

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 18, 2020

Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Nebraska Avenue Center Complex NW
Washington, D.C. 20528

RE: Pastor Steven Tendo, A.201-520-012, Port Isabel Detention Center

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf,

We write to express our grave concern about the on-going and inhumane treatment of **Steven Tendo**, a young pastor from Uganda currently seeking asylum in the United States. Pastor Steven is detained at the Port Isabel Service Processing Center in Los Fresnos, Texas, where he is at imminent risk of deportation despite his well-founded fear of persecution if he is returned to Uganda. We urgently request that the Department of Homeland Security immediately halt the possible deportation of Pastor Steven Tendo to Uganda because of the threat to his life should he be returned. For life-threatening medical reasons, we further ask for his immediate release from detention on medical parole to his sponsor while his immigration court proceedings continue.

Pastor Steven became a target of grave governmental repression after advocating for and participating in nonviolent human rights and voting rights campaigns in Uganda. While detained and tortured, Ugandan Government agents amputated two of his fingers and burned his legs with melting plastic. Many of his friends and relatives have been attacked and/or killed, ostensibly because of their connection to him and his work.

After his arrival to the United States in December 2018, Pastor Steven was detained in the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Port Isabel Service Processing Center in Texas, where he has been held for over 19 months. Although his asylum application was supported by ample evidence of the torture he had suffered and the harms that would befall him if he was returned to Uganda, an immigration judge denied his application for asylum. The Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) affirmed. Pastor Steven has filed a Petition for Review of this decision before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit as well as a motion to reopen before the BIA. Both are pending at this time.

Despite Pastor Steven's well-founded fear of persecution, torture, and death, and these unresolved petitions, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials are pressing for his removal to Uganda. Evidence has been filed with the courts describing how government agents there have already attacked and intimidated the Pastor's supporters in anticipation of his return.

There is reason to believe that Pastor Steven Tendo will be tortured and killed as soon as he arrives in Uganda. Removing Pastor Steven under these circumstances would constitute a breach of U.S. obligations under both U.S. domestic asylum law as well as the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment.

In addition to halting Pastor Steven's deportation until all appeals have been exhausted, we further urge that he be released immediately on medical parole as he is at high risk of serious illness or even death in ICE detention. Pastor Steven has offers of full sponsorship from eligible U.S. citizens and poses no safety or security risk to the community. He has never committed a crime. During more than nineteen months of detention, the pastor's health has been ravaged. According to medical reports received by his counsel, his diabetes is now out of control, he suffers from recurrent boils, and he is going blind. Despite his obvious medical vulnerabilities, he has not been released on medical parole even as the number of COVID-19 cases continue to escalate in his facility. Recent testing shows that his immune system has been nearly destroyed, leaving him at great risk of imminent infection and even death.

Accordingly, we call upon the Department of Homeland Security to immediately halt the possible deportation of Pastor Steven Tendo to Uganda, and urge his release from detention on medical parole to his sponsor while his proceedings before the BIA and the federal appeals court continue.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

/s/
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

/s/
Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

/s/
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

/s/
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

/s/
Filemon Vela
Member of Congress

/s/
Peter Welch
Member of Congress

/s/
Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress

/s/
Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

/s/
Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

/s/
David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

/s/
Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress

/s/
Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

/s/
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

/s/
Josè E. Serrano
Member of Congress

/s/
Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

/s/
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

/s/
Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress

/s/
Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

/s/
Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
Karen Bass
Member of Congress

/s/
Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

/s/
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

/s/
Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

/s/
Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress

/s/
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

/s/
Andy Levin
Member of Congress

/s/
Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

/s/
André Carson
Member of Congress

/s/
Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

/s/
Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress

/s/
Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

/s/
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

/s/
Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

/s/
Susan Wild
Member of Congress

/s/
Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

/s/
Darren Soto
Member of Congress

/s/
Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

/s/
Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

/s/
Deb Haaland
Member of Congress

/s/
Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

/s/
Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

/s/
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress