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June 23, 2008

The Honorable Howard L. Berman  
Chairman  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2221 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Berman,

I am writing to request that the House Committee on Foreign Affairs hold immediate oversight hearings and initiate an investigation into reports detailing significant managerial weaknesses at *Al Hurra* Television, including an absence of American editors fluent in Arabic, that have resulted in the airing of reports intended to incite opposition to U.S. diplomatic efforts in the Middle East and anti-Israel hatred.

The United States Government created *Al Hurra* in 2004 in an attempt to provide a meaningful alternative to Middle East news outlets that typically operated outside of acceptable standards of journalistic fairness and that are purveyors of hate speech. The *Al Aqsa* news station has shown videos that advocate assassinating President Bush and drowning the Jewish people in "Arab spit," while *Al Manar* has broadcast scenes of Islamists leading chants of "death to America." Even the more "mainstream" *Al Jazeera* station has an unabashed bias against the United States and Israel, demonstrated through its broadcast-images of dead American soldiers and celebrations in the aftermath of 9/11.

*Al Hurra* has received nearly \$500 million to pursue its foundational aim, but has apparently indulged in the same incitement that it was intended to counter. Reports indicate that commentators on the network have referred to Israel as a "racist" state that is conducting a "Holocaust" in Gaza. The network has previously earned the scrutiny of this Congress when it broadcast an hour long speech by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and delivered reports from the Holocaust denier's conference in Tehran. These seem contrary to Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Jim Glassman's statement that the U.S. is "not allowed to provide a platform for terrorists."

Given these transgressions, I am anxious to learn the degree to which the Broadcasting Board of Governors is overseeing editorial decisions made at *Al Hurra*, the Board's knowledge about the content of its broadcasts, and any known weaknesses in management of the network. I am also anxious to better understand the degree to which effective oversight by the Board may be weakened by a lack of broadcast transcripts in English.

The management at *Al Hurra* has repeatedly guaranteed that it would make reforms and ensure that hateful rhetoric never be broadcast on its station. These have been, it appears, empty promises, and raises the specter that on-sight American managers - with little training in the Arabic language - are simply incapable of exercising editorial control, leaving vital decisions to editors that may have personal agendas or political views inconsistent with the fairness and objectivity demanded by their role as journalists.

Changing the tone of reporting in the Middle East is a crucial component of American public diplomacy. But we cannot do this if it means compromising our values. It is bad enough that these hateful images appear on the airwaves, but it is inexcusable that American taxpayers foot the bill. I ask that you authorize an investigation into *Al Hurra* so that we may ensure these transgressions do not take place, or conclude that our efforts in the region with *Al Hurra* have failed.

Sincerely,

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN  
Ranking Member