September 14, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.  20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

On behalf of the American Bar Association and its more than 400,000 members from across the United States and more than 100 countries, I write to urge that the State Department continue to prioritize the promotion of democracy, human rights, justice, and the rule of law in its diplomacy and development assistance.

We appreciate the need for reorganization of the Department to bring greater efficiencies and effectiveness to its work. At the same time, we have been concerned by reports that the reforms might result in a downgrading of these core American values in the Department’s mission, activities, or programs. Advancing democratic governance, respect for human rights, accountability for atrocity crimes, and respect for the rule of law fosters more peaceful and successful societies in ways that serve U.S. commercial and security interests alike. These efforts help counter violence and extremism that threaten our security; they foster stable environments in which U.S. investment and trade can thrive.

For these reasons, the ABA has a long history of supporting State Department efforts to advance these interests, and at its recent Annual Meeting, its House of Delegates adopted a resolution that states:

[T]he American Bar Association urges the United States Congress and the Department of State to ensure that the function of supporting criminal accountability for mass atrocities resides in an office mandated to the pursuit of global criminal justice, with sufficient resources and stature of leadership, such as an ambassador-at-large position, to ensure that the United States’ commitment to criminal accountability for mass atrocities is not diminished.

We were thus appreciative of your recent decision to maintain the role of the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice, and we urge sustained support for this mandate and others aimed at advancing human rights and the rule of law through the work of the Department.
The Department’s efforts to advance human rights and the rule of law--from combating trafficking in persons to supporting international criminal justice, from advancing women’s rights to combating corruption--make the world safer, more stable, and more prosperous, and help cement American leadership in the world. We urge you to ensure that any reforms reinforce and strengthen the role that values play in U.S. diplomacy and development assistance.

Sincerely,

Hilarie Bass