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Congress of the United States
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Free Jacob

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Rep. Chris Smith
Press Release
December 13, 2012

On May 13, I was contacted by Rabbi Aaron Kotler of Lakewood, New Jersey, with an urgent request to help Jacob Ostreicher, an innocent man and a victim of theft, who was languishing in the infamous Palmasola Prison in Bolivia.

Three weeks later on June 6, I chaired the first of two congressional hearings (the other in August) on Jacob's case. We heard powerful testimonies from Miriam Unger, Jacob's wife as well as his daughter Chaya. Retired FBI Special Agent Steve Moore – a man with a distinguished quarter century record of law enforcement – investigated and found that Jacob was the victim of crimes and innocent.

I twice visited Jacob in Palmasola Prison in early June. Jacob's health was frail – the result of the harsh conditions and a hunger strike. I attended a bail hearing that, like every other bail hearing failed to secure his release from prison.

I also had meetings with high Bolivian Officials including Minister of Government Carlos Romero, who promised to investigate. True to his word he did, and several people including Fernando Riveria are now in custody.

Last week, Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez and I met with Jacob in a health clinic and had meetings with the Minister of Government, the Attorney General Ramiro Guererro, and others.

We left Bolivia on Sunday optimistic that when Jacob appeared in court this past Tuesday that at the very least, he would make bail.

It didn't happen. The court remanded the case back to a lower court in yet another procedural delay that feels to Jacob and his family like an eternity. So today we appeal to the Bolivian Government to respect the fundamental human rights of Jacob. Jacob has been in prison for 18 months, no charge has been filed. Under Bolivian law, he should be free.

Jacob is very sick. He has been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease.

Our appeal is based on justice – he is an innocent man- and on grave humanitarian concern.