

News from ***Congressman Eliot Engel***

Representing the Bronx, Westchester, and Rockland Counties

Offices in the Bronx, Mount Vernon and West Nyack

2161 Rayburn HOB, Washington, DC 20515

Contact: Eric Jacobstein or Jason Steinbaum, 202-226-9980

For Release: Friday, December 3, 2010

STATEMENT FROM CHAIRMAN ENGEL ON THE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF ALAN GROSS'S IMPRISONMENT

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Eliot Engel, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, issued the following statement yesterday on the eve of the one-year anniversary of American contractor Alan Gross's imprisonment in Cuba:

“Madam Speaker, tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of the imprisonment of Alan Gross in Cuba. Today, I come to the House floor not in my role as Chairman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee nor as a Congressman interested in U.S. policy toward Cuba.

“Instead, I come here as a father and a husband to urge the Cuban government to release Alan Gross on humanitarian grounds.

“Alan's health continues to deteriorate. He has lost 90 pounds and has developed disc problems that have caused partial paralysis in his leg. This could become permanent if he does not have surgery. He also has developed severe pain in his hips.

“Perhaps even more devastating than his own health is Alan's not being able to be with his daughter who was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. His daughter has had several surgeries and is now undergoing chemotherapy. As a father to a daughter around the same age, it absolutely breaks my heart that Alan cannot be by his daughter's side to give her the emotional support that she needs.

“The United States and Cuba have had a difficult relationship for a long time. But, Alan Gross is not a politician. His work brought him to Cuba because of his passion for the country's Jewish community.

“Earlier this year, I met with Judy Gross in the Capitol. She told me that Alan jumped at the chance to work in Cuba, because he loves the Cuban people and wanted them to be able to communicate better with the rest of the world. She explained that he never would do anything to harm them.

“Judy Gross tells me that Alan is a family man. He is a very devoted son who called his mother every morning. She is 88 years old and fears she may never see him again. She is emotionally distraught about Alan's situation, and this is translating into a decline in her physical health.

“There are times that we come to the House floor to engage in impassioned policy debates. There are times when we argue amongst ourselves about the right direction for U.S. – Cuba relations. Now is not one of those times.

“Madam Speaker, today, on the eve of the one-year anniversary of Alan Gross’s imprisonment, I stand in this chamber to plea for Alan’s release. Not just for Alan’s sake, but for the sake of his wife, his mother and his two daughters, I urge the Cuban government to immediately release Alan Gross.”