

*Members Express Concern with Musharraf Government Manipulating Elections and Call for International Monitoring and Removal of Restrictions on Media*

Washington, DC— Today, Congressman Steve Israel (D-NY) led twelve of his colleagues in Congress in sending a letter to Secretary Rice regarding the upcoming elections in Pakistan. The letter calls on Secretary Rice to encourage Pakistani President Musharraf to allow international monitoring of the February 18 elections in Pakistan and to remove restrictions on the media.

“Without a credible electoral process, instability in Pakistan will continue, and likely worsen, to the detriment of the people of Pakistan and U.S. national interests,” said Congressman Israel, a Member of the State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee. “We need to do everything we can to ensure the elections are fair, that media can work without restriction and that the elections are not further postponed.”

The letter, sent today, was signed by the following House Members: Steve Israel (D-NY), Gary Ackerman (D-NY), Joseph Crowley (D-NY), Lloyd Doggett (D-TX), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), Patrick Kennedy (D-MA) Steve Rothman (D-NJ), Tim Ryan (D-OH) and Anthony Weiner (D-NY).

A full copy of the letter follows:

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

February 8, 2008

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice  
Secretary of State  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

We write to express our concern that the United States is not doing enough to prevent the government of President Pervez Musharraf from manipulating the upcoming February 18th elections in Pakistan. Without a credible electoral process, instability in Pakistan will continue, and likely worsen, to the detriment of the people of Pakistan and U.S. national interests.

As you know, on November 3, 2007, President Musharraf suspended the Pakistani constitution and assumed emergency powers under a Provisional Constitutional Order. That order suspended a number of fundamental rights listed in the Pakistani constitution including freedom from unlawful arrest and detention and the freedoms of movement, assembly, association and

speech. In addition, the order required that the country's judges take a new oath of office. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court refused to take the new oath and he, along with seven of his colleagues and scores of other High Court judges, were suspended. The courts were subsequently reconstituted with justices appointed by President Musharraf.

The lack of an independent judiciary also undermines Pakistan's Election Commission since the commission is headed by a former Supreme Court Justice handpicked by President Musharraf and is made up of sitting High Court judges from each of the four provinces. As these judges all now serve at the pleasure of President Musharraf, it is difficult to see how the people of Pakistan can have any faith that the institutional supervision of the upcoming elections will be free and fair.

In addition, it is our understanding that the Government of Pakistan has barred monitors from conducting exit polls and has otherwise severely restricted the ability of international monitors to oversee the election. Because of these restrictions, the International Republican Institute (IRI), which had previously planned to send dozens of election monitors to Pakistan, has now decided against sending such a mission. In a January 25th article published in the McClatchy Newspapers, Lorne Craner, President of IRI, was quoted as saying, "It's very unusual not to be able to do an exit poll.....An exit poll or a parallel vote tabulation is an extra assurance of the legitimacy of the election."

In light of these circumstances, we urge you to call on President Musharraf to allow all international monitors the freedom to do their job fully, including access to polling stations in areas beyond the major cities. In addition, we urge you to ask that the Election Commission be reconstituted so it enjoys the confidence of all major political parties. Lastly, we urge you to ask President Musharraf to lift all restrictions on the media, and for his assurance that the elections will not be postponed beyond the stated February 18th date.

According to the latest opinion polls, 75% of Pakistanis want President Musharraf to step down immediately. With the elections for the new Parliament one week away, President Musharraf has an obvious incentive to manipulate the elections in order to produce a parliament supportive of him. Pakistan is the world's sixth largest country and its 165 million people deserve an election that is free, fair and transparent. We must do all that we can to warn President Musharraf not to undermine the credibility of the election, an act which could trigger mass unrest and create further instability in a nation that is crucial to our fight against global terrorism.

International monitors, a reformed judiciary and electoral commission and an unrestricted media are all necessary to bring credibility to the Pakistani elections and we ask you to urge President Musharraf to take these steps to ensure free and fair elections in Pakistan.

Sincerely,

Steve Israel, Gary Ackerman, Joseph Crowley, Lloyd Doggett, Kirsten Gillibrand, Maurice Hinchey, Patrick Kennedy, Steve Rothman, Tim Ryan, Anthony Weiner.