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One Hundred and Twelfth Congress
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

April 11, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

The long-standing dispute regarding the Western Sahara and its detrimental impact on the people living in that region demands U.S. leadership. In April 2011, the United Nations Security Council will be reviewing the mandate for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Given the very precarious and vulnerable situation of the Sahrawi people there, it is critical that the United States government along with the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy to Western Sahara and other interested parties fully explore the human rights situation in that region during the April session. During the upcoming Security Council debates on the issue, the U.S. should play an active role in advocating for the establishment of a permanent, neutral, international human rights monitoring and reporting body in Western Sahara and the refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria.

MINURSO was created in 1991 to oversee a cease-fire between Morocco and the Polisario Front, and to implement a referendum on self-determination, which has not yet taken place. MINURSO stands as the only modern UN peacekeeping mission that does not contain a human rights component. The uncertain political situation in the territory, coupled with the lack of an international human rights monitoring body, has had dire consequences on the rights of the Sahrawi people.

Both MINURSO and outside parties have faced intermittent interference with access to information, freedom of movement, and entry to the country, demonstrating that the status quo is inadequate. Strong leadership by the United States would be critical to addressing these concerns.

In addition to supporting a human rights component within MINURSO, the U.S. should also play a lead role in exploring alternative impartial international mechanisms to monitor the human rights situation. Any human rights monitoring mechanism must have the capacity to monitor and investigate, seek redress for violations, and be able to hold

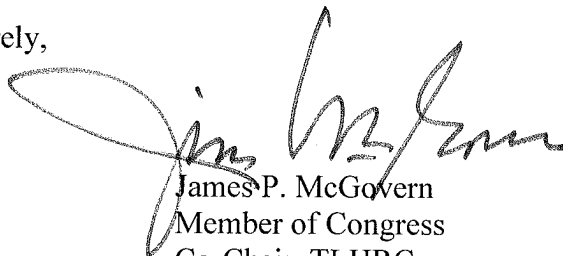
the state and individuals accountable for violations of human rights. It should report to the UN Security Council and monitor the situation in both Western Sahara and the refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria.

As the entire region is undergoing a period of unrest and transition, it is critical that the United States voice its strong support for protection of human rights. We therefore call on the U.S. government, the UN Secretary General's Personal Envoy to Western Sahara, and other interested parties to address the human rights situation in Western Sahara during the review of MINURSO's mandate, and to lead the efforts to find a viable solution.

Sincerely,



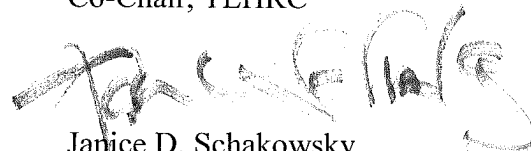
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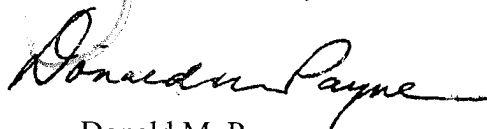
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Member of Congress
Exec. Committee, TLHRC



Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress
Exec. Committee, TLHRC



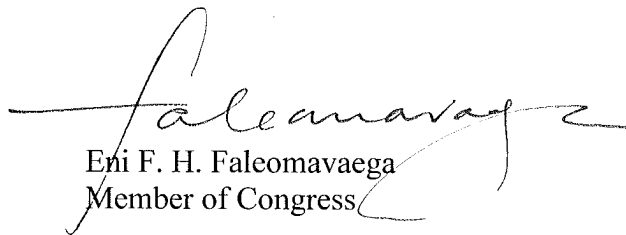
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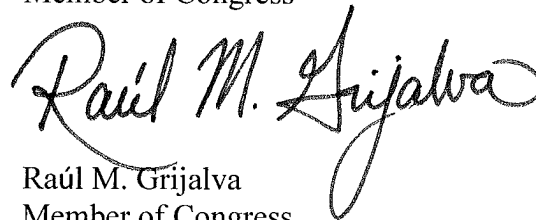
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