Write a Letter to the Editor: Honor Professor Muhammad Yunus and Urge Congress to Support His Mission to Eradicate Poverty

“I firmly believe that we can create a poverty-free world if we collectively believe in it. In a poverty-free world, the only place you would be able to see poverty is in the poverty museums. When school children take a tour of the poverty museums, they would be horrified to see the misery and indignity that some human beings had to go through. They would blame their forefathers for tolerating this inhuman condition, which existed for so long, for so many people.”

— Professor Muhammad Yunus’s Nobel Lecture, December 10, 2006

On April 17, Congress will award Professor Muhammad Yunus with the Congressional Gold Medal for his pioneering efforts to eradicate global poverty. Since the American Revolution, Congress has commissioned gold medals as its highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions. Professor Yunus will become one of just seven people to have received the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Congressional Gold Medal.

Congress is honoring Professor Yunus’s groundbreaking microfinance work and the founding of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Today, Grameen Bank has over 8.4 million members — 97 percent of whom are women — and has lent over $12.5 billion since its inception in 1976, helping millions of women and their families lift themselves out of extreme poverty. The Grameen model has also been replicated around the world and now benefits tens of millions of others.

After decades of partnering with Professor Yunus to advocate for microfinance and promote the Grameen Bank model, RESULTS volunteers worked with Senators Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Bob Bennett (R-UT) and Representatives Rush Holt (D-NJ) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) in 2009 to see that Professor Yunus’s work was recognized by Congress and the United States by introducing legislation to award Professor Yunus a Congressional Gold Medal. After a sustained and impressive push by RESULTS volunteers, the legislation passed in 2010.

The long-awaited Gold Medal Ceremony on April 17 is an occasion to recognize Professor Yunus’s work, but it is also an opportunity to thank members of Congress who signed on to the legislation awarding the Gold Medal, promote the unrealized potential of microfinance, and highlight Professor Yunus’s mission of creating a world without poverty.

Join the effort by writing a letter to the editor honoring Professor Yunus and urging Congress to support his vision of eradicating extreme poverty by funding critical poverty-focused foreign affairs programs in 2014. The timing is especially critical as Congress is beginning work on the fiscal year 2014 appropriations bills.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Instructions: Follow the guidelines for letters to the editor provided by your local papers. Always include your address and phone number with your submission. Make your letter short (150–250 words) and to the point using the EPIC format (see sample letter below). If your letter gets published, amplify its impact by sending a copy of your published letter to your members of Congress and send it to Blair Hinderliter, RESULTS/REF Communications Director at bhinderliter@results.org and Ken Patterson, Global Grassroots Manager at kpatterson@results.org.

| Engage  | Gold Medals are reserved for excellence, for champions, for heroes. On April 17, an economist and unlikely hero, Professor Muhammad Yunus, will become the seventh person in history to receive the triple crown for good works — the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and now the Congressional Gold Medal. The Gold Medal from Congress honors Professor Yunus for his pioneering microfinance work and lifelong mission of eradicating poverty. |
| Problem | Around the world, 1.2 billion people still live on less than $1.25 per day. Sixty percent of these are women. And there are still 2.5 billion people who lack access to safe financial services. |
| Inform about | When he founded Grameen Bank in Bangladesh in 1983, Professor Yunus created an |
Background on the Congressional Gold Medal Legislation

Long before Congress, RESULTS recognized back in the 1980s that Professor Yunus was doing something unique. Professor Yunus and his creation, Grameen Bank, were using credit, the market, individual drive, and community support to give individuals the hand they needed to transform their lives. RESULTS introduced microfinance to Congress, the media, and the public. Later, Professor Yunus, RESULTS founder Sam Daley-Harris, and John Hatch of FINCA together launched an effort to take Professor Yunus’ idea to the world via the Microcredit Summit Campaign, an effort that continues today.

Fast forward to 2009. Together with Senators Durbin and Bennett and Representatives Holt and Ros-Lehtinen, RESULTS volunteers worked to introduce and promote legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Professor Yunus. The only challenge with this effort was that two-thirds of House and Senate members needed to cosponsor the legislation even before it could be considered for passage – and all of this in a very divided Congress. Even as the only group working the legislation, RESULTS volunteers took on the challenge. Both S. 846 and H.R. 2000 were introduced on April 21, 2009. The Senate version moved quickly, taking just six months to pass the full Senate in October 2009.

The House was a different story. Within two days of introduction, 19 members of Congress joined as cosponsors – a good start, but a long way from the 290 needed to move the legislation forward. There was another surge of 65 cosponsors after the RESULTS International Conference that year. Cosponsors trickled in for the balance of the year, closing 2009 with 115 cosponsors, or not even half of what would be needed. A steady push at the beginning of 2010 turned out an additional 72 cosponsors by June 30. RESULTS groups like those in Chicago and Oak Park, Illinois, vowed to get their entire state delegations on board. After a big push by volunteers during the June 2010 International Conference, 84 more cosponsors were added, leaving us only 18 short of the needed two-thirds. Congressional sponsors pushed, volunteers pushed, and Lenny Chorazy, volunteer with RESULTS Northern Virginia, walked to any office on Capitol Hill that fellow volunteers wanted him to make the request. On September 14, just two weeks before the end of the congressional session, the 290th cosponsor signed, as did an additional 8 after that. The House passed the bill on September 23, 2010, clearing the way for President’s signature to make it law and setting the stage for the ceremony this month.

Biography of Professor Muhammad Yunus

Professor Muhammad Yunus established the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh in 1983, fueled by the belief that credit is a fundamental human right. His objective was to help poor people escape from poverty by providing loans on terms suitable to them and by teaching them a few sound financial principles so they could help themselves. From Professor Yunus’ personal loan of $42 to destitute basket-weavers in Bangladesh in the mid-1970s, the Grameen Bank has advanced to the forefront of a burgeoning world movement toward eradicating poverty through microlending. Replicas of the Grameen Bank model operate in more than 100 countries worldwide.

Born in 1940 in the seaport city of Chittagong, Professor Yunus studied at Dhaka University in Bangladesh, then received a Fulbright scholarship to study economics at Vanderbilt University. He received his Ph.D. in economics from Vanderbilt in 1969 and the following year became an assistant professor of economics at Middle Tennessee State University. Returning to Bangladesh, Yunus headed the economics department at Chittagong University. From 1993 to 1995, Professor Yunus was a member of the International Advisory Group for the Fourth World Conference on Women, a post to which he was appointed by the UN Secretary-General. He has served on the Global Commission of Women’s Health, the Advisory Council for Sustainable Economic Development, and the UN Expert Group on Women and Finance. Professor Yunus is the author of Creating a World Without Poverty and Banker to the Poor.

1 You can see a list of all of the representatives and senators that cosponsored the legislation at the end of the Action Sheet.
House of Representatives: Cosponsors of H.R. 2000 [297]

Rep Altmire, Jason [PA-4] - 7/15/2010
Rep Baca, Joe [CA-43] - 9/14/2010
Rep Bachus, Spencer [AL-6] - 7/30/2010
Rep Baird, Brian [WA-3] - 7/15/2010
Rep Bean, Melissa L. [IL-8] - 7/15/2010
Rep Becerra, Xavier [CA-31] - 7/15/2010
Rep Berry, Marion [AR-1] - 7/20/2010
Rep Bilbray, Brian P. [CA-50] - 8/10/2010
Rep Bilirakis, Gus M. [FL-9] - 7/13/2010
Rep Bishop, Rob [UT-1] - 7/31/2009
Rep Bishop, Sanford D., Jr. [GA-2] - 7/11/2010
Rep Bono Mack, Mary [CA-45] - 7/30/2010
Rep Boustany, Charles W., Jr. [LA-7] - 8/10/2010
Rep Calvert, Ken [CA-44] - 7/27/2010
Rep Cantor, Eric [VA-7] - 7/30/2010
Rep Cardozo, Dennis A. [CA-18] - 8/10/2010
Rep Castle, Michael N. [DE] - 3/2/2010
Rep Christensen, Donna M. [VI] - 7/27/2010
Rep Chu, Judy [CA-32] - 4/21/2010
Rep Clay, Wm. Lacy [MO-1] - 9/15/2010
Rep Cole, Tom [OK-4] - 9/14/2010
Rep Costello, Jerry F. [IL-12] - 3/2/2010
Rep Courtney, Joe [CT-2] - 7/15/2010
Rep Crizz, Mark S. [PA-12] - 9/14/2010
Rep Cuellar, Henry [TX-28] - 7/19/2010
Rep Dahlkemper, Kathleen A. [PA-3] - 7/15/2010
Rep Davis, Artur [AL-7] - 9/14/2010
Rep Davis, Geoff [KY-4] - 7/30/2010
Rep DeFazio, Peter A. [OR-4] - 3/12/2010
Rep DeGette, Diana [CO-1] - 3/12/2010
Rep Delahunt, Bill [MA-10] - 6/30/2010
Rep DeLauro, Rosa L. [CT-3] - 7/13/2010
Rep Dijou, Charles K. [HI-1] - 7/30/2010
Rep Duncan, John, Jr. [TN-2] - 7/30/2010
Rep Eshoo, Anna G. [CA-14] - 12/16/2009
Rep Farr, Sam [CA-17] - 7/10/2009
Rep Fortenberry, Jeff [NE-1] - 4/21/2010
Rep Foster, Bill [IL-14] - 7/8/2009
Rep Fudge, Marcia L. [OH-11] - 7/15/2010
Rep Green, Al [TX-9] - 9/9/2009
Rep Green, Gene [TX-29] - 7/8/2009
Rep Hall, John J. [NY-19] - 6/30/2010
Rep Hare, Phil [IL-17] - 3/4/2010
Rep Harper, Gregg [MS-3] - 7/30/2010
Rep Heinrich, Martin [NM-1] - 11/18/2009
Rep Hodes, Paul W. [NH-2] - 6/30/2010
Senate: Cosponsors of S. 846

Sen Bennet, Michael F. [CO] - 7/20/2009
Sen Bingaman, Jeff [NM] - 4/21/2009
Sen Boxer, Barbara [CA] - 6/24/2009
Sen Cantwell, Maria [WA] - 4/30/2009
Sen Cochran, Thad [MS] - 4/30/2009
Sen Dodd, Christopher J. [CT] - 4/30/2009
Sen Inouye, Daniel K. [HI] - 4/30/2009
Sen Reed, Jack [RI] - 4/30/2009
Sen Udall, Tom [NM] - 6/25/2009