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September 11, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
2201 C St NW Ste 7276
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

I was mystified by the Department's August 10 letter, in response to my previous phone calls and correspondence, indicating that "as a matter of long-established policy, the Department of States does not release invitation lists to any events, including our Fourth of July events overseas."

For more than two months I have been requesting a copy of the invite list to Embassy Hanoi's July 4 celebration. As you know, I had requested, and Ambassador Shear had agreed, to invite prominent dissidents, human rights activists and religious freedom advocates to the event. But then my office received reports following the event that this had not happened. As such, I was curious to see the invite list to see if it reflected the agreement I had with Ambassador Shear. When I spoke with Ambassador Shear the week after the celebration he indicated that he would provide the list in few weeks. That time lapsed and no list was forthcoming. In subsequent interactions with State Department officials, similar promises were made. No one, at any point, mentioned this purported "long-established policy."

If such a policy is in fact place, I would respectfully disagree with the assumption that undergirds the policy—namely that keeping the list private will protect invitees some of whom are harassed, detained and imprisoned by their own government, from additional scrutiny or abuse. History has shown us that publicly standing with dissidents actually communicates to repressive regimes their value and import and gives them a level of protection they might not otherwise enjoy. Further, I would venture that the July 4 event at the embassy likely included some press. Is this accurate? Assuming this is the case, the attendees are hardly a secret.

That said, even if this flawed policy remains in effect, as a Member of Congress with the relevant security clearance, who serves on the State Foreign Operations subcommittee, I find it insulting that for months now the department has stonewalled and refused to honor this simple request. If the department wishes for the invite list to remain out of the public domain, it need only say that.

In short, the letter I received is unsatisfactory. I look forward to a more thoughtful response in the coming days.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

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