

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 11, 2022

Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our concern for the safety of the Foreign Service National (FSN) and Locally Employed Staff (LES) employed by the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Ukraine. These individuals and their families have made significant contributions to U.S. foreign policy objectives and diplomatic efforts in Ukraine and the region and are now at grave risk following the Russian invasion.

On February 14, 2022, you announced the temporary relocation of operations in Ukraine from the Embassy in Kyiv to Lviv due to safety concerns during the buildup of Russian forces.¹ While arrangements were made for all “core Embassy staff” that remained in the country to depart Kyiv, there were no such arrangements, to our knowledge or reported publicly, made for FSN and LES staff. To that end, we understand from press reports² that that on February 24th the locally employed staff committee sent the Department an email following Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified attack against Ukraine asking for further assistance and support in relocating outside of fighting zones or the country. A second email letter to Department leadership was also sent, signed by nearly 400 American foreign-service officers and other State Department personnel³, expressing frustration over what they described as the Department’s “lack of responsiveness” to requests for help from their Ukrainian colleagues.

We appreciate that late last week, the Department took the important step to provide paid administrative leave for all staff whose work was made impossible by Russia’s invasion, whether they have remained in Ukraine or have already relocated, as well as to provide salary advances to those with additional needs.⁴ Providing this sense of financial security in an uncertain and stressful time can go a long way to ensuring that local staff can continue to support their families’ needs.

Continuity of income, however, only partially addresses the concern. The opportunity to support the relocation of those local partners and their families in a time of crisis increasingly diminishes as each day passes, with limited transit options and soaring fuel costs. We fear that access to financial resources will not necessarily be enough to facilitate temporary relocation for those who may urgently wish to do so. Many related questions remain unanswered, including:

1. Did you receive the messages from Department staff, and have you formally responded?
2. What steps are being taken to help ensure that those staff and their families with have legitimate security concerns and who would like to leave the country have the support and resources to do so? Is there a standard operating procedure by which these requests are handled within the Department? If so, what is that process?

¹ <https://ua.usembassy.gov/operations-at-u-s-embassy-kyiv/>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/25/politics/us-embassy-kyiv-locally-employed-staff-letter/index.html>

³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/diplomats-urge-state-department-to-help-ukrainian-embassy-staff-left-behind-11645813673>

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/briefings/departments-press-briefing-25-february-2022/>

3. What processes, resources, and personnel will/has the Department put into place to ensure those who may be eligible to apply for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) are able to do so, in light of the suspension of consular operations in the country?
4. Is the Department exploring any options to assist displaced staff, including but not limited to engaging with allied and partner governments?
5. What other steps is the Department taking to assure locally employed staff that we stand behind them, and we will not forget their contributions to the U.S. Mission to Ukraine?

We appreciate that some of this information may be sensitive in light of the imperative to shield these individuals from any further risk and would welcome a future briefing on details that cannot be shared at this time. We look forward to responses to these questions and hearing more on the Department's continuing plans to support locally employed staff of the U.S. Mission in Ukraine. Thank you for your close attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress




Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Jamaal Bowman
Member of Congress



Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
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Gerald E. Connolly
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Jimmy Costa
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Raúl Grijalva
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Jahana Hayes
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