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One Hundred and Twelfth Congress  
**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern**  
**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing**  
**“The Human Rights Crisis in Syria”**

**B-318 Rayburn HOB –Tuesday, March 27, 2012 – 09:30-11:00 AM**

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Good Morning. Thank you all for being here today for this important hearing on the human rights crisis in Syria.

I want to thank Congressman Keith Ellison, a Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Executive Committee Member, for encouraging the Commission to hold this hearing to highlight the horrific human rights situation in Syria and consider options for addressing it. I would like to thank Rupal Metha, Kate Hixon, and the staff of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for organizing this hearing.

I also want to thank our witnesses for testifying and for their leadership over the past year in raising awareness about the human rights crisis in Syria. Most especially, I believe we all need to thank the many people on the ground in Syria and in refugee camps in neighboring countries who have worked – sometimes at great risk to their own lives – to help people in tremendous need and to share information about conditions inside Syria with the outside world.

The arrest of a group of students in Daraa for scrawling anti-regime graffiti on a wall in March 2011 – just one year ago – sparked a wave of anger in that impoverished southern province. The government responded swiftly with force, setting off a cycle of protest and reprisal that spread across the country.

Since last March, tens of thousands of Syrians have been arrested, detained arbitrarily, held incommunicado, and tortured as the Assad regime tries to crush its opponents and any voices of dissent or calls for reform. Severe beatings, electric shocks, and sexual violence have been used against Syrians by security personnel. In some cases, torture has been so severe that victims have died in custody. Medical professionals face arrest, prosecution, and even death if they try to provide medical assistance or carry out their obligation to put a patient's welfare first.

As a result of the violence perpetrated by the Syrian government, more than 200,000 people have been displaced, and the number is rising rapidly. Refugees leave their homes daily, often under fire, to set out for neighboring Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. The Syrian government is deploying landmines near its borders as a deadly tactic to prevent civilians from escaping.

Given the great insecurity inside Syria, I was pleased that the Administration announced on Friday that it is designating Temporary Protected Status for Syrian nationals in the United States.

Despite widening international condemnation, Assad's regime has largely remained intact and brutal repression by the Syrian government continues. Western and Arab countries have struggled to stop the bloodshed by calling on Assad to step down and imposing sanctions. One year into the Syrian revolt, the fight

to oust Assad is cascading toward civil war with more than 8,000 killed and no end in sight to the bloodshed.

I have been very disappointed by the response of Russia and China to the crisis in Syria. While most of the international community has been united in seeking to apply heavy pressure on the Assad regime to stop its assault on the Syrian people, the governments of Russia and China have refused to support strong U.N. action to squeeze the regime. Even worse, Russia has continued to provide military aid to the Syrian government.

The United States should not continue to purchase arms from Russian companies that are providing the government of Syria with lethal weapons. The Defense Department recently signed a \$375 million contract to purchase helicopters for the Afghan military from the Russian state arms dealer. I believe this sends the wrong signal about the importance of withholding arms from a government that is committing terrible atrocities.

The humanitarian situation in Syria remains catastrophic for civilians. We must do all we can to provide humanitarian assistance to Syrians in need and place more pressure on the Syrian government to stop its assault on the Syrian people.

It is my hope that today's hearing will bring new awareness of the human rights abuses currently taking place in Syria and new ideas for taking action to address these abuses and save lives in Syria.

With that said, I turn the gavel over to Congressman Ellison to chair the remainder of the hearing.