

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 20, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Scott Bessent
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretaries Rubio and Bessent:

We write to urge the Department of the Treasury and the Department of State to promptly employ authorities under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and Executive Order 13818 to designate and sanction Russian individuals and entities responsible for increasingly common illicit schemes to lure foreign nationals to the Russian Federation under false pretenses and subsequently subject them to coercive military conscription or forced labor in support of Russia's war effort, including manufacturing drones and other critical military material.

As Putin's full-scale war on Ukraine reaches its fourth anniversary, Russia has turned to desperate and barbaric practices to acquire manpower. Russia recruits foreign nationals from areas where unemployment is high. They arrive expecting to take on the promised security or civilian jobs, only to be forced to the front lines after minimal military training.¹ These schemes are not limited to just battlefield manpower. Russia's "Alabuga Start" program has illicitly recruited women from around the world with promises of full-time jobs and professional training, only to force these unwitting participants into manufacturing jobs helping build the very drones that are central to Putin's campaign of indiscriminately bombing Ukrainian cities.² While Alabuga is under sanctions first imposed in 2024, we must do more to punish Russia's wide-ranging enterprise and thus deprive Russia of the human resources it needs to conduct its illegal war.³

The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act authorizes the President to impose sanctions on foreign persons responsible for or complicit in "gross violations of internationally

¹ Rael Ombuor and Katharine Houreld, Kenyan Job Seekers Were Lured to Russia, Then Sent to Die in Ukraine, Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/02/01/kenya-russia-military-ukraine-war/> (last updated Feb. 2, 2026).

² Mayeni Jones, 'My Skin Was Peeling' - the African Women Tricked Into Making Russian Drones, Bbc, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cdrzdpre058o> (last updated Nov. 5, 2025).

³ Department of the Treasury, On Second Anniversary of Russia's Further Invasion of Ukraine and Following the Death of Aleksey Navalny, Treasury Sanctions Hundreds of Targets in Russia and Globally, Department of the Treasury, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2117> (last updated Jan. 23, 2024).

recognized human rights.”⁴ Executive Order 13818, issued on December 20, 2017, implements and expands this authority, authorizing sanctions against foreign persons responsible for “serious human rights abuse,” which should be understood to include forced labor and trafficking in persons.⁵ The Magnitsky Act and Executive Order 13818 build on a longstanding U.S. recognition of human trafficking, forced labor, and involuntary servitude as grave violations of internationally recognized human rights. Congress expressly condemned such practices in the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, which defines trafficking in persons to include recruitment through fraud or coercion for forced labor or services.⁶

Illicit recruitment followed by forced conscription or labor constitutes human trafficking and a violation of human rights, squarely within the conduct that Magnitsky sanctions are designed to address. Imposing Magnitsky sanctions for human trafficking and forced labor schemes is not without precedent. In 2024, the Department of the Treasury sanctioned Cambodian businessman Ly Yong Phat, and his business for their role in abuses related to trafficked workers subjected to forced labor in online scam centers.⁷

To that end, we urge the Departments of State and Treasury and State to:

1. Identify and designate Russian individuals and entities involved in deceptive recruitment, forced conscription, or coerced labor schemes;
2. Impose sanctions pursuant to the Global Magnitsky Act and Executive Order 13818, including asset blocking and visa restrictions;
3. Coordinate with international partners to ensure a unified law enforcement response to punish schemes that go beyond Russia’s borders; and
4. Continue to aggressively enforce existing sanctions against Russians committing violations, especially those sanctions that weaken Russia’s war efforts against Ukraine.

Because Ukraine’s brave resistance on the battlefield has kept Russia from claiming victory, Russia has turned to even crueler tactics to bolster its defense industrial base. Using existing sanctions authorities against Russia to the maximum extent possible can help deal a decisive blow to Putin’s floundering campaign. We look forward to continuing to partner with this administration to hold Russia accountable for its continued crimes.

Sincerely,

⁴ Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, Pub. L. No. 114-328, tit. XII, subtit. F, §§1261—1265, 130 Stat. 2000, 2533–44 (2016), codified at 22 U.S.C. § 2656 note.

⁵ Exec. Order No. 13,818, 82 Fed. Reg. 60,839 (Dec. 20, 2017).

⁶ Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. §§ 7101-7114.

⁷ Department of the Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Cambodian Tycoon and Businesses Linked to Human Trafficking and Forced Labor in Furtherance of Cyber and Virtual Currency Scams, Department of the Treasury (Sept. 12, 2024), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2576>.



Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
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Sheldon Whitehouse
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Amy Klobuchar
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