

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 11, 2009

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing to express concern regarding the alarming situation facing proponents of human rights and the rule of law in the Russian Federation.

As you know, Natalya Estemirova, a prize-winning human rights activist in Russia's volatile North Caucasus region, was found murdered in Ingushetia on July 15th after being kidnapped from her home in neighboring Chechnya. Sadly, Estemirova's brutal murder serves as yet another startling example of the pattern of murders of journalists and human rights activists in Russia. Estemirova in fact worked with the late journalist Anna Politkovskaya, a prominent critic of the Russian government's human rights abuses in Chechnya, who was herself murdered in Moscow in 2006, and with Politkovskaya's attorney, Stanislav Markelov, who was shot to death earlier this year along with opposition newspaper reporter Anastasia Baburova. Russian authorities have yet to solve those murders or those of other independent journalists and human rights activists. Considering such troubling instances of the use of mortal force against reporters and activists, international media watchdog groups view Russia as one of the most dangerous places in the world for working journalists.

Estemirova and many other human rights activists and journalists who have been murdered in Russia have worked to expose the involvement of government authorities in massive human rights abuses in the North Caucasus. In fact, earlier this month, Memorial, a Russian human rights group, and Human Rights Watch issued a report accusing Russian and Chechen local authorities of severe human rights violations in Chechnya.

On a related matter regarding human rights and the rule of law in Russia, we are concerned about the designation of Vladislav Surkov to serve as the Russian government's representative in the new U.S.-Russia Working Group on Civil Society, part of the bilateral presidential commission to be established under an agreement between you and President Medvedev. Mr. Surkov is reportedly one of the masterminds behind Russia's authoritative policies of the past years, which have resulted in the Kremlin consolidating its power, restricting activities of political opposition parties and cracking down on independent media and NGOs. Further, Mr. Surkov's designation has

been strongly criticized in an open letter signed by over twenty of Russia's leading human rights activists.

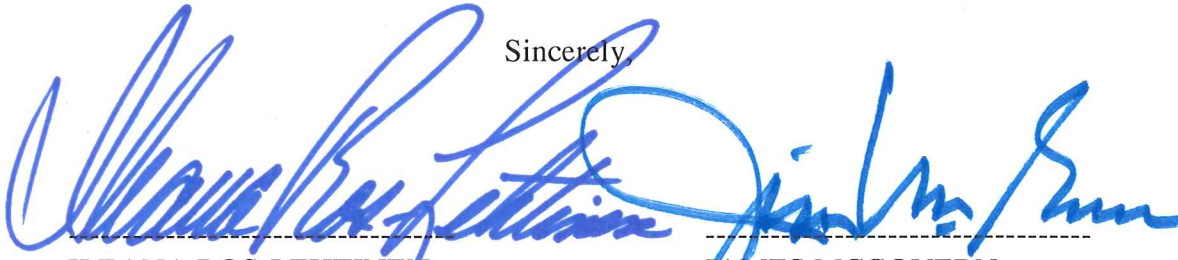
The United States should not participate in any such Working Group on Civil Society unless and until the Russian government has taken concrete, verifiable steps to address the significant shortcomings in its treatment of political and media freedoms in Russia. Having the Russian government replace Mr. Surkov as the co-chair of the Working Group on Civil Society with someone who has not been involved in establishing oppressive and undemocratic policies in Russia would be a positive starting point in that regard.

We ask that your Administration raise with the appropriate officials of the Russian government and with officials of the leading member-states of the European Union, the critical issue of the continuing murders in Russia of independent journalists, lawyers and human rights activists such as Ms. Estemirova.

Mr. President, in closing, we respectfully request that you and members of your administration take these extremely troubling and important matters into consideration as you formulate and implement United States foreign policy towards Russia, and that you demand immediate steps by the Russian government to end what appears to be government-sponsored repression.

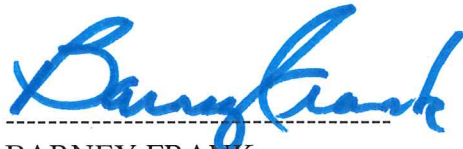
We look forward to working with you and members of your Administration on these and other important matters.

Sincerely,

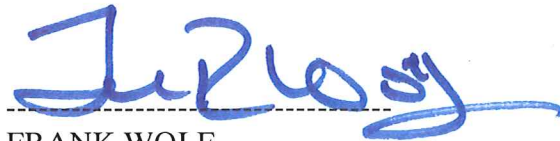


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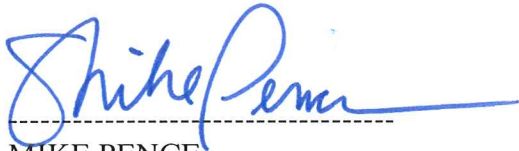
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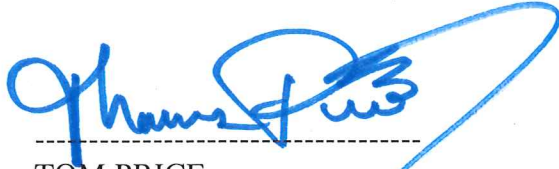
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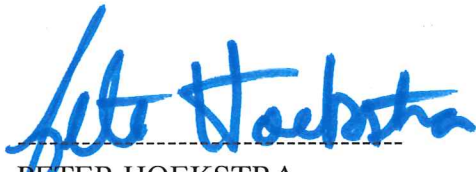
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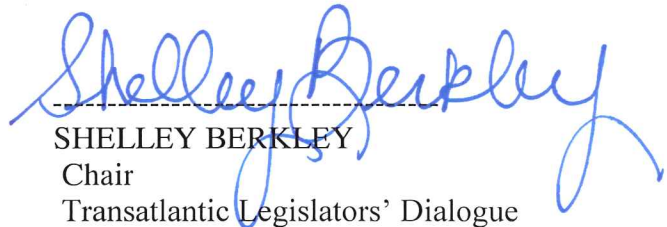
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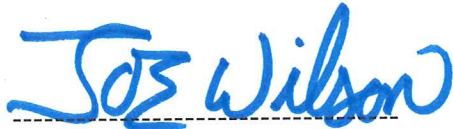
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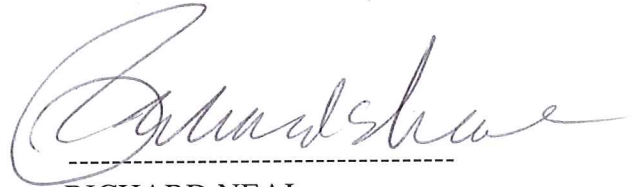
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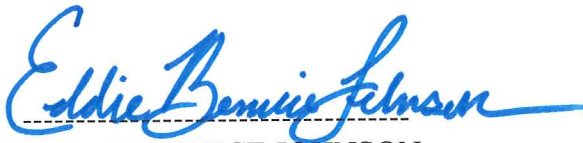
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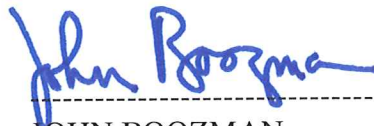
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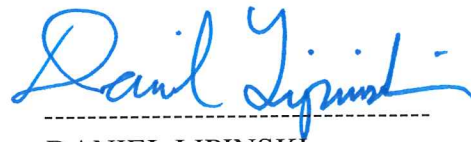
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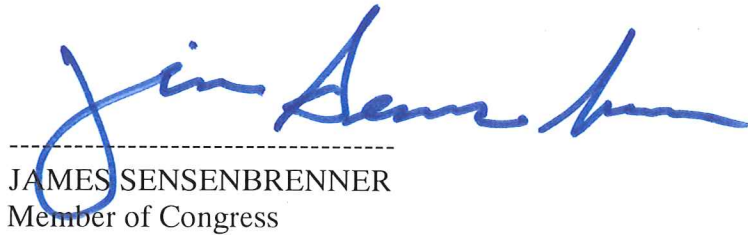
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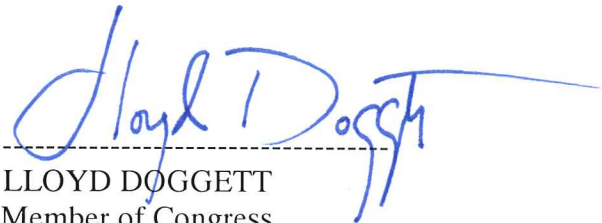
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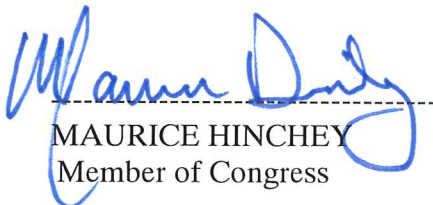
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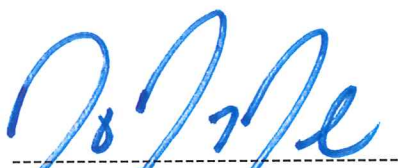
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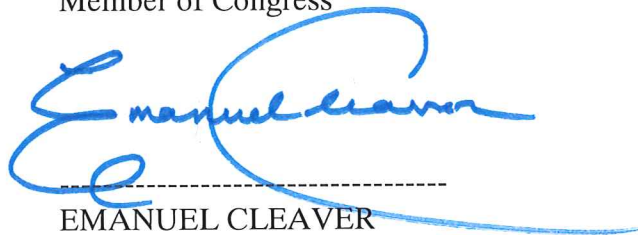
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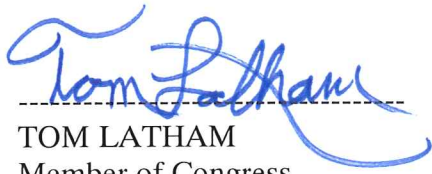
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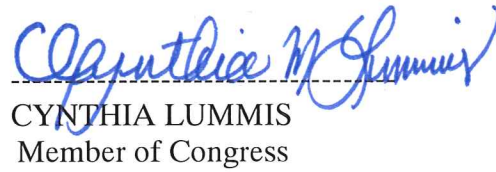
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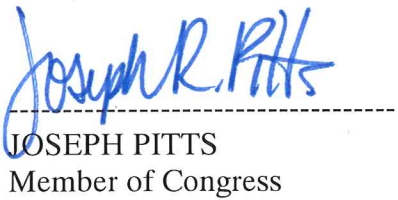
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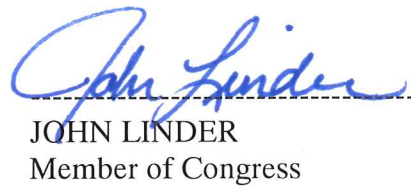
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