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February 15, 2015

The Honorable Colleen Bell, U.S. Ambassador to Hungary
Embassy of the United States of America
Szabadság tér 12
H-1054 Budapest
Hungary

Dear Ambassador Bell:

Thank you for meeting with me and my colleague, Tad Stahnke, last month as you prepared to take up your post in Budapest. I hope your transition has been smooth.

As we discussed in Washington, Hungary is at a critical juncture, with increasing antisemitism, restrictions on human rights, and corruption. As you know, there is movement in Hungary toward authoritarianism and intolerance toward minorities, and Prime Minister Orbán has been repositioning the country to ally more closely with Russia.

We believe the United States can play an important role in helping to steer Hungary onto a path to greater stability, stronger democracy, and increased prosperity by countering these disturbing trends. You have a unique opportunity in your new role to encourage Hungary to adopt policies that will strengthen the rule of law and independent democratic institutions, and improve respect for human rights. Given your background in media and transparency, we know that you understand well the importance of the tasks ahead.

I'd like to reiterate the recommendations we made during our meeting last month and suggest that in the early stages of your tenure you place special priority on the following areas:

- 1) **Highlight the importance of fighting corruption.** An anti-corruption message which includes specific details of corrupt activities will resonate with the Hungarian public. You can speak out publicly against sham corruption prosecutions. You can work with Germany and other partners to highlight Hungary's corruption issues at meetings this year of the G-7 and G-20. You can also fund investigative reporting, monitoring by NGOs, and citizen participation in anti-corruption efforts.
- 2) **Support civil society.** NGOs and civil society are increasingly under attack in Hungary, particularly those that receive foreign funding. We suggest that you build relationships with a wide variety of civil society leaders and organizations, and that you speak out strongly against government harassment and suppression of legitimate NGO activity. Embassy funds should be used to support NGO capacity- and constituency-building.

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Your Embassy staff should translate into Hungarian and distribute widely the [human rights defender guidelines](#) issued by the State Department in 2013.

- 3) **Hold Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to his zero tolerance pledge on antisemitism.** School curricula should not include revisionist versions of history or laud fascist or racist writers. You should counter hate speech, violent crimes, and discrimination against Jews or other minorities with strong public messages of condemnation. The Embassy should monitor closely the government's response to hate violence, and secure offers of U.S. and international assistance to help investigate and prosecute these crimes.
- 4) **Highlight Russian influence.** Call out and condemn Russian propaganda and Russia's penetration of the Hungarian media.
- 5) **Encourage public-private partnerships and U.S. trade and investment** that benefits ordinary Hungarians, particularly youth, as part of a broader campaign to demonstrate the benefits of close ties to the United States and democratic Europe.

The upcoming visit to Budapest of Russian President Vladimir Putin comes at a time of extraordinary tension between Russia, the United States, and the European Union over Russian aggression in Ukraine, and underscores the formidable challenges you face. Hungary's current course risks the country deteriorating into authoritarianism and becoming a haven for hatred and persecution of minorities. We urge you to do all you can to help Hungary shift course onto a path that will lead to strengthened democracy, human rights, and good governance for all.

We look forward to working with you to build support for U.S. policies to achieve that goal.

Sincerely,



Elisa Massimino
President and CEO

cc: Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs
Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor