

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 20, 2008

Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are writing to express our serious concerns with reports of a policy that prohibits Iraqi interpreters from wearing ski masks to disguise their identities while working with U.S. troops.

Preventing interpreters from concealing their identities puts their lives, as well as the lives of their families, at grave risk. This heightened threat could also reduce the number of interpreters available in Iraq, due to death and resignations, and put American service members and their missions in danger.

As you know, since the beginning of operations in Iraq, the United States military has relied on cooperative Iraqis to help stabilize the country. Interpreters have been a critical help in this regard. Along with interpreting, they've helped our troops develop a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the history and culture of Iraq, and they've provided a counterweight to extremism by promoting reconciliation among the warring factions. They've put their lives at risk in an effort to secure peace and prosperity in their beloved country. The successes our military has had in the conduct of this war have been due in part to the unique skills of these interpreters.

These brave interpreters don't benefit from around-the-clock security; they must go home to their communities and their families where they are targeted by assassins. So they wear masks to conceal their identities while assisting American forces.

Over 300 interpreters have been killed since 2003. This is no accident as extremists on both sides target them to destabilize the country for their own benefits. We know that the Mahdi Army, for example, distributes photos of interpreters in order to target and kill them and their families.

The current policy preventing interpreters from concealing their identities is seemingly based on appearances. While we appreciate the military's desire to appear professional, we do not believe that the goal of maintaining appearances overrides the very real life and death risks that could come as a result of this policy.

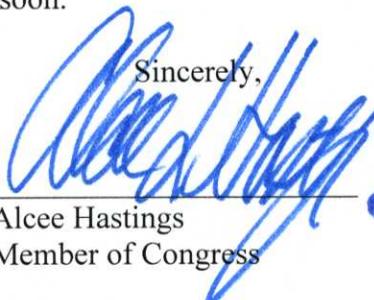
With few operational benefits to this policy, and such obvious and severe negative consequences, we believe that you should look to rescind it as soon as possible.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

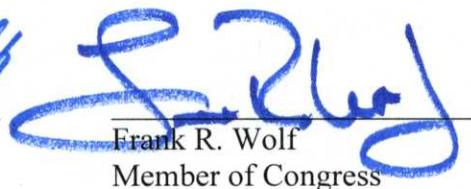
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Alcee Hastings
Member of Congress



Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress



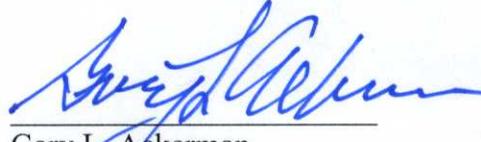
Steve J. Israel
Member of Congress



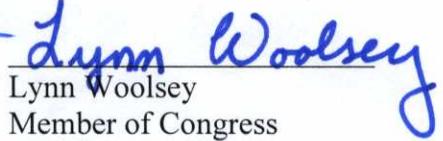
Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



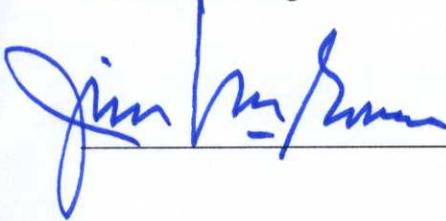
Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Gary L. Ackerman
Member of Congress



Lynn Woolsey
Member of Congress



Eddie Green
Member of Congress