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On behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose over 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, which represents over 2,000 Reform rabbis, we submit these questions regarding the nomination of Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State. We urge Committee Members to make use of them during his nomination hearing.

The Reform Movement is the largest denomination in American Jewish life and believes firmly that all people are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of the Divine (Genesis 1:27). This animates our deep commitment to defending the human rights of all individuals, regardless of national origin.

Jewish tradition teaches that "You must not stand idly by when your neighbor's blood is being shed" (Leviticus 19:16). For this reason, we are obligated to speak out in defense of all who are persecuted. This commandment compels us to defend the rights of individuals around the world to practice their religion freely, to live without discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and to live a peaceful, prosperous, and healthy life. As Jews, we know too well the sting of persecution; therefore, we feel a unique obligation to welcome those who seek refuge and to ensure that Israel remains a Jewish and democratic homeland.

1. The United States and the world in general are facing a broad range of complex foreign policy challenges including major destabilizing forces like climate change, the global refugee crisis and the ongoing civil war in Syria. With so many complex and urgent challenges before us, it is more important than ever that the United States uphold its diplomatic commitments and deftly balance our own interests, while also maintaining our obligations to our allies. Stewarding the country through these uncertain times will require skilled leadership. What would be your first priorities as Secretary of State? What previous experiences do you think enhance your qualifications to represent the United States' interests on a global stage?

Israel

2. The United States has been a steadfast friend and ally to Israel since its founding in 1948. Democratic and Republican administrations alike have advanced U.S. interests and bolstered a key partner by strengthening Israel as it meets the security and economic challenges of the day. What do you see as the core principles of the U.S.-Israel relationship?



The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Reform Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.



3. The United States has taken a vital role in facilitating peace negotiations between Israel and her neighbors, including those which resulted in the Camp David accord, peace between Israel and Jordan, and the Oslo agreement. The U.S. strengthens Israel's security and advances its own national interest in the region through robust military aid: In September 2016, the United States and Israel agreed to a Memorandum of Understanding to provide \$38 billion to Israel over the next ten years.¹ What will be your key priorities for the U.S.-Israel relationship?
4. The two-state solution is widely accepted as the only way to maintain Israel's Jewish and democratic character.² A one-state solution would force Israel to maintain its status as a Jewish state at the price of forfeiting its democratic nature. As Israel's closest ally and a major provider of aid for both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the United States has historically taken a leadership role in brokering peace negotiations between the two parties. What are your goals for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
5. The presence and growth of settlements over the Green Line are a key issue within peace negotiations. How would you direct U.S. negotiations on the peace process regarding settlements? How would you direct U.S. policy on the other final status issues of Jerusalem, refugees, borders and security?
6. U.S. economic aid to the Palestinian Authority provides support for strengthening civil society. That in turn fosters stability and the provision of services, including education and health care, to the Palestinian people. What in your view are the benefits to ongoing U.S. aid to the PA?
7. President-elect Trump has said he intends to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.³ How do you intend to ensure that any such move does not further damage an already ailing peace process?
8. For any negotiations to move forward, both partners must be prepared to engage in difficult discussions and to address the most pressing concerns. The Palestinian Authority's decision to take unilateral action at the UN violates the principle that peace must be directly negotiated between the two parties. How do you plan to hold Palestinian representatives accountable for their responsibilities in regards to the peace process and to facilitate conditions that foster Israel having a partner for peace?
9. The United Nations has a long and troubling record of hostility toward Israel. Resolutions that target Israel for undue scrutiny, such as the recent Security Council Resolution 2334 regarding the legality of settlements, are harmful to the peace process. Former Secretary

¹ [The White House, "Fact Sheet: Memorandum of Understanding Reached with Israel."](#)

² [Brookings, "Two States, Four Paths for Achieving Them."](#)

³ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/19/world/middleeast/jerusalem-us-embassy-trump.html?_r=0

General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, has stated that the disproportionate number of Security Council resolutions targeting Israel have “foiled the ability of the UN to fulfill its duty effectively.”⁴ In October 2016, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) passed a motion denying a Jewish connection to the Temple Mount and recognizing the site as holy for only the Islamic faith. How will you use the United States’ influence at the UN and on the international stage to ensure that Israel is treated fairly in these and other international forums?

10. As an issue of existential importance for Jews worldwide, opinions on Israel within the Jewish community are diverse, and debate is active. Great sages of our tradition teach us that “debate for the sake of heaven” is healthy and even Divine, (Pirkei Avot, 5:17). For this reason, it is important that the State Department, and particularly the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, maintain open and active dialogue with all organizations representing major constituencies of American Jews. How will you foster this dialogue? How do you plan to engage representatives of Jewish organizations working from a variety of perspectives on issues related to Israel?

Foreign Aid

11. Foreign aid accounts for less than 1% of the United States’ annual budget, yet these dollars have an immense impact on improving the lives of vulnerable people worldwide. With \$22.7 billion dollars at its disposal, the United States Agency for International Development works to eradicate extreme poverty, support food security and promote global health initiatives all over the world.⁵ Since 2003, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief has provided life-saving antiretroviral treatment for 11.5 million people with HIV worldwide.⁶ These initiatives not only drastically improve the lives of the individuals who are affected, but they are also a smart foreign policy investment, improving global stability and perception of the United States. How will you strengthen the United States’ commitment to providing humanitarian aid?

Iran

12. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action represented a significant effort from the United States and the other permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany to address Iran’s nuclear weapons program. The agreement provides for regular inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities, which the UN asserts has so far have shown compliance with the terms of the JCPOA.⁷ What is your view of the JCPOA’s effectiveness thus far? Do you plan to advocate that the United States continue its commitments under the Plan? What will you do to ensure that all parties to the JCPOA maintain their obligations under the deal going

⁴ [Independent, “Ban Ki-moon says UN has ‘disproportionate’ focus on Israel.”](#)

⁵ [USAID, “FY 2017 Budget Request Highlights.”](#)

⁶ [The United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, “Funding and Results.”](#)

⁷ [Reuters, “Head of U.N. nuclear watchdog says Iran showing commitment to deal.”](#)

forward? If you do not believe the JCPOA should be maintained, how do you intend to address the challenge of Iran's nuclear ambitions?

International Human Rights

13. As a country founded on religious freedom, the United States has a unique moral voice with which to defend religious freedom for all. International religious freedom is a human right, and the United States affirmed this right when it supported the passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United States has upheld this commitment to international religious freedom through the establishment of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and the appointment of a United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. What will you do to strengthen these institutions and defend religious freedom internationally for all?
14. While ExxonMobil received a 85/100 on the Human Rights Campaign's 2017 Corporate Equality Index, this is a relatively new achievement.⁸ In both 2012 and 2013, ExxonMobil was given a negative 25 out of 100 possible points, the lowest score ever received by any corporation, for lacking any protections for LGBT workers against discrimination and for having "a large scale or public anti-LGBT blemish on their recent records."⁹ The company's nondiscrimination policies were changed to include protections for LGBT workers in 2015, but this was already a year after President Obama's 2014 executive order that required federal contractors to do so. As Secretary of State, you will be responsible for representing American values to the world. In what ways will you ensure that principles of inclusion and non-discrimination for LGBT people are among those values?
15. The U.S. Department of State's Office of Global Women's Issues is key to advancing and empowering women and girls worldwide by addressing violence against women and promoting economic, political and social equality. In what ways will you support the work of the Office of Global Women's Issues, and what are your priorities for promoting women's empowerment internationally?

Climate Change

16. While the United States has only 5% of the world's population, we contribute about 16% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰ The practices of the United States and other developed nations put an undue burden of climate change onto developing countries. As a developed nation and one of the top two emitters of greenhouse gases, the United States has a unique responsibility to be a world leader on climate action. It is the role of the

⁸ [Human Rights Campaign, "Corporate Equality Index, 2017."](#)

⁹ [Human Rights Campaign, "Corporate Equality Index, 2013."](#)

¹⁰ [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data: Emissions by Country."](#)

Secretary of State to lead the United States' effort on international climate action, through initiatives like the Paris Agreement and the Green Climate Fund. Will climate change be a major component of your diplomacy and negotiations with other countries on behalf of the United States? How do you plan to work with our international allies to both find solutions to the effects of climate change and mitigate their effects in the future? Will you maintain the United States' commitments to the Paris Agreement?

Syrian Civil War and Refugee Crisis

17. The Syrian Civil War, now nearing its sixth year, is an increasingly dire humanitarian crisis. In addition to the immense human cost of the fighting (the conflict has displaced over 11 million people and killed an estimated 470,000 people), the conflict has engaged a wide range of geopolitical actors.¹¹ The massive forced migration of civilians and continual fighting threaten to destabilize the entire Middle East, with consequences spilling over into Europe. Do you believe the United States has a core role to play in leading the international community's response to both the war and the refugee crisis? How do you plan to work multilaterally to deescalate the Syrian Civil War and address the related humanitarian crisis?

18. The current global refugee crisis is the most severe crisis of its kind since World War II, with over 65 million people displaced around the globe. Large scale conflicts in places like Syria, Iraq, and South Sudan have totally disrupted daily life, leading to a severe scarcity of resources that forces millions to flee their homes. Roughly 50% of these displaced people are children under the age of 18, who spend months or years in refugee camps without access to regular education.¹² Judaism teaches that we have a special obligation to welcome the stranger, and the Torah reiterates this commandment 36 times, more than any other commandment. The United States has a legacy of welcoming refugees, and as a wealthy nation, we have a moral obligation to open our doors safely and securely to the vulnerable and needy. While the United States demonstrated leadership in 2016 by welcoming 85,000 refugees, the scope of the global refugee crisis demands far greater action. What will you do to protect and strengthen the United States' refugee resettlement program?

¹¹ [Syrian Center for Policy Research, "Confronting Fragmentation: Impact of Syrian Crisis Report 2015."](#)

¹² [Doctors Without Borders, "Fall 2016 Alert. Forced From Home: Stories of Displacement From Around the Globe."](#)