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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

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June 12, 2002

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BERNARD SANDERS, VERMONT,  
INDEPENDENT

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush:

We write to ask you to help the dozens of American citizens who are being held against their will in Saudi Arabia. Saudi law requires that Saudi women receive the permission of their father or husband before they are allowed to leave the country. This Saudi law is used also to keep American women and girls from leaving Saudi Arabia, even in cases in which they have been kidnapped in violation of U.S. law and other cases in which they clearly want to leave Saudi Arabia.

One case being investigated by the Committee particularly deserves your attention. In January 1986, two young U.S. citizens named Alia and Aisha Gheshayan, the daughters of Pat Roush, were kidnapped by her ex-husband, Khalid Gheshayan. Khalid took Alia and Aisha to Saudi Arabia, where he has held them ever since. For the last 16 years, these two young American citizens have been held in Saudi Arabia under some of the most repressive conditions imaginable. The State Department has provided little assistance to Pat Roush. Currently, the State Department is attempting to locate Alia and Aisha and arrange a meeting with them to ask them if they want to return to the U.S. However, even if State Department personnel are able to meet with Alia and Aisha, there is no reason to believe that they will feel free to speak their minds. Even if Alia and Aisha did risk their safety by saying that they did want to return to the United States, the State Department would still do little to assist them. Rather, Embassy staff would simply ask Khalid Gheshayan, the man who kidnapped the girls 16 years ago, if he would let them go. Obviously, the State Department's current approach is bound to fail and must be changed. More important, this approach has consistently rewarded a man who violated U.S. law by kidnapping two minor children.

The Committee is also investigating the equally troubling case of Monica Stowers and her two children, Rasheed and Amjad Radwan. In 1985, Monica moved with her

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Saudi husband and two U.S. citizen children to Saudi Arabia. Shortly thereafter, her husband divorced her and had her deported from Saudi Arabia. However, under Saudi law, he was able to keep the children in Saudi Arabia. For the next four years, Rasheed and Amjad suffered severe neglect and abuse in Saudi Arabia. In 1990, hearing of the abuse her children were suffering, Monica returned to Saudi Arabia. She was able to get her children and she then took them to the U.S. Embassy, expecting she would be able to take them to safety in the United States. Instead, Embassy staff told her that since her ex-husband had not signed an exit visa for the children, they would not be able to help. When Monica refused to leave the Embassy, she and her family were escorted out by Marine guards. After that, Monica's children were taken back by her ex-husband and subjected to years of additional abuse, and Monica was briefly imprisoned by Saudi authorities. Monica has chosen to sacrifice the last 12 years of her life by living in Saudi Arabia to try to protect her daughter Amjad from further abuse. Monica, Rasheed, and Amjad live together in Saudi Arabia, but they cannot leave because Monica's ex-husband still will not give Amjad permission to leave the country. Despite Amjad's clearly stated desire to leave Saudi Arabia, the State Department has done little to help her.

While the Roush and Stowers cases may be the most prominent, they are not unique. The State Department has listed 46 recent cases involving American citizens held against their will in Saudi Arabia. The source of all of these outrageous cases is Saudi law, which allows Saudi men to hold American women in the country against their will. While the Saudi government blames individual Saudi men for these cases, ultimately, it is the Saudi government that is refusing to issue exit visas to these Americans, and it is the Saudi government which should be held accountable. Therefore, to solve this problem, we must escalate this to the level of a state-to-state issue, and show the Saudi government that we will hold it accountable for its laws. We must also show that the Saudi government will be held accountable when it assists those who violate U.S. law. Therefore, we request that you speak with Crown Prince Abdullah, and ask him in the strongest terms to resolve the Roush and Stowers cases specifically, along with the other cases where U.S. citizens have been held against their will. We request that you tell the Crown Prince that the United States will hold the Saudi government responsible when its laws result in the mistreatment and unjustified detention of American citizens.

We also request that you increase the pressure on Saudis who have kidnapped Americans and are holding them with the protection of Saudi law. The Roush case was almost resolved by Ambassador Raymond Mabus in 1996, when he began using visas as a way to pressure Khalid Gheshayan to return Alia and Aisha. Ambassador Mabus instituted a policy whereby no member of the extended Gheshayan family could get a visa to come to the U.S. until Alia and Aisha were returned. With more time, this policy might have succeeded. However, it was discontinued by Ambassador Mabus' successor. We urge you to direct Ambassador Jordan to consider implementing a similar policy to place pressure on Khalid Gheshayan to return Alia and Aisha to the United States. In addition, you should consider a parallel policy of selected visa denial for official Saudi travel to the United States until Saudi policy is rectified.

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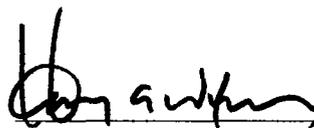
The terrorist attacks on September 11 have caused many of us to reconsider relationships with countries that do not promote the sanctity of human life and the pursuit of freedom. The freedom and well-being of American citizens obviously should be our first concern, and should be a paramount issue in the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. If Saudi Arabia is not willing to recognize the importance of American law and the rights of American citizens, it is difficult to see how Saudi Arabia will fully cooperate with the U.S. in the war on terror. Indeed, our inability to obtain the Saudis' cooperation on this matter does not bode well for our broader agenda in combating terror.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

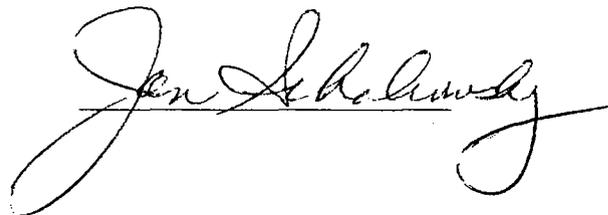
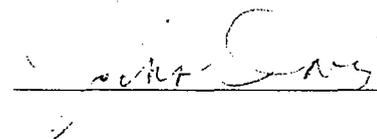
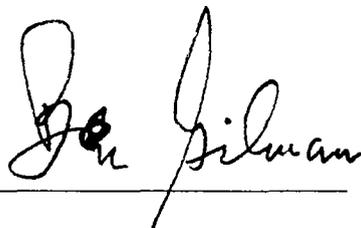
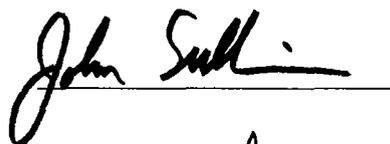
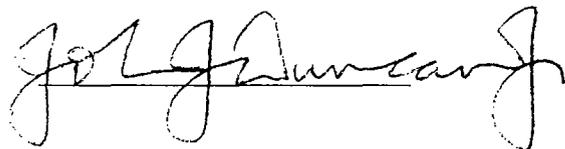
Sincerely,



Dan Burton  
Chairman



Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Minority Member



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