Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 15, 2016

H.E. Mr. Gerard van Bohemen
Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the United Nations
600 Third Avenue, 14th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10016

Dear Ambassador van Bohemen:

We commend your vocal support of a resolution imposing an arms embargo on South Sudan and encourage your continued advocacy before the United Nations Security Council to secure the votes required to pass such a measure by the end of the year. We agree that international community bears the collective responsibility to protect the population from the wide-scale ethnic violence and rampant gross human rights violations and to avert the imminent risk of genocide in the country.

The Security Council has repeatedly emphasized that there can be "no military solution" to the situation, but evidence suggests that both sides continue to seek arms and, as the UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan reports, incentives for violence have multiplied. The government's ongoing acquisition and employment of heavy weapons systems has enabled it to mount large-scale attacks in densely populated areas and to encroach into the territory and airspace of a neighboring sovereign country, as evidenced by its deployment of attack helicopters into the Democratic Republic of the Congo in pursuit of opposition forces in August 2016. Horrendous violations against civilians continue to be reported on a regular basis and, according to the UN Refugee Agency's most recent data, more than three million people have been displaced, including nearly 1.9 million who are internally displaced and more than 1.3 million fleeing as refugees to neighboring countries.

Additionally, according to UN human rights investigators, rape is "one of the tools being used for ethnic cleansing" and 70 percent of the women in Juba, South Sudan's capital, have experienced sexual assault since the onset of the civil war. Over eight million people are facing some degree of food insecurity – roughly three quarters of the population – and the situation is likely to deteriorate, potentially reaching famine-level conditions in certain areas throughout the country. We echo the Panel of Experts' grim assertion that "the continued belligerence of the government … remains the principal factor driving the extension and expansion of the war in South Sudan and … the government has consistently failed to demonstrate any willingness to alleviate what is by every empirical measure among the worst country-wide humanitarian emergencies in the world."

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A UN arms embargo on South Sudan would signal to the government that its actions do not warrant it equal standing with other sovereign nations that may freely purchase weapons on legitimate international markets – because those countries do not use those weapons to systematically kill their own citizens. Furthermore, because those weapons systems already in the country are serviced by non-South Sudanese nationals, an arms embargo would serve the purpose of compelling these foreign actors to halt their services once they are deemed illegal and unacceptable by the international community. We believe an embargo that is clearly tied to human rights violations and whose lifting is preconditioned on a lasting cessation of hostilities will not only lessen the scale of the atrocities, but also create a more conducive climate to restart long-stalled political and diplomatic efforts to develop a viable path forward for peace.

We appeal to the members of the UN Security Council to take action to curb the fighting and avert genocide in South Sudan and urge your support of a resolution to impose an arms embargo before the end of the year. The status quo serves only to embolden and endorse the actions of the current government, which will continue committing gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law with impunity. Without your immediate action, reconciliation will remain elusive – exacerbating the costs of war paid by the people of South Sudan as well as by the international community, which will ultimately shoulder the financial burden of this impending humanitarian catastrophe.

The UN Security Council and its constituent member states, including U.S. allies and partners, have been presented with incontrovertible evidence of just such a catastrophe unfolding, and history will not excuse inaction.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Rooney
Member of Congress

Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Scott DesJarlais
Member of Congress

Karen Bass
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress

John Lewis
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress

Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

Edward R. Royce
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Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver
Member of Congress

Daniel M. Donovan, Jr.
Member of Congress

Ted S. Yoho, DVM
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress