

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 15, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We are writing to express our concern about U.S. policy and the approaching November 24 elections in Honduras. The evidence so far indicates that the freedom and fairness of this election is very much at risk, as human rights abuses under the existing government continue to threaten basic civil liberties, opposition candidates do not enjoy a level playing field, and state security forces are taking on an increasingly central, and ominous role in context of the election.

We are particularly alarmed to learn that the ruling party, and its presidential candidate Mr. Juan Orlando Hernandez, now dominates all the key institutions of the government, including the country's electoral authority and the military, which distributes the ballots--leaving scarce recourse for Honduran citizens should fraud be committed in the electoral process, or human rights violations continue to threaten open debate. This is particularly troubling given the long history of electoral fraud in Honduras, including allegations of widespread fraud during the primary elections in November of 2012.

In light of these facts, we fear the country currently lacks conditions to guarantee a free and fair election process. For instance, in a recent report on Honduras, the International Federation of Human Rights expresses great concern in regards to the "absolute dysfunction" of the Honduran justice system, the "politicization of justice for electoral ends," and the concentration of power.

We are also troubled to learn about acts of violence and intimidation against leaders of the opposition parties, especially members of LIBRE. According to COFADEH, Honduras' leading human rights group, at least sixteen activists and candidates from LIBRE have been assassinated since June of 2012. Furthermore, it has been brought to our attention that the Honduras government has failed to effectively investigate and prosecute those responsible for these assassinations.

We also note with great concern the promotion of increasing militarization of the police as it is threatened civil liberties, including freedom of speech and freedom of association in Honduras. For instance, Honduran media reported that the military blocked peaceful marches of the opposition this past Independence Day, September 15, and members of the Army's Engineers' Battalion shot and killed an indigenous activist, Tomás García, at a peaceful protest in July. It has come to our attention that the governing party candidate has based much of his campaign on

a new hybrid military police, 5,000-strong, under the control of the military. The candidate himself led the push for its creation by the Honduran Congress this past August, promising "a soldier on every corner." These new troops are already engaging in police work and are visible in the streets, wearing black helmets and masks with only their eyes visible.

We welcome the recent statement from the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa expressing the U.S. neutral political position with respect to the elections, and its willingness to work with whichever candidate wins. However, we are concerned that the Embassy has not spoken forcefully about the militarization of the police under the impetus of one of the candidates, expressed concern with the National Party's concentration of institutional power through illegal means, and condemned the ongoing intimidation against the members of the opposition.

We are of the opinion that our government would lose credibility in Honduras and the region should it be perceived as taking sides in the election or turning a blind eye to fraud and unfair electoral conditions. Many in the region are well aware that in the past, the United States government has indeed supported specific candidates in Latin American elections, particularly in Central America. In November 2009, while the military coup in Honduras was still in force and basic civil liberties violently repressed, the State Department announced it would recognize the outcome of the presidential election even before the ballots had been counted. It also appears that the State Department has largely countenanced the concentration of institutional power in Honduran government in the past year, in the hands of the ruling party candidate, through illegal means.

We request the Department of State to use every available means to ensure free and fair elections in Honduras on November 24, to guarantee a level playing field in the weeks preceding the election, and to be entirely neutral in its public and private messages to this country. In addition, we request the Department of State to speak forcefully against the pattern of concerted attacks targeting human rights defenders and the opposition.

Sincerely,


Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress


Hank Johnson
Member of Congress


Michael Honda
Member of Congress