

FRANK R. WOLF, Virginia
Co-Chairman
CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
JOSEPH R. PITTS, Pennsylvania
TRENT FRANKS, Arizona



JAMES P. MCGOVERN, Massachusetts
Co-Chairman
TAMMY BALDWIN, Wisconsin
JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY, Illinois
KEITH ELLISON, Minnesota
DONNA F. EDWARDS, Maryland

One Hundred and Twelfth Congress

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

February 1, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama
The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write today to express our concern about attacks in recent days perpetrated by Egyptian authorities against peaceful demonstrators across the country. As the administration continues to engage the Government of Egypt, in the midst of ongoing protests, we urge you to emphasize both privately and in public statements that all parties involved should refrain from violence and that any transition should be peaceful and democratic and ensure that human rights and religious freedom are protected. It is imperative that the rapidly evolving situation not be exploited by extremist elements whose ultimate aims would be antithetical to these hallmarks of a free society.

For years, the Egyptian people have been thwarted from expressing their legitimate grievances through democratic means. These abuses of government power are well known. Our own State Department's annual human rights report found that in Egypt, "The government's respect for human rights remained poor, and serious abuses continued in many areas. The government limited citizens' right to change their government and continued a state of emergency that has been in place almost continuously since 1967."

Since last week, hundreds of thousands of individuals have joined in demonstrations against the lack of political freedom, poverty, police abuse and corruption that have marked President Hosni Mubarak's regime. Today, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that unconfirmed reports suggest that "as many as 300 people may have been killed so far, more than 3,000 injured, and hundreds arrested." Prominent opposition leaders and human rights activists have been targeted by security forces during the demonstrations.

The situation is especially precarious given the lack of communication and information within the country since the regime moved to cut Internet and mobile phone services last Thursday. AP reported Monday that "The last of Egypt's main Internet

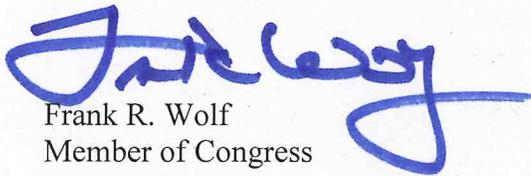
service providers, the Noor Group, has gone dark.” Furthermore, according to the non-governmental organization (NGO) Reporters Without Borders, authorities have arrested journalists in order to prevent information and press accounts of the events unfolding on the ground from leaving the country.

While these abuses are particularly acute in the face of growing unrest, in many respects they are utterly consistent with the repression endured by the Egyptian people for decades and underscore the importance of the United States being a voice for the voiceless around the world at *all* times. Tellingly, Voice of America reported that “The Chinese government is blocking access to searches for the word ‘Egypt’ on social networking Internet sites in China.” Authoritarian governments the world over fear their own people. Even as we engage with foreign governments, we must support the democratic aspirations of their people—not simply elections, but a robust civil society marked by freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion, among others.

As the administration continues to engage with the Egyptian government we also ask you to emphasize the potentially precarious situation facing religious minorities, including the Coptic Christians and the Baha’is, during this period of transition. They are important moderating influences and critical to the future of a democratic and pluralistic Egypt. They have long suffered governmental and societal discrimination and hostility in Egypt, but they could be particularly vulnerable in these uncertain times. Evidence has already emerged that these communities are suffering, as police and security forces focus on the protection of the regime.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress