



## Congress of the United States House of Representatives

TERRI A. SEWELL  
7TH DISTRICT, ALABAMA

The Honorable Nikki Haley  
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations  
799 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017

Ambassador Haley:

I appreciate your prompt response to the congressional letter I cosigned regarding the report released by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights here in the United States. I strongly disagree with your assessment that its findings are either “misleading” or “politically motivated,” and I invite you to visit areas in Alabama covered by the report to gain a better understanding of the impacts of generational poverty in the United States.

The Special Rapporteur traveled to my district and state during his tour of the United States. He wasn’t the first to study poverty in Alabama and he certainly will not be the last.

In response to the conditions he saw in my state, he said, “In most countries in the Western world, it’s assumed governments will one way or another make sure basic facilities like clean running water, sewage, and sanitation are available. What was striking to me in Alabama was the extent to which there’s no sense that a government should be working towards providing basic infrastructure. If you happen to live in one of the big cities, you will get access, but if you don’t—and particularly if you live in one of the poor counties like Lowndes—there isn’t any obligation and there are no plans in place.” Later, he referenced those conditions in a tweet, “Lowndes County in rural #Alabama I saw homes that are not connected to public sewage systems, whose owners can’t afford to install septic tanks. Many resort to digging ditches & straight piping waste water to within meters of homes, posing serious health risks.”

In your response to my letter and the Special Rapporteur’s report, you cite the “remarkable improvements taking place in the U.S. economy.” I believe that if you visit Alabama’s Black Belt, you will find that there are communities which have not seen the benefit of the Trump Administration’s tax cut or its attack on healthcare subsidies. These communities, some without access to functional wastewater treatment, need immediate and targeted help in order to take advantage of today’s economic opportunities.

There is no event, group, or person solely responsible for the socioeconomic depravity that has followed my constituents and millions of Americans like them for generations. We are all responsible and history will hold us accountable for how we respond.

Your efforts to downplay the findings in the UN Report with statistics demonstrating poor conditions in Burundi and Democratic Republic of the Congo are noted. I want to remind you that the United States is the world’s standard bearer. We do not use the world’s most economically distressed countries as an

excuse to ignore depravity existing within our country. I understand that you have seen conditions in the Third World that most Americans couldn't fathom, but I urge you to abandon the desire to dismiss pain and suffering in the United States as a result. There is not a single cause or symptom of poverty or economic distress in my congressional district that I can resolve by telling my constituents that there are people worse off than them in other parts of the world.

I share your belief that the best pathway out of poverty is a job. There is indeed dignity in work. This is why I have made career development and job training the chief priority of my congressional agenda. My office hosts an annual Job Fair, which has become my office's biggest annual event. We also host career readiness workshops to provide those looking for jobs with the tools they need to be successful in their job search.

While we are delighted with the positive economic growth which began under the Obama Administration, our goal remains reversing the generational poverty that continues to exist in Alabama's 7<sup>th</sup> District. This work requires more than a focus on job attainment. While I am steadfast in my belief that there is dignity in work, there are millions of working Americans who live paycheck-to-paycheck their entire lives. They do not have the disposable income to take advantage of many of the luxuries you and I do, or in some cases even the income to afford a working septic tank.

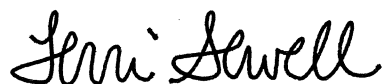
For these working Americans, there is no correlation between hard work and wealth. To thrive in any job, there are necessities that must be met, including access to basic health care, education and training, transportation, nutrition, child care, and clean water.

The absence of any of these necessities can lead to missed work and therefore, stagnation in or termination from employment. I appreciate your desire to focus on the positive upward trends in our economy, but I ask that you not forget about the marginalized in America today who must overcome basic structural barriers before they can realize successful workforce participation.

I invite you to my congressional district, where you can see for yourself the conditions reported on by the Special Rapporteur and meet with the communities impacted. You'll meet with people who have worked their entire lives, but haven't earned enough to afford a proper septic tank or a health insurance plan that covers quality dental care. It would be my great pleasure to introduce you to my constituents, who we all have a lot to learn from.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and your service to our great country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terri Sewell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Terri A. Sewell  
Member of Congress