

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 4, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our continued support for the position of U.S. Special Envoy to Belarus, which is vital to promoting democracy and freedom in Belarus. On December 15, 2020, Ambassador Julie Fisher was confirmed by the Senate as U.S. Ambassador to Belarus. This was the first time the position had been filled since 2008 and demonstrated the United States' continued commitment to a free and democratic Belarus. Unfortunately, Ambassador Fisher was denied a visa and accreditation by the Belarusian authorities and instead had to serve as Special Envoy to Belarus from Vilnius, Lithuania. Ambassador Fisher served in this role with distinction. However, given her recent appointment as Ambassador to Cyprus, we urge you to appoint a successor for this important role.

Over the past two years, the Lukashenka regime has continued to crack down on peaceful protestors and punish dissenting voices — a trend that began with the detention of more than 10,000 people who protested the 2020 fraudulent elections. These ongoing human rights violations include attacks on independent media, which are critical to a free and open society. In addition, Alyaksandr Lukashenka's continued support for Putin's unprovoked war in Ukraine shows his complete disregard for the democratic principles that have kept the peace in Europe since the end of World War II.

As Mr. Lukashenka tightens his authoritarian grip, the United States must remain a committed partner for all those pursuing a democratic future for Belarus. Ambassador Fisher provided critical support to the pro-democracy movement in Belarus and was a strong advocate for its democratic aspirations. She kept the spotlight on Lukashenka's horrendous human rights abuses and worked with Senators to establish the Free Belarus Caucus, which continues to marshal bipartisan support for the Belarussian people.

On June 9, 2022, Ambassador Fisher announced her departure from the role of U.S. Special Envoy to Belarus. We wish to thank the Government of Lithuania and the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius for their partnership in America's efforts to support the Belarusian people, and we congratulate Ambassador Fisher on her tour of duty. Her role of Special Envoy cannot be left vacant. As Ambassador Fisher demonstrated, this role played a critical role in keeping much-needed focus on Belarus, and the Administration needs to ensure this continues.

We therefore urge the State Department to work quickly with President Biden to ensure this position is preserved and filled without delay. If it is not filled, we respectfully request that the

State Department outline its strategy on diplomatic engagement with Belarus going forward, including plans to fill the position of U.S. Special Envoy.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Lindsey Graham
United States Senator