April 24, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing regarding our deep concern over the continued lack of settlement of the conflict over Western Sahara. We urge the Administration to provide the leadership needed to resolve this conflict through the holding of a free, fair, and transparent referendum for self-determination.

As you may know, there is a long history of support for this referendum in the U.S. Congress, particularly reflected in the unanimously passed legislation (H.Res. 245) of the 105th Congress which expressed support for a free, fair, and transparent referendum in which genuine Sahrawi people vote. The United Nations Security Council has continued to uphold the right of self-determination. Sadly, the continued delay of this referendum has brought disunity among countries in North Africa and could cause instability in this region. In addition, the delay has caused terrible suffering for the Sahrawi refugees who have lived in refugee camps since 1975, continuing to hope for the actualization of the 1991 promise of a referendum for self-determination held by the United Nations.

In light of the recent Autonomy Plan offered by the Government of Morocco, we are concerned that it is a violation of international law by denying the right to self-determination for the Sahrawi people. The right to self-determination is a founding principle on which our own country was built, and it is vital that we uphold this principle both in theory and in practice.

This month, the United Nations Security Council is scheduled to debate the reauthorization and/or extension of MINURSO, the UN peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara. After more than a decade and over at least $500 million being spent, there is still no resolution to this conflict. In light of MINURSO’s failure to hold a referendum, to resolve the conflict, and to include human rights monitoring as part of the mission, perhaps it is time for the Administration to reconsider whether United States taxpayers should continue to finance a failed UN operation.

Mr. President, in light of U.S. efforts to combat terrorism around the world, it is in our nation’s best interest, as well as in the interest of peoples of other nations, to encourage, promote, and uphold fundamental human rights as well as democracy; this includes the right of the people of Western Sahara to decide their future. It is only through a democratic process that provides a just and lasting solution that there will be peace and stability in North Africa. Further, a
democratic process will provide a signal to the broader Middle East and North African region that there are successful alternatives to violence in the pursuit of national aspirations.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to hearing from you and to continuing to work with you to bring this significant matter to a peaceful and just close.

Sincerely,

Joseph R. Pitts
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne
Member of Congress

Zach Wamp
Member of Congress

Diane E. Watson
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

Trent Franks
Member of Congress

Al Green
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Wayne T. Gilchrest
Member of Congress

Lynn Woolsey
Member of Congress

Hank Johnson
Member of Congress
Western Sahara

Cc: The Honorable Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State
    The Honorable Stephen Hadley, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
    The Honorable Zalmay Khalilzad, Permanent U.S. Representative to the United Nations