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National Security and
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February 17, 1993

The Honorable Howard L. Berman
Chairman, Subcommittee on
International Operations
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Chairman, Subcommittee on Terrorism,
Narcotics and International Operations
United States Senate

Since December 1991, we have received allegations from several sources that Radio Marti's broadcasts to Cuba did not meet Voice of America standards for objectivity, balance, and other quality measures. We discussed these allegations with officials at the U.S. Information Agency's Bureau of Broadcasting. We also suggested that the Bureau consider developing a review mechanism to ensure that broadcasts meet the standards. In December 1992, the Bureau informed us that it planned to enhance its overall Radio Marti program review process. Because of your Subcommittees' oversight of international broadcasting activities, we are providing you with the results of our inquiry and actions planned by the Agency.

BACKGROUND

Radio Marti and TV Marti are U.S. government stations that broadcast radio and television programs to Cuba. Both stations are part of the Office of Cuba Broadcasting within the Bureau. The Voice of America is also part of the Bureau. Authorizing legislation requires radio and television broadcasts to be in accordance "...with all Voice of America standards to ensure the broadcast of programs which are objective, accurate, balanced, and which present a variety of views."¹

¹Radio Broadcasting to Cuba Act (P.L. 98-111, Oct. 4, 1983, section 3(b)) and Television Broadcasting to Cuba Act (P.L. 101-246, Feb. 16, 1990, section 243(b)).

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In 1992, we reported on TV Marti² and recommended that procedures be established to ensure that TV Marti's broadcasts meet applicable standards. In response to our recommendation, the Director of the U.S. Information Agency reported that he was creating an external program review committee of qualified independent critics who will convene every 6 months to evaluate TV Marti news and programs against criteria established by the Voice of America.

ALLEGATIONS THAT RADIO MARTI
BROADCASTS DID NOT MEET STANDARDS

During and after our review of TV Marti, we received allegations from several sources that some of Radio Marti's broadcasts were not meeting Voice of America standards. For example, the allegations stated that some broadcasts were not objective, did not provide balance, and did not present a variety of views. We did not attempt to determine if the allegations were valid or if program review processes were adequate to ensure compliance with standards. On October 5, 1992, we discussed the allegations with officials from the Bureau of Broadcasting. We suggested that the Bureau consider establishing an external review committee for Radio Marti similar to the review committee created for TV Marti, depending on its review of the allegations.

ACTIONS TO ENHANCE THE
RADIO MARTI REVIEW PROCESS

In a December 7, 1992, letter to us, the U.S. Information Agency's Associate Director for Broadcasting said that an internal review had found that few of the allegations had any real substance and that he was convinced that Radio Marti had complied with the Voice of America standards. Nevertheless, he said that the Agency had decided to enhance the overall Radio Marti program review process through two actions:

- One action involves creating an external program review committee to evaluate broadcast standards at Radio Marti along the lines of the committee recently created to

²TV Marti: Costs and Compliance With Broadcast Standards and International Agreements (GAO/NSIAD-92-199, May 6, 1992).

review TV Marti broadcast standards. The new committee is to convene every quarter and to evaluate Radio Marti news and programs against criteria established for Radio Marti as described in its programming guidelines, which implement Voice of America broadcasting standards. The committee will submit its report and recommendations to the Agency, the Bureau, and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting.

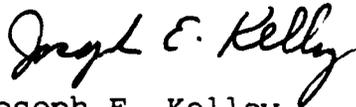
- The second action is to move a program review unit from the Office of Voice of America Programs, which does not oversee Radio Marti, to the Office of the Associate Director for Broadcasting. Under this organizational change, the unit will have responsibility for coordination of the program review process throughout the Bureau, including broadcasts of Radio Marti and TV Marti.

We believe that these actions, when fully implemented, will help management to monitor Radio Marti news and programs, determine compliance with standards, and take corrective actions if necessary.

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We are sending copies of this letter to the Director and the Associate Director for Broadcasting of the U.S. Information Agency and other officials responsible for Radio Marti broadcasts. We are also sending copies to interested congressional committees and will make copies available to others upon request.

Please contact me at (202) 275-4128 if you or your staff have any questions.



Joseph E. Kelley
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Affairs Issues

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