

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 31, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 "C" Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary of State Clinton,

We write to express our deep and continuing concerns about the protection of human rights, freedom of expression and the rule of law in Honduras. We urge you to ensure that U.S. policy towards Honduras is based on a more vigorous U.S. response in support of human rights. We share the concerns expressed by the Inter -American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in March 2011 regarding "the disproportionate use of force to quell public demonstrations against the policies of the current government, the lack of an independent judiciary and the situation of human rights defenders."

We are greatly concerned about the threats and violence reportedly directed against human rights defenders, activists, opposition leaders, members of the LGBT community and journalists in Honduras. State institutions dramatically fail to take action to defend those at risk. As you are aware, the IACHR singled out Honduras in its 2010 Annual Report, released on April 15th, as one of four countries in the hemisphere whose human rights situation warrants special attention. The IACHR reports that precautionary measures issued by the IACHR are generally not being implemented by Honduran authorities. Moreover, members of the security forces are implicated in many incidences of threats, harassment, attacks and extrajudicial executions.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) cites ten journalists killed since March 2010 in total impunity. Frank La Rue, the U.N. Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion also expressed concern about the role of the Honduran government in attacking community radio. The International Federation of Journalists reported that 10 of 29 journalists killed in Latin America in 2010 were in Honduras, and along with CPJ, has named Honduras one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a journalist. According to Human Rights Watch, the violent attacks on journalists and political opponents have a "profound chilling effect on basic freedoms."

News reports have cited a number of abuses in response to nationwide protests in March by teachers, parents and students in reaction to proposed budget cuts and withholding of teachers' pension funds. For example, widespread police use of tear gas affected teachers, students, journalists and bystanders, and the Honduran human rights group COFADEH reported that tear gas canisters were being fired directly at protestors and that police used live bullets. On March 17, 2011, teacher and human rights leader Ilse Ivania Velasquez died after being struck by a tear gas canister fired by police and then subsequently run over by a truck. Internationally known leader of the Garifuna community, Miriam Miranda, was injured by tear gas burns, threatened and detained.

According to reports by respected human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch, renowned human rights defender, former national Ombudsman and former IACHR president Leo Valladares has received threatening phone calls, been followed and had his home monitored, following a television appearance in which he questioned the growing power of the Honduran military. The non-governmental Commission of Truth, which is documenting human rights abuses perpetrated since the June 2009 coup,

has been the target of several attacks during March and April, including the severe beating by police of one of its staff. The IACHR documents 34 killings of members of the LGBT community since June 2009. In the Aguán valley, campesino farmers report that violence and forced evictions continue unabated. The Honduran non-governmental human rights group COFADEH reports 237 death threats during the first year of President Lobo's term in office (January 2010-January 2011), 133 directed at human rights defenders; 36 politically motivated killings; and 36 people fleeing the country into exile after having received threats. In a December 2010 report, Human Rights Watch noted that "no one has been held criminally responsible for the human rights violations and abuses of power committed after the coup," and observed little evidence of progress in human rights violations committed since the Lobo Administration took office in January 2010.

We strongly urge the State Department and U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa to vigorously press the Honduran government to take concrete steps to end abuses by official security forces by suspending, investigating and prosecuting those implicated in human rights violations. The State Department's own 2010 human rights report notes the lack of progress in investigating human rights crimes. We further urge you, Madam Secretary, to suspend U.S. assistance to the military and police, due to the lack of mechanisms in place to ensure security forces are held accountable for abuses.

It is essential that the United States require the Honduran government to respect its citizens' rights to freedom of expression and assembly, including an end to excessive use of force in response to protests. Importantly, the Honduran government must be pressed to vigorously implement the measures recommended by the IACHR to protect human rights defenders and journalists. We ask the U.S. Embassy to publicly denounce violence and threats against defenders and activists. It is vital that the Embassy denounce attacks against the staff of the non-governmental Commission of Truth and urge the government to ensure that the Commission can carry out its functions safely and that victims and witnesses are protected from intimidation and abuse. It would also be helpful to encourage reinstatement of three judges and a magistrate who were inappropriately removed from their posts for simply expressing opposition to the coup. Finally, to end the cycle of abuses and repair the deteriorated rule of law in Honduras, both intellectual authors and direct perpetrators of human rights abuses that have occurred since the June 2009 coup must be brought to justice.

Thank you for your serious consideration of these requests regarding strengthening the protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law in Honduras. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss them further with you and look forward to your response to these critical matters.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress



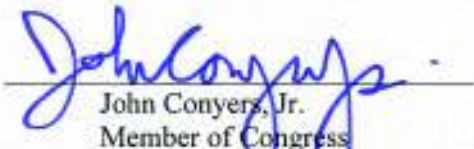
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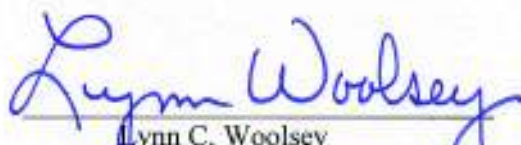

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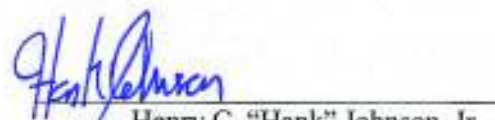

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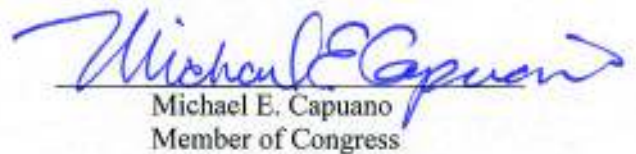
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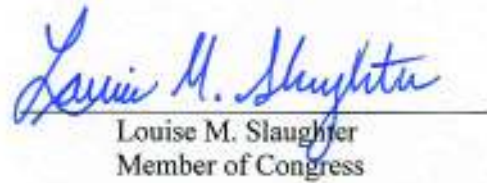
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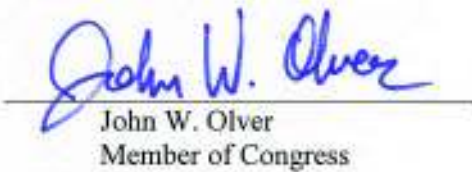
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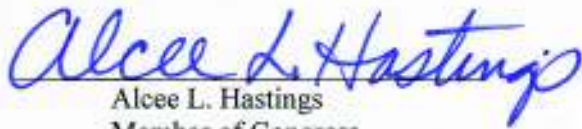
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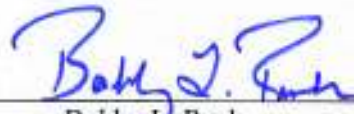
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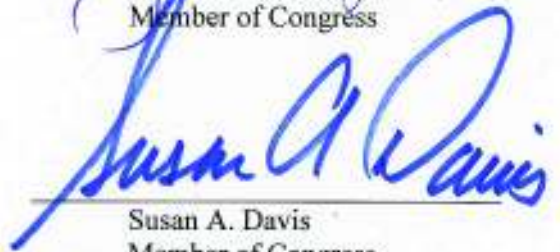
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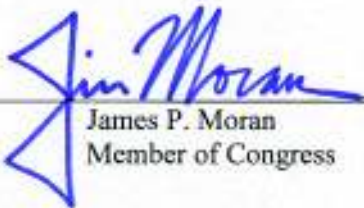
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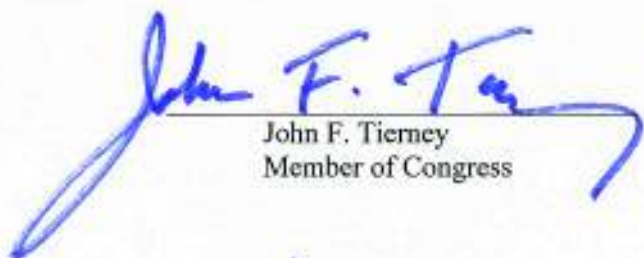
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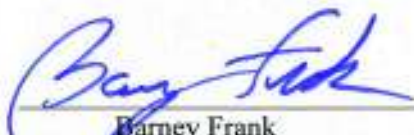
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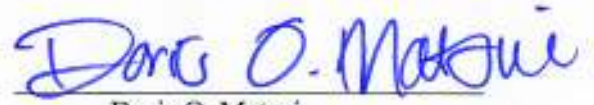
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cc: Arturo Valenzuela, Assistant Secretary of State, Western Hemisphere Affairs
Michael Posner, Assistant Secretary of State, Democracy, Labor and Human Rights
Dan Restrepo, National Security Council, Latin America Affairs
Hugo Llorens, U.S. Ambassador to Honduras