2016, the law is named after whistleblower Sergei Magnitsky, who was imprisoned and murdered in 2009 by Russian authorities after exposing a large-scale fraud. Under the act, the U.S. government may sanction foreign individuals and entities found to have committed gross violations of human rights, or to have engaged in significant acts of corruption, by subjecting designees to asset freezes and visa restrictions. The law expands upon the 2012 Magnitsky Act, which applied only to Russian individuals and entities.

“If used to its full potential, the Global Magnitsky Act will give pause to those that use violence to silence whistleblowers and dissent, sustain those persecuted for their defense of fundamental freedoms, and potentially deter crimes before they’re committed,” added Berschinski, who coordinated the efforts of the consortium of NGOs. “This law puts the United States in the driver’s seat concerning international efforts to protect human rights defenders and combat impunity—but only if it’s used.”

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