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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

April 26, 2018

Committees:

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Chairman, Subcommittee on
Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific

SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

Subcommittee on Space
Subcommittee on Energy
Subcommittee on Environment

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Office of the Secretary, United States Department of State
Harry S. Truman Building, 2201 C Street NW, Room 7220
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

I am writing to bring your attention to the country of Eritrea, which is strategically located along the Red Sea north of Ethiopia and south of Sudan. It also shares a short border with Djibouti. I support improving our relationship with Eritrea including a resumption of military cooperation.

Eritrea defeated the Stalinist dictatorship ruling Ethiopia to gain independence in 1991. Eritrea is a key member of the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE fighting against the Iranian backed Houthis in Yemen. Eritrea has excellent relations with Israel, UAE and Egypt. Cooperation with Eritrea to address the growing Chinese influence in the region, including their new military base in Djibouti and the ongoing fight against radical Islam makes sense.

Unfortunately, during the previous Administration, relations with Eritrea deteriorated badly and, at U.S. instigation, UN sanctions were placed on Eritrea in December 2009. It is dubious whether these sanctions were ever justified, but by almost accounts they are certainly not justified now. We have not had full diplomatic representation at the Ambassador level, since 2004. I speak to Eritrean leaders regularly and I am certain that Eritrea wants improved relations with the United States.

The Obama sanctions are a burden and a stigma on Eritrea. They impede economic development and undermine our bilateral relationship. Whatever legitimate problems exist—whether involving human rights, diplomatic differences, or other issues—can be better addressed and solved in the context of normal relations and cooperation.

I urge you and your Administration to restore full diplomatic relations, to lift sanctions on Eritrea, and to begin a dialogue on strategic cooperation that would benefit both countries and our allies in the Red Sea region.

Sincerely,

Dana Rohrabacher
Member of Congress