Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 19, 2012

The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Attorney General Holder and Secretary Clinton,

We are concerned about recent reports that the Obama administration is considering the release of Omar Abdel-Rahman, better known as the "blind sheikh," to the custody of Egypt for humanitarian and health reasons. If these reports are true, such considerations would be extremely disconcerting as release of this convicted terrorist should not happen for any reason.

The blind sheikh inspired the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, ordered the 1997 massacre of Western tourists at Luxor, Egypt, and issued the Islamic religious ruling that Osama bin Laden relied upon to justify the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. He is serving a life sentence at a federal penitentiary, for seditious conspiracy to wage war upon the United States, based on his role in a 1993 plot to conduct assassinations and destroy bridges, tunnels and other landmarks in New York City. The blind sheikh was the first person convicted under this statute since the Civil War. Nonetheless, the newly-elected government in Egypt has indicated that his release is amongst its top foreign policy priorities.

While considerations regarding the blind sheikh's release would be disturbing in any context, they are particularly alarming given recent events. The 11th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks was marked by the assassination of America's ambassador to Libya and an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Egypt. The violence in Egypt has been attributed, in part, to that government's demands for the blind sheikh's release.

Succumbing to the demands of a country whose citizens threaten our embassy and the Americans serving in it would send a clear message that acts of violence will be responded to with appeasement rather than strength. The blind sheikh should remain in federal prison.

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The release of Abdel-Rahman or any terrorist who plots to kill innocent Americans would be seen for what it is -- a sign of weakness and lack of resolve by the United States and its President.

We request a briefing this week by representatives from each of your Departments on the accuracy of recent reports and the status of any negotiations with Egypt. We look forward to your immediate response.

Sincerely,

LAMAR SMITH
Chairman
House Committee on the Judiciary

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Chairwoman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

MIKE ROGERS
Chairman
House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services

PETER KING
Chairman
House Committee on Homeland Security

HAL ROGERS
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations

FRANK WOLF
Chairman
House Appropriations Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee

KAY GRANGER
Chairwoman
House Appropriations State of Foreign Operations Subcommittee

cc: The Hon. Barack Obama
cc: The Hon. John A. Boehner
cc: The Hon. John Conyers, Jr.