

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2004

The Honorable John Howard  
Office of the Australian Prime Minister  
3-5 National Circuit  
Barton, ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Prime Minister Howard:

As members of the U.S. House of Representatives who are strong supporters of East Timor, we write to urge your country to move seriously and expeditiously in negotiations with East Timor to establish a fair, permanent maritime boundary and an equitable sharing of oil and gas resources in the Timor Sea.

We recognize the critical role your country played in East Timor's fight for independence, and we know your diplomatic efforts were instrumental in prompting the dialogue between Indonesian officials and East Timorese nationalists that led to the vote for independence.

Australia's commitment to regional security, and its concern for East Timor in particular, was also evident when you indicated last June that Australian troops might remain in East Timor for years to prevent the country from "coming under unacceptable strain and perhaps collapse."

As the poorest country in Southeast Asia, East Timor's dependence on foreign aid is one factor that keeps it from consolidating its stability and economic development, which of course adds greatly to the strain the country continues to face. This is why we support the statement our colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee included in its report that accompanied this year's foreign aid bill underscoring how important the negotiations over the maritime boundary and the petroleum reserves are to the future economic development and security of East Timor.

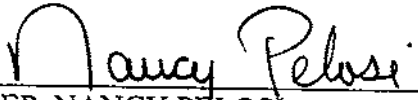
We also join our Senate colleagues in urging both governments to engage in good faith negotiations to resolve their maritime boundary in accordance with international legal principles, and we hope both governments will agree to a legal process for an impartial resolution if the boundary dispute cannot be settled by negotiation.

We also urge you to heed Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri's call to conclude negotiations within three to five years. We were pleased that a preliminary meeting between your two governments was held in November, but we were disappointed by your government's insistence that bilateral meetings on the boundary be semi-annual and encourage you to hold them monthly, as requested by East Timor.

Finally, given the overlapping claims of the two countries, we would strongly hope that any revenue from disputed areas on East Timor's side of the median line but outside the Joint

Petroleum Development Area defined in the Timor Sea Treaty be held in escrow until a permanent boundary is established.

We trust your country's commitment to the freedom and security of East Timor will include recognition of East Timor's territorial integrity and its right to a swift, permanent resolution of the maritime boundary dispute.

  
REP. NANCY PELOSI

  
REP. BARNEY FRANK

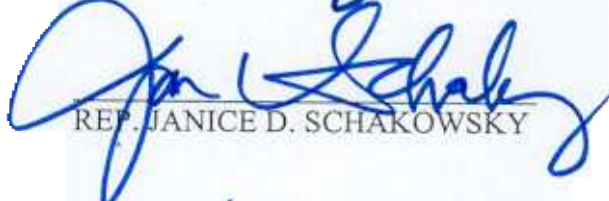
  
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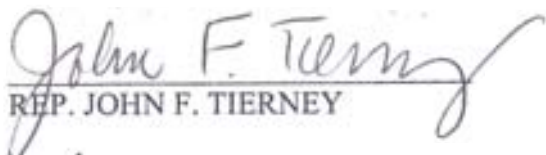
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