

Representatives Call on Administration to Endorse U.N. Investigation of Bhutto Assassination and to Prevent Delay in Pakistani Elections

Washington, DC—On Monday, U.S. Representative Steve Israel (D-NY), a Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, led his colleagues in a letter they will send tomorrow to Secretary Condoleezza Rice concerning the Administration's statements on the assassination of Benazir Bhutto and the impending elections in Pakistan. The letter calls on the Bush Administration to support the previously scheduled date of January 8 for Pakistani elections and to endorse an international investigation, to be conducted by the United Nations, into the Bhutto assassination. The letter was signed by U.S. Representatives Steve Israel (D-NY), Joseph Crowley, Ron Klein (D-FL), Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), James McGovern (D-MA), Donald Payne (D-NJ), Adam Schiff (D-CA), Allyson Schwartz (D-PA), Brad Sherman (D-CA) and Adam Smith (D-WA)

"The Bush Administration should not turn a blind eye to another setback to democracy in Pakistan," said Congressman Israel. "We need to foster the democratic process by allowing the Pakistani people to have an election on January 8 as previously scheduled and ensure that an independent investigation into the assassination of Benazir Bhutto takes place."

In the letter to Secretary Rice, the representatives respond to the Administration's assertion that an investigation of the Bhutto assassination should be an "internal" matter for Pakistan by pointing out the Administration's policy on the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri of Lebanon. They also indicate their support for further restrictions on U.S. aid to Pakistan until an independent investigation is conducted and democratic elections are held.

A copy of the letter follows:

December 31, 2007

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice

Secretary of State

U.S. Department of State

2201 C Street NW

Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice

Secretary of State

U.S. Department of State

2201 C Street NW

Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Madame Secretary:

We are deeply concerned with recent Administration statements with respect to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.

It troubles us that the White House today said that the matter of the assassination of Ms. Bhutto is an internal matter for Pakistan. In fact, in other circumstances we have not hesitated to join in calls for international investigations of crimes with sovereign nations when the actions had worldwide implications and there were legitimate issues raised about the objectivity or capability of a host government to conduct the investigation alone -- as was the case in the assassination of Rafik Hariri.

Furthermore, there are serious questions and contradictions emerging regarding the circumstances of Ms. Bhutto's death, including statements by doctors who examined her and videotape that clearly shows that she was shot by a bullet. These contradictions demonstrate the need for a vigorous and independent international investigation into her cause of death.

With respect to the upcoming elections, the leaders of Pakistan's largest political parties have joined in calling for the elections to go forward as scheduled on January 8th. The White House has stated that the scheduling of the elections should be determined by the political parties, the largest of which have demanded that the elections go forth as planned. Yet the White House also said that if the election is postponed, it should be postponed to a date certain. This is not the right message to send, as it is practically an open invitation to postpone those elections.

As you know, Congress has withheld \$50 million in aid to Pakistan in this year's appropriations process. Without being satisfied that an investigation is truly impartial and independent, and with the belief that elections were postponed in order to further setback the democratic aspirations of the Pakistani people, we will focus intently on the status of these funds already withheld and may seek additional restrictions in the future appropriations bills.

We urge you and President Bush to clearly call for elections to take place as scheduled, and to endorse an international investigation by the United Nations of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.

Our support for future aid to Pakistan is at stake over this issue.

Sincerely,

Steve Israel

Joseph Crowley

Ron Klein

Carolyn Maloney

James McGovern

Donald Payne

Adam Schiff

Allyson Schwartz

Brad Sherman

Adam Smith