Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 29, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We join you and the international community in expressing unequivocal condemnation over the news that chemical weapons were reportedly used by the government of Syria.

While we understand that as Commander in Chief you have a constitutional obligation to protect our national interests from direct attack, Congress has the constitutional obligation and power to approve military force, even if the United States or its direct interests (such as its embassies) have not been attacked or threatened with an attack. As such, we strongly urge you to seek an affirmative decision of Congress prior to committing any U.S. military engagement to this complex crisis.

While the ongoing human rights violations and continued loss of life are horrific, they should not draw us into an unwise war—especially without adhering to our own constitutional requirements. We strongly support the work within the United Nations Security Council to build international consensus condemning the alleged use of chemical weapons and preparing an appropriate response; we should also allow the U.N. inspectors the space and time necessary to do their jobs, which are so crucial to ensuring accountability.

As elected officials, we have a duty to represent the will and priorities of our constituents, consistent with the Constitution we all swore to uphold and defend. Before weighing the use of military force, Congress must fully debate and consider the facts and every alternative, as well as determine how best to end the violence and protect civilians. We stand ready to work with you.

Sincerely,

Barbara Lee
BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress

Michael M. Honda
MICHAEL HONDA
Member of Congress

Lois Capps
LOIS CAPPS
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
ZOE LOFGREN
Member of Congress

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JACKIE SPEIER
Member of Congress

BETO O'ROURKE
Member of Congress

JOHN LEWIS
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PETER DEFAZIO
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Member of Congress

RAUL M. GRIJALVA
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JANICE HAHN
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EMANUEL CLEAVER
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RUSH HOLT
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JOSÉ E. SERRANO
Member of Congress

GEORGE MILLER
Member of Congress

DONNA F. EDWARDS
Member of Congress

ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT
Member of Congress

STEVE COHEN
Member of Congress

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ALCEE L. HASTINGS
Member of Congress

JAMES P. MCGOVERN
Member of Congress

DANNY K. DAVIS
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MARCIA L. FUDGE
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CHARLES RANGEL
Member of Congress

JUDY CHU
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ALAN LOWENTHAL
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DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN
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YVETTE CLARKE
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Member of Congress

RICK NOLAN
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ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
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JOHN GARAMENDI
Member of Congress

GRACE MENG
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DAVID SCOTT
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MICHAEL CAPUANO
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JOHN CONYERS
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LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD
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JOHN YARMUTH
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JULIA BROWNLEY
Member of Congress

GREGORIO SABLAN
Member of Congress