

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 26, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson,

We write in regards to disturbing reports that you are preparing to shutter the State Department's Office of Global Criminal Justice (GCJ), the sole office in the United States Government dedicated exclusively to the prevention of atrocities and holding war criminals to account. As Members committed to preserving U.S. leadership on human rights, protecting U.S. interests and values, and ensuring that history does not repeat its darkest hours, we strongly oppose any decision to close this office.

According to news reports, your office has informed Todd Buchwald, the special coordinator of the Office of Global Criminal Justice, that his detail is being terminated and that the rest of the Office's staff may be reassigned as well. If true, these reports indicate that your office has made the decision to dismantle the Department's primary repository of technical expertise related to war crimes and crimes against humanity, even before the conclusion of your ongoing organizational review. This decision would send the message that the Department of State is de-prioritizing human rights and the rule of law.

For the past two decades, GCJ has served as the lead office in helping to formulate U.S. policy on the prevention of and responses to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Collectively, this office houses much of the most technical legal expertise on transitional and international justice mechanisms available to the U.S. Government. Among other achievements, GCJ obtained and helped authenticate the famed "Caesar photos" documenting atrocities committed by the Assad regime in Syria; coordinated the State Department's financial and political support for an African Union court investigating those responsible for crimes in South Sudan; and advised foreign governments on transitional justice from Rwanda to Colombia to Sri Lanka.

Closing this office would unilaterally degrade the U.S. Government's knowledge base on criminal accountability at a time when we are witnessing some of the worst war crimes and crimes against humanity in a generation. From bringing Syria's Assad to justice to addressing mass rape in the Central African Republic, it is the GCJ that stands ready to design a legally-sound international tribunal based on best practices.

Closing GCJ would also leave the U.S. legally vulnerable. In its role as the liaison to international tribunals with jurisdiction over war crimes and other serious crimes of concern to the international community, GCJ is also responsible for interfacing with the International Criminal Court (ICC). This fall, the Prosecutor of the ICC is slated to release a new report related to her preliminary examination of crimes committed in Afghanistan since 2003. In last year's report, the ICC Prosecutor determined that alleged war crimes committed by U.S. military and intelligence personnel fell within the Court's jurisdiction. Lacking an ambassadorial-level official and staff with the necessary expertise to represent the United States in talks with the ICC during this legally and politically fraught time would only harm our interests.

Abolishing the Office of Global Criminal Justice would be a self-inflicted wound. It would diminish the United States' standing as a nation committed to holding accountable those responsible for genocide and other forms of crimes against the human race. It could also harm our ability to successfully resolve a matter that will establish a significant precedent concerning international criminal scrutiny of American military and intelligence personnel. We strongly urge you to maintain the current structure of the Office of Global Criminal Justice, and to promptly nominate a U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues.

Sincerely,



Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Donald Norcross
Member of Congress



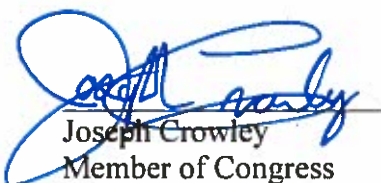
Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



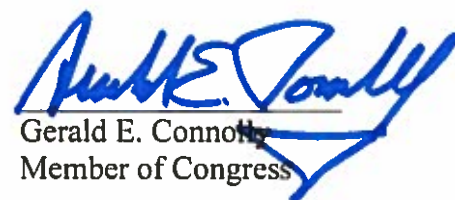
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
Member of Congress



Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress



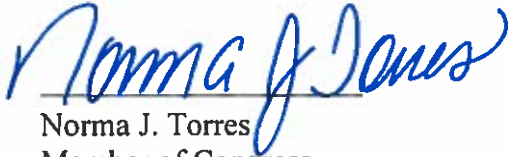
Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



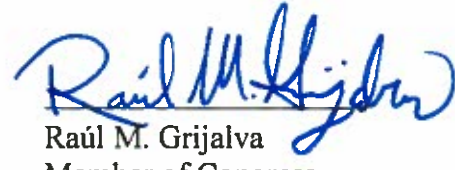
Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



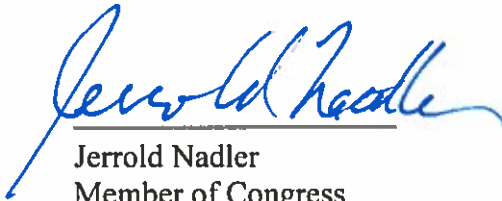
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



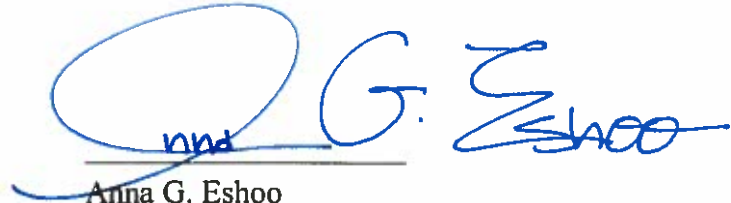
Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



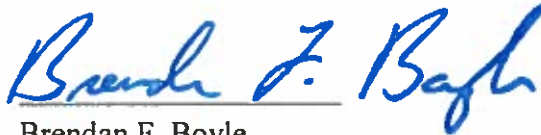
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress




Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle
Member of Congress



Katherine Clark
Member of Congress



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Suzanne Bonamici
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Salud Carbajal
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Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



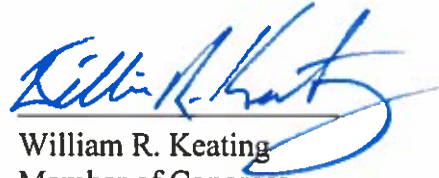
Bradley S. Schneider
Member of Congress



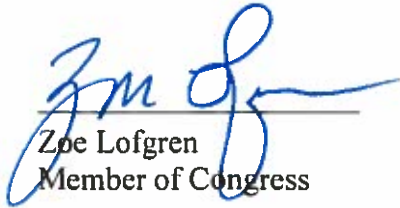
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress