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February 26, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

We write today to express our concerns about your upcoming visit to Cuba and to once again request that your administration make the extradition of Joanne Chesimard and William Morales from Cuba an immediate priority.

As you know, William Morales was sentenced to ninety-nine years in prison for his participation in the terrorist organization Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional Puertorriqueña (FALN). William Morales was a chief bomb maker for FALN, and he was linked to the 1975 bombing of Fraunces Tavern in New York City, an attack that killed four people and injured sixty others.

Joanne Chesimard, also known as Assata Shakur, was convicted of murder of a law enforcement officer, and sentenced to life in prison in 1977. In 1973, New Jersey State Troopers Werner Foerster and James Harper made a routine traffic stop on the New Jersey Turnpike. When the troopers asked the vehicle's driver to exit the car, one of the passengers, Joanne Chesimard, pulled out a gun and began shooting. During the ensuing firefight, Foerster was hit twice in the chest and Harper once in the shoulder. The injured Foerster was then shot twice in the head—execution style—with his own sidearm.

Over a year ago, your administration announced the reopening of diplomatic channels with Cuba. Since then, your administration has continued to take steps towards normalizing relations by relaxing trade restrictions, reopening embassies, and re-establishing scheduled air services. On February 18th your administration announced your trip this March to Cuba citing the significant progress made by normalizing relations. However, we fail to see any progress in extraditing the fugitives Joanne Chesimard and William Morales, nor any improvement in the treatment of the Cuban people by their government.

Last year, National Security Council spokeswoman, Bernadette Meehan, said "the return from Cuba of fugitives from U.S. justice is an issue of long-standing concern to the United States that will be addressed in the broader context of normalizing relations." Yet there has been no evidence of progress in securing the return of these fugitives.

Rather, when asked about the extradition of Joanne Chesimard, a Cuban official said "...it is off the table." Additionally, the Cuban government has continued to oppress its people. During the past year there has been an increase in political and religious oppression. The Washington Post reported that in November 2015 there were more than 1,447 political arrests, the highest monthly tally in a decade. In total there were more than 8,616 political arrests in Cuba throughout 2015. This has continued in 2016 where there were 1,414 arrests in January.

In 2015, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released an annual report that stated the Cuban government "principally targets for arrest or harassment religious communities and leaders deemed too independent from government control or those who support democracy and human rights efforts." There have also been recent reports of churches being demolished while some of the parishioners are detained.

For too long, the Cuban government has continued to oppress its people and has refused to cooperate with United States officials seeking the return of the fugitives Joanne Chesimard and William Morales. This is unacceptable. We once again strongly request that your administration prioritizes the return of William Morales and Joanne Chesimard as one of the requirements for achieving normal diplomatic relations with Cuba. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


SCOTT GARRETT
Member of Congress


PETER KING
Member of Congress


LEONARD LANCE
Member of Congress