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McDermott & Jones Introduce Medical Neutrality Protection Act

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA) and Congressman Walter Jones (R-NC) introduced the *Medical Neutrality Protection Act of 2011*, which would protect the independence of health care workers in times of war and civil unrest. With ongoing reports of medical professionals under threat and access to hospitals blocked by armed forces, this bipartisan bill would elevate these issues as a policy priority for the U.S. government so that countries that violate norms of medical neutrality in times of unrest face repercussions.

"As events are unfolding around the world, I'm concerned that the United States isn't doing enough to stop government forces from harming medical workers," said Congressman McDermott, who is a physician. **"In most cases, these workers – many of whom are doctors and nurses – are just trying to provide emergency care. These doctors should be free to provide aid and governments who punish them should not receive U.S. military assistance."**

Under the McDermott/Jones bill (H.R.2643), the U.S. Secretary of State would be required to maintain a list of countries that violate medical neutrality. Listed countries would not qualify for certain military assistance and officials from those countries would be barred from obtaining visas to travel to the United States.

The legislation has already earned the support of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), who [explained in a letter](http://mcdermott.house.gov/images/letter%20of%20support%20for%20intro%20of%20bill%20rev%207%2025%2011%202.pdf) (<http://mcdermott.house.gov/images/letter%20of%20support%20for%20intro%20of%20bill%20rev%207%2025%2011%202.pdf>), "Medical professionals often risk their lives and security to provide essential services, and they must be able to uphold this duty to patients and others in need without fear of violence, retribution, or arbitrary arrest."

According to Dr. Robert Lawrence, PHR Chairman of the Board of Directors, **"For the first time, the Medical Neutrality Protection Act would shine a bright light on serious human rights violations, which strike at the heart of communities at large all over the world. The act makes it crystal clear that the United States will not tolerate any attacks under any circumstances on medical professionals, hospitals, equipment and supplies, and will not turn a blind eye to any interference with the ability to seek medical treatment."**

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