



July 23, 2020

Honorable Alcee Hastings  
Chairman  
The Helsinki Commission  
2353 Rayburn Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Roger Wicker  
Co-Chairman  
The Helsinki Commission  
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hastings and Co-Chairman Wicker:

The App Coalition, whose mission is to promote the global app economy and ensure that consumers have unfettered access to the content of their choosing, commends the Commission for convening today's hearing on Human Rights At Home: Media, Politics, and Safety of Journalists. As you examine this important topic, the Coalition wishes to convey its deep concern with recent decisions by the new CEO of the United States Agency for Global Media (USAGM) to remove key personnel at the Open Technology Fund (OTF) that may undermine OTF and its mission.

As you know, freedom of speech and expression are essential to establishing and maintaining a functioning democracy and in turn, a free press. Since its establishment, the OTF has been instrumental in fostering democracy by providing tools to help those living under authoritarian regimes access the internet and communicate with one another without fear of retribution from those governments. Its funding provides essential resources for the development of open-source security tools to protect citizens living under these regimes whose activities are perceived as threatening.

OTF's work demands that its staff and board have an understanding of both policy and technology to further its efforts. The recent firings call that ability into question. While we are pleased that a court recently [issued](#) a preliminary injunction prohibiting USAGM from taking any action to remove or replace any OTF officers or directors while litigation related to the firings is pending, we believe it is imperative for Congress to conduct rigorous oversight into recent decision-making to preserve the OTF and its mission. To that end, the Coalition encourages the Commission to incorporate OTF oversight into its examination of the juxtaposition of human rights and the media.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and the App Coalition stands ready to assist in any way possible.

Sincerely,

*Eric Silverberg*

Eric Silverberg, President