April 24, 2017

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Ryan, and Leader Pelosi:

As former U.S. Permanent Representatives to the United Nations who have served under both Republican and Democratic Administrations, we share a deep understanding of the UN’s strategic value in advancing U.S. national interests and promoting American leadership. While the UN is imperfect, and many reforms are needed, the UN remains an indispensable instrument for advancing the global stability and prosperity on which U.S. interests and priorities depend. We therefore urge you to support U.S. leadership at the UN, including through continued payment of our assessed and voluntary financial contributions to the Organization.

The United States and its allies and partners today face grave and interconnected challenges that transcend national borders. These include cascading conflict in the Middle East and South Asia, an emboldened North Korea, the rising threat of violent extremism and organized crime, vulnerability to pandemics, the worst forced displacement crisis since 1945, the prospect of famine in four countries, and the potential for major societal disruptions from climate change. The U.S., despite its wealth and military might, cannot afford to take on these issues alone, nor should it have to. That is exactly why the UN was created in the first place: to harness the resources and commitment of all countries to act on challenges that necessitate collective response.

Since its establishment, the UN has been a cornerstone of the post-World War II international order, serving also to advance U.S. priorities and interests on many fronts. Through its peacekeeping operations, humanitarian relief work, efforts to address international public health emergencies, and development investments, the UN has helped secure core U.S. interests while reinforcing America’s long-standing commitment to human rights and human dignity worldwide. By marshalling financial contributions from all UN member states, the UN has also reduced the burden on American taxpayers by leveraging U.S. contributions to the UN four-fold. The whole UN system is built on burden-sharing that ensures the United States does not have to go it alone and that other countries stand up, rather than stand by.

We understand frustration in Congress at what can seem a needlessly slow pace of critical management, budgetary, and accountability reforms at the UN, all of which we have fought hard
to advance during our respective tenures at the helm of the U.S. Mission in New York. We fought those battles differently and did not always agree. Nevertheless, in our experience, the U.S. is much more effective in pressing reforms when it stays engaged and pays its dues and bills. Withholding or slashing funding for the UN, by contrast, weakens our hand, alienates allies whose support is critical to our reform priorities, undermines essential UN activities that promote core American interests and values, and costs us more over the long term. It also cedes the agenda to countries that can be hostile to our interests and more than willing to see the U.S. give up its seat at the table.

This January, the UN elected a new Secretary-General – Antonio Guterres of Portugal – and the U.S. Administration fielded a new U.S. Permanent Representative – Nikki Haley, the former Governor of South Carolina. Secretary-General Guterres and Ambassador Haley have both expressed a commitment to work together to create a more efficient, effective, and responsive UN. We urge you to give them the time and space needed to advance this critical work and avoid policies, such as drastically reducing our financial support, that would damage our nation’s ability to lead – not just at the United Nations but on the wider world stage. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ambassador Andrew Young
Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, 1977-1979

Ambassador Donald McHenry

Ambassador Thomas Pickering

Ambassador Edward Perkins
Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, 1992 - 1993

Secretary Madeleine Albright

Ambassador Bill Richardson

Ambassador John Negroponte
Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, 2001-2004

Ambassador Susan Rice
Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, 2009-2013

Ambassador Samantha Power