

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 24, 2006

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Secretary Rice:

We are writing to express our concern about the continuing crisis facing several hundred Sudanese refugees in Cairo, Egypt, and in particular the threat of imminent deportation facing these refugees. We urge you to use your good offices to convey our concerns regarding the status, welfare and safety of these Sudanese refugees to the Government of Egypt. We also ask that you encourage President Hosni Mubarak not to deport these refugees back to Sudan and to allow an independent inquiry into the events leading up to and surrounding the December 30th confrontation.

We appreciate the fact that Egypt has accommodated an estimated 2-3 million Sudanese within its borders, and even though these refugees often face harsh living conditions and discrimination, they are, nonetheless, safe from the current violence and perils confronting many regions of Sudan. As you are well aware, in late December, a situation with a comparatively small number of Sudanese – according to media reports, around 2,500 refugees – that had been encamped since September in a Cairo public square in front of the UNHCR Office escalated into an assault by the Egyptian police and security forces against this group, resulting in a yet-to-be-determined number of dead Sudanese and many more hurt or wounded; we have also heard reports that many Egyptian police were also injured in the confrontation.

We recognize that negotiations had been occurring between the refugees, officials at the UNHCR Cairo Office, and the Egyptian authorities in the weeks and days leading up to the assault. Ultimately not only did negotiations break down, but it also appears that there was a communications break down between all parties, and the police were authorized to disperse the refugees from the public square. Nonetheless, the police operation carried out in the wee hours of the morning on December 30th escalated into violence and led directly to the current humanitarian crisis facing these Sudanese refugees.

While all of the Sudanese refugees were initially placed in detention, the Egyptian government, to its credit, has released the overwhelming majority, and less than two hundred remain in detention pending a determination of their legal status by the UNHCR. No one has been deported, and the Egyptian government has extended a series of deadlines threatening deportation of the detained Sudanese should their refugee status not be confirmed by UNHCR. It is our understanding that the most current deadline will expire on Thursday, January 26th.

Many of the facts leading up to the confrontation remain unclear; however, we firmly believe that the remaining detainees should not be deported back to Sudan. Some of the affected Sudanese refugees are from the Darfur region, and in no way can we support a return to that

genocidal region of Sudan. The majority of the victims are from Christian and animist tribal groups of southern Sudan, where a tenuous peace accord is being implemented and where we strongly believe only repatriations of a *voluntary* nature should occur. We reject the arguments put forward by officials of the UNHCR Cairo Office to justify their refusal to heed the southern Sudanese refugees' pleas for resettlement somewhere other than Sudan with the bureaucratic explanation that the petitioners no longer qualified as refugees.

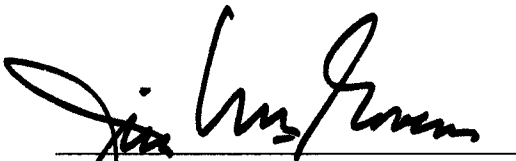
We further believe that there are very credible reports regarding the use of excessive force by the Egyptian police against the refugees. While we welcome and are encouraged by the Egyptian government assigning its Attorney General to carry out an investigation into the actions taken by the police and security forces, we also believe that an independent inquiry into these events is warranted to review not just the orders and actions of and the excessive force used by the Egyptian police, but also the role, decisions and actions taken by the UNHCR Cairo Office, the Sudanese refugees' leadership, and other Sudanese that may have contributed to the deterioration of the situation in the public square in the days and hours leading up to police assault.


We believe there is more than enough blame to be shared for the deaths, detentions and precarious situation of these Sudanese refugees in Cairo: the Egyptians who ordered the police assault against the refugees; the Khartoum regime the refugees were fleeing; and the UNHCR officials in the Cairo Office who had refused and/or failed to effectively process these refugees for resettlement in some third country.

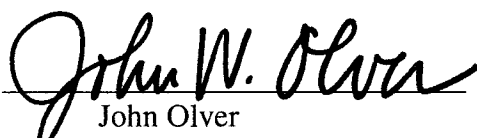
Once again, **we urge you to express in the strongest terms the U.S. government's opposition to the deportation of any of these Sudanese refugees in Cairo back to Sudan, and to press for an independent inquiry into the events leading up to and resulting in the assault against these refugees.** Finally, we also encourage the State Department review the status of these refugees and seek to accommodate as many as possible within the United States under our own refugee resettlement program.


Thank you in advance for your immediate attention to these requests and our concerns.

Sincerely,


James P. McGovern
Member of Congress


Donald Payne
Member of Congress


John Oliver
Member of Congress


Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Richard Neal
Member of Congress



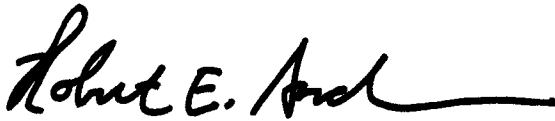
Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress



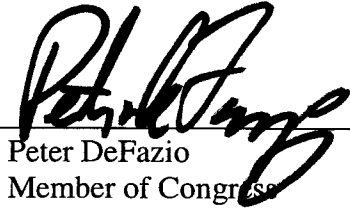
Al Green
Member of Congress



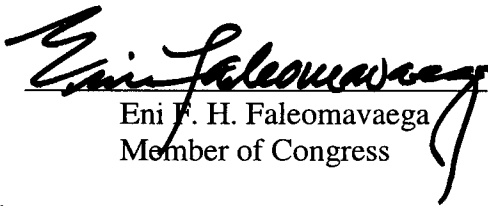
Michael H. Michaud
Member of Congress



Robert E. Andrews
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



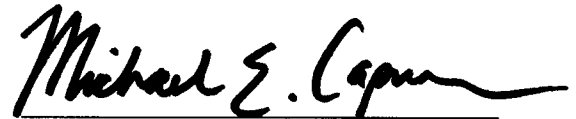
Eni F. H. Faleomavaega
Member of Congress



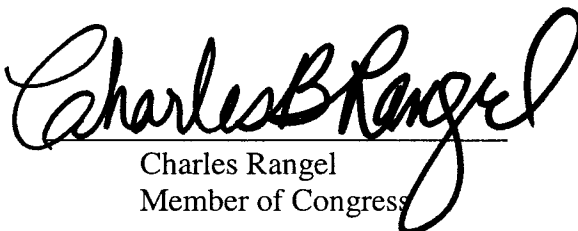
Michael Honda
Member of Congress



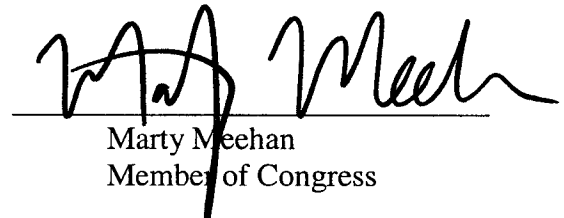
Mark Udall
Member of Congress



Mike Capuano
Member of Congress



Charles Rangel
Member of Congress



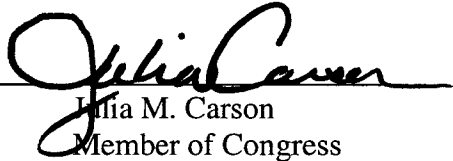
Marty Meehan
Member of Congress



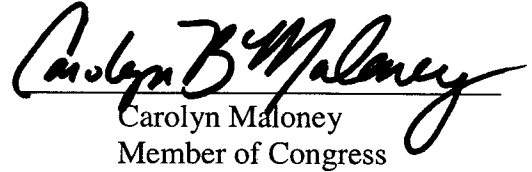
Jim Moran
Member of Congress



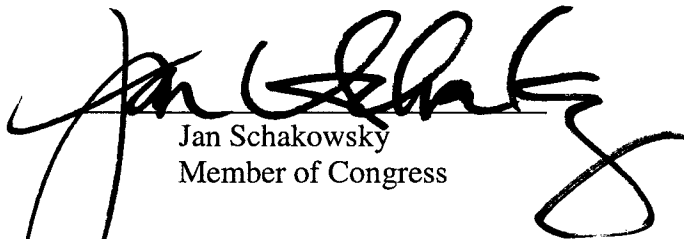
Bill Delahunt
Member of Congress



Julia M. Carson
Member of Congress



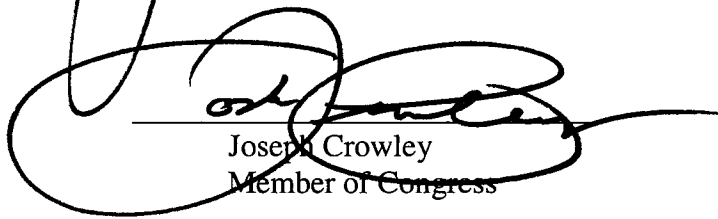
Carolyn Maloney
Member of Congress



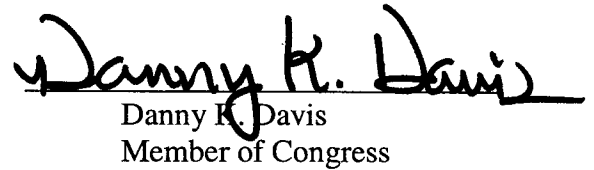
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



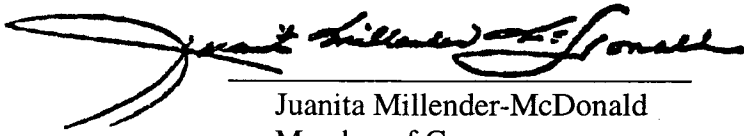
Tom Lantos
Member of Congress



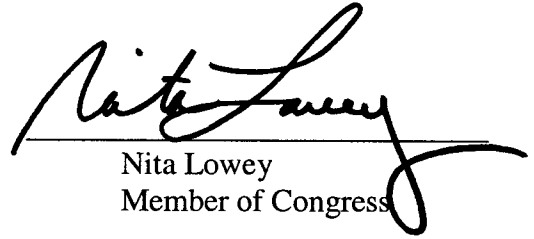
Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Juanita Millender-McDonald
Member of Congress



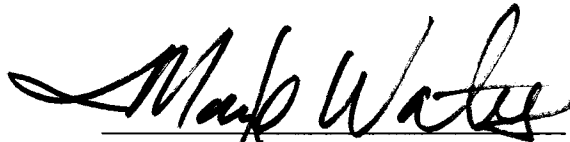
Nita Lowey
Member of Congress



Frank Wolf
Member of Congress



David Scott
Member of Congress



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

cc: C. David Welch, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
Barry F. Lowenkron, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights
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Francis J. Ricciardone, U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, Cairo, Egypt
Nabil Fahmy, Ambassador to the United States, Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt,
Washington, D.C.
Wendy Young, Governmental Affairs, UNHCR, Washington Office