Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 19, 2012

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Mail Stop 0150
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Clinton and Secretary Napolitano:

We, the undersigned Members of Congress, would like to express our concern over the well being of a United States citizen, and Marine combat veteran, Jon M. Hammar, who is unjustly being imprisoned in Centro de Ejecución de Sanciones (CEDES) de Matamoros, Tamaulipas, since his August 13, 2012 arrest. We urge the State Department to use diplomatic means to ensure the well-being of Jon and make every effort, within all applicable rules and regulations, to bring Jon home.

Jon served tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan, was honorably discharged in 2007 and served four more years of inactive reserves subsequent to his discharge. He was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - having seen his Marine battalion suffer a large number of casualties in Fallujah and elsewhere - and voluntarily checked himself into a PTSD inpatient facility in August of 2011, graduating from the program in May of this year. Shortly after graduation, Jon and a fellow Marine from the inpatient program purchased an RV and planned a surfing trip from Florida to Costa Rica to help them cope with the stress of PTSD.

Along with his surf boards, Jon brought with him one of his most prized possessions – his great-grandfather's old-fashioned Sears & Roebuck .410 bore shotgun. This is the smallest of the traditional shotgun sizes, used for small game hunting. Jon took all the precautions he believed necessary and honestly sought to fully abide by all laws and regulations regarding transporting his shotgun across the border, including Jon asking the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents for the proper procedures to do so. The CBP agents informed him that he could take his shotgun into Mexico as long as he registered it with the Mexican authorities.

We are extremely concerned over the role Customs and Border Protection has played in this situation. This is not the first time the role of CBP has come into question following the arrest of an American citizen in Mexico. Earlier this year, Jabin Bogan – who was driving a truck containing ammunition – stated that a CBP agent told him to make a U-turn in Mexico, and upon his return through the border, he was arrested on the accusation of smuggling ammunition. While the CBP insists it was not one of their agents who gave Mr. Bogan the bad directions, there can be no disputing its role in the Hammar incident. We would like to know how this could have happened, and why the CBP agents at the border gave Jon what was obviously wrong information.

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Jon and his friend trusted that the CBP agents were giving him the correct information, so they crossed into Mexico and attempted to register the shotgun legally. He was arrested immediately while trying to declare the shotgun. Jon was told he was being charged with possession of an assault rifle which is restricted for military use and was taken to CEDES de Matamoros. While there, Jon was initially placed in the general population where he was beaten by the other inmates. His parents immediately began receiving extortion calls from these inmates. They were told that Jon would be killed unless the extortion money was paid. The inmates even forced Jon to speak to his parents on the phone and tell them to pay the money or he would be killed.

Jon's parents contacted the U.S. consulate officials, who arranged for Jon to be removed from the general population. However, he was then isolated in a room where he was shackled to his bed and the wall, in a clear violation of his fundamental human right. This lasted for months, though we have been assured by the State Department that Jon is no longer being chained to his bed or the wall.

This situation is unacceptable. Though the State Department has provided updates on Jon's well-being, it has not provided details on what our government is doing to get him released from prison. We urge the State Department to continue to press the Mexican authorities for a speedy resolution to this extremely unfortunate situation.

This case is of the utmost importance, and we would like these matters resolved as quickly as possible so that Jon can return home to be with his family before Christmas. Jon put his life on the line for our country, and the United States government has a responsibility to him and his family to do everything within its power to bring him home.

Sincerely,

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Member of Congress

MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress

EDWARD ROYCE
Member of Congress

HOWARD BERMAN
Member of Congress

HOWARD P. "BUCK" MCKEON
Member of Congress

ELIOT ENGEL
Member of Congress

MIKE ROGERS (AL)
Member of Congress

C. W. BILL YOUNG
Member of Congress

STEVE CHABOT
Member of Congress

PATRICK MEEHAN
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DUNCAN HUNTER
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ALCEE HASTINGS
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