STATEMENT OF RAFIQ UR REHMAN (Oral)

Congressman Grayson, thank you for inviting me to speak. Thank you also for everything you did to try to help our lawyer, Shahzad Akbar, obtain a visa. While in the end we did not succeed, it was reassuring to me that some members of the US government were trying to shed light on this terrifying US practice.

My name is Rafiq-ur-Rehman. On October 24, 2012, a CIA drone killed my 67 year old mother and injured my children and those of my brother’s.

Nobody has ever told me why my mother was targeted that day. Some media outlets reported that the attack was on a car, but there is no road alongside my mother’s house. Others reported that the attack was on a house. But the missiles hit a nearby field, not a house. All of them reported that three, four, five militants were killed.

But only one person was killed that day – Mammana Bibi, a grandmother and midwife who was preparing to celebrate the Islamic holiday of Eid. Not a militant, but my mother.

In urdu we have a saying: aik lari main pro kay rakhna. Literally translated, it means the string that holds the pearls together. That is what my mother was. She was the string that held our family together. Since her death, the string has been broken and life has not been the same. We feel alone and we feel lost.

We also feel scared. My family no longer gathers together like it did when my mother was alive. I hardly see my brothers and sisters and my children rarely see their cousins. Their cousins tell them that they are afraid to visit because the drone might then kill them, too.

Four of my children were injured that day and four of my brother’s children. We have had to borrow money and sell land to pay for the childrens’ medical treatment. There has been no compensation to help with these bills. The Pakistani government accepted my claim and confirmed the details. But it says it is not responsible; the U.S. is.

I am a primary school teacher in my community. I come from a family of teachers. Both of my brothers are teachers and my father is a retired headmaster.

Congressman Grayson, as a teacher, my job is to educate. But how do I teach something like this? How do I explain what I myself do not understand? How can I in good faith reassure the children that the drone will not come back and kill them, too, if I do not understand why it killed my mother and injured my children?

My mother is not the first innocent victim of US drones. Numerous families living in my community and the surrounding area have also lost loved one, including women...
and children, in these strikes over the years. Dozens of people in my own tribe that I
know are merely ordinary tribesman have been killed. They have suffered just like I
have. I wish they had such an opportunity as well to come tell you their story. Until
they can, I speak on their behalf as well. Drones are not the answer.

In the end I would just like to ask the American public to treat us as equals. Make
sure that your government gives us the same status of a human with basic rights as
they do to their own citizens. We do not kill our cattle the way US is killing humans in
Waziristan with drones. This indiscriminate killing has to end and justice must be
delivered to those who have suffered at the hands of unjust.

Thank you.