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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0909
April 4, 2008

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His Excellency Machivenyika Mapuranga
Ambassador to the United States
Embassy of Zimbabwe
1608 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009

Dear Ambassador Mapuranga:

I am writing to express my extreme displeasure with the questionable detention of foreign journalists and democracy advocates.

According to a statement released by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), U.S. citizen and NDI senior program officer, Dileepan Sivapathasundaram, was detained by authorities at the Harare airport on Thursday, April 3, 2008. His whereabouts were unknown to NDI or U.S. officials for more than 22 hours. While Mr. Sivapathasundaram has been provided access to legal counsel and U.S. Embassy officials, the Zimbabwean government must now move to release Dileepan and allow him to safely return to the United States.

The New York Times has reported that six individuals, including its own correspondent and American citizen, Barry Bearak, were also detained on Thursday, following a raid led by high-ranking security officials on a hotel frequented by foreign journalist in Harare. In recent years, the Zimbabwean government has seized control of media outlets throughout the country, which makes this blatant suppression of foreign journalists from moving and reporting freely about the recent election results a clear effort to manipulate the flow of information out of Zimbabwe to benefit President Robert Mugabe and his ruling regime.

Your Excellency, I implore your government to act on calls for the immediate release and safe return of all Americans currently detained in the wake of the election results. I also urge your government to respect the current results and not resort to any further acts of intimidation or violence as a means of manipulating the will of the Zimbabwean electorate.

Respectfully yours,

Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress

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