

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 4, 2013

Mr. Ivica Dačić
Prime Minister
Government of the Republic of Serbia
11 Nemanjina Street, 11000 Belgrade
Republic of Serbia

Dear Prime Minister Dačić:

We write to express our concerns for the basic freedoms of assembly, speech, and expression for all Serbian citizens. Given the Government of Serbia's recent ban on the Pride Parade in Belgrade for the third consecutive time, we urge you to reverse this decision and uphold democratic principles and human rights. In particular, we ask that you implement policies that foster greater tolerance and acceptance for all people, while helping to prevent discrimination and violence.

It is deeply troubling that there is existing legislation concerning non-discrimination in Serbia, but that it is not enforced. We understand that the Pride Parade was registered with the authorities in October 2012. That means that the government had more than a year to thoroughly prepare for the Parade. The fact that Serbia has missed yet another opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to respecting human rights causes us great concern. This ban violates the fundamental freedoms that constitute the foundations of a democratic society.

As Members of the U.S. Congress, we are troubled by the Government's decision to ban the Parade, as it encourages intolerance and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) citizens and their families. Furthermore, the decision to ban the Parade violates the fundamental freedoms of assembly, speech, and expression, which are vitally important in creating a strong and vibrant society. We believe that the ban is contrary to the international human rights standards to which the Republic of Serbia has committed itself by joining the Council of Europe and ratifying the United Nations' Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Protecting the equal human rights of every citizen is the main responsibility of every democratic government.

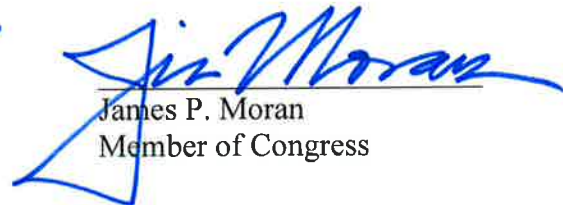
Moreover, violence, and the threats of violence, by extremists groups does not have a place in democratic discourse. Although the decision to ban the Pride Parade was made based on security reasons, we are very disappointed to see that there has been no legal action taken against those individuals who encourage violence, and are known to have participated in violent acts, against the LGBT community in Serbia. It is truly a shame that the threats from extremists groups have determined the outcome of this event. The Government of Serbia must not allow its citizens to lose faith in its ability to stand strong against violent extremism.

Therefore, we respectfully call on the Serbian authorities at all levels to take greater steps to prevent discrimination, and protect the basic freedoms of assembly, speech, and expression. The 2014 Pride Parade in Belgrade has already been registered. This represents a tremendous opportunity for the Government of Serbia to reaffirm its commitment to human rights, democratic values, and Euro-Atlantic integration.

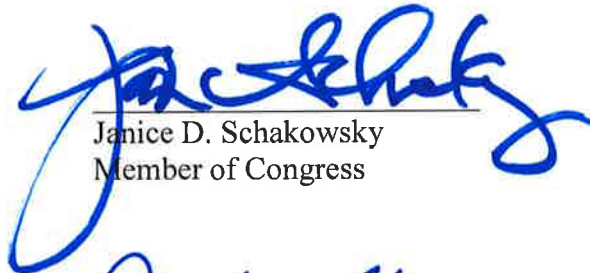
Sincerely,



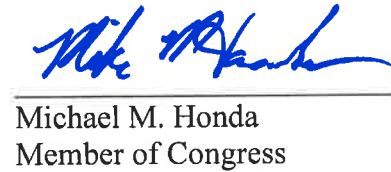
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



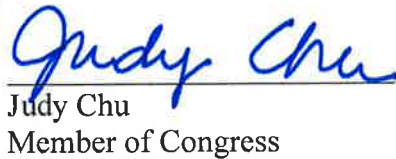
James P. Moran
Member of Congress



Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress