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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 on**  
**“Human Rights in Syria”**  
**340 Cannon HOB – Tuesday, July 12, 2011 – 10:00-11:30 AM**

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Good morning. I want to thank everyone for being here today. I would also like to thank Jann (YONN) Futterman and the staff of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for coordinating this hearing, and I especially want to thank our witnesses for their attendance.

It is my hope that today’s hearing will bring some much needed awareness to the human rights abuses currently taking place in Syria. I also would like to examine the current refugee situation that has resulted from the violence perpetrated by the Syrian government.

As we sit here today, crimes against humanity are taking place in Syria. In its desperate attempts to cling to power, the authoritarian government of President Bashar al-Asad has carried out extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture, denial of medical assistance to the wounded, and the deprivation of basic services to the civilian population.

The Dara’a (DAR-AH) district in the South has been particularly targeted by Syrian security forces, leading to over 400 deaths, while the overall death toll throughout Syria has risen to well over 1,500. There have been reports of security forces using live ammunition against unarmed civilians – of shootings by snipers positioned on rooftops of public buildings – and of the deployment of tanks in densely populated areas.

Just recently, security forces have responded to protests in the western city of Hama, which is evidence that the protests, as well as the violence, is spreading.

This situation has understandably spurred on a mass exodus of refugees attempting to escape the violence by fleeing into Turkey. The Syrian government's military operation against cities in the north has reportedly led 15,000 Syrians to flee to Turkey, where 10,000 of them have been relocated to refugee camps near the border. All the while, Syrian security forces have been violently trying to keep people from fleeing. Those who are lucky enough to escape Syria live in makeshift camps along the Syria-Turkey border where conditions are extremely difficult.

In short, the human rights situation in Syria is dire.

Sometimes when such grave human rights violations occur in real time, it makes it difficult to grasp the gravity of what is taking place. It is only when we take a step back that we realize what we have really witnessed. History has a strange way of making us think that nothing could have been done, that we were powerless, that there was a certain inevitability to it.

However, I believe that something can be done. We are not powerless. We have a responsibility to act. There is no inevitability to the atrocities being committed by the Syrian government against the Syrian people.

I hope that this hearing will highlight magnitude of the human rights violations taking place in Syria as well as the urgency with which we need to act to prevent the continuation of such violations.