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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**

#### **“No Safe Haven: Law Enforcement Operations**

#### **Against Foreign Human Rights Violators in the U.S.”**

**334 Cannon HOB – Thursday, October 13, 2011 – 10:00-11:30 A.M.**

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Good morning and welcome. Thank you for attending this important hearing on the efforts of the United States government to address the issue of human rights violators from other countries who later come to the United States. I want to welcome my fellow members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. I would like to give special thanks to Colleen Costello for coordinating this morning’s hearing and I appreciate all the Commission staff who helped prepare for this event.

Since the end of World War II, the United States has maintained a generous policy of providing refuge for millions of people fleeing the effects of persecution and war in their home countries. A significant number of those refugees have been harmed and damaged by abusive and criminal behavior, and they bear the physical and psychological scars to prove it. According to the Department of Health and Human Service’s Office of Refugee Resettlement, approximately 400,000 current refugees are survivors of torture. Many more have suffered in other ways, from witnessing the needless death of family members to the destruction of their homes, places of worship, and cultural centers. All those individuals find a measure of safety and comfort in the United States and become part of our local communities throughout the country. We all can be proud of this tradition.

Unfortunately, our nation’s noble effort to protect the vulnerable at the time of their greatest need has also inadvertently opened the door to individuals who are in fact responsible for inflicting the very pain and suffering which requires the United States to act as a place of refuge. These human rights

violators and war criminals take advantage of the openness of the United States to evade punishment or prosecution in their home countries, or to enjoy the proceeds of their crimes in our free and open society. These individuals sometimes reside in the same communities as their victims, causing further traumatization in the process. It is true that some perpetrators have been victims of atrocities themselves, but they then attempt to use that fact as an excuse for their subsequent crimes – in fact, it is not an excuse. Finally, a few shamelessly and falsely claim to be victims when in fact the truth is that they only created victims. Whatever the reasons and background, it is wrong that they are here.

Starting with the attempts by the Department of Justice to track down and deport Nazis in the late 1970s, the United States Government has gradually become increasingly focused on reversing the course of protecting those who have committed or assisted in human rights abuses. Today, both the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security use a range of law enforcement tools and techniques to identify, investigate, prosecute, and remove human rights violators residing within our borders. There are teams of federal agents, attorneys, analysts, researchers, experts, and historians who cooperate in enforcing criminal and immigration laws designed to achieve the same goal: Ensuring that this country does not become a “safe haven” for human rights abusers. Also, there is a growing effort to improve information sharing amongst agencies and departments to deny admission to human rights abusers who attempt to gain entry into the United States.

In addition, there is a role for those outside government to assist in the efforts to end impunity. For example, various non-governmental organizations may work with victims to cooperate with U.S. law enforcement in criminal and immigration proceedings, or may pursue other legal avenues for accountability. There is also a need for various ethnic and cultural groups to engage with law enforcement and identify perpetrators in their communities.

Today, the Commission looks forward to hearing from the two U.S. government agencies most responsible for investigating, prosecuting, and removing human rights violators: the Department of Justice’s Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section, and the Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement. We will also receive testimony from the Center for Justice and Accountability, a victims’ rights advocacy organization which has played an important role in supporting the

work of these federal agencies and has taken other steps to promote accountability.

Although a Senate subcommittee has twice held hearings regarding current-day U.S. law enforcement efforts against human rights violators, there apparently has not been a hearing in the House of Representatives on this topic before now. Again, on behalf of the Commission, I thank all of our witnesses for being here. We look forward to hearing your testimony.