

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 19, 2015

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

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to express our concern regarding the continued involvement of the Honduran military in domestic law enforcement and traditionally civilian institutions in Honduras, and the Obama Administration's request to increase U.S. security assistance to Honduras for FY2016.

We also write to request the State Department's strict evaluation of U.S. support and training for the Honduran police and military in accordance with human rights conditions placed in the FY2015 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, full implementation of the Leahy Law, and the suspension and re-evaluation of further training and support for Honduran police and military units until human rights abuses are adequately addressed by the Honduran government.

Most democratic countries clearly establish the distinct roles of the military and the police, and place limits on their military's involvement in domestic law enforcement. However, in Honduras the military is becoming increasingly involved in civilian policing.

Since 2010, the Honduran government has regularly deployed military forces to carry out policing functions in different parts of the country. In 2013, the Honduran government established a "military police," promoted by Juan Orlando Hernández while he was running for president. This military police, which is part of the military chain of command, now numbers 3,000 members and continues to expand. On February 28 of this year, now-President Hernández announced that the work of 2,144 newly graduated personnel of the regular military would include domestic law enforcement. Today, military personnel patrol residential neighborhoods, buses, airports and highways.

According to the *Comité de Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos en Honduras* (COFADEH), a leading human rights organization in Honduras, military personnel have been involved in human rights abuses, including assassinations and intimidation of opposition leaders, land activists and peaceful demonstrators. Over the last few months, military police agents have reportedly threatened and harassed journalists, community leaders, and members of the indigenous organization COPINH; forcibly evicted small farmers without a warrant; raided the home of a student leader involved in recent protests; and shot and killed an unarmed woman selling mangos, among other alleged crimes. As reported by Al-Jazeera, *Defensores en Linea* and Today Media Network, these forces have also allegedly conducted raids against the homes of opposition activists, and participated in the killing of land-rights activists and peaceful demonstrators.

Furthermore, under the Hernández administration, according to reports from Amnesty International, the Associated Press, and the Honduran media, the military police have brutally beaten a leading advocate for homeless children, beaten and teargassed 35 members of an opposition party within the halls of Congress, and allegedly kidnapped and gang-raped a young woman – all with impunity.

The Honduran Constitution forbids the military from engaging in domestic law enforcement except in emergencies. This February, the Honduran Congress defeated a proposal by President Hernández to change the constitution and allow for the regular use of military police. However, despite those statutory limitations, the Honduran government has continued expanding this force by executive authority and has failed to fulfill its promises to engage in fundamental reforms of the country's corrupt police forces.

We are also concerned about the creation of a new “super-ministry,” called the Ministry of Security, last year. This ministry merged civilian and military security institutions under the direction of Julian Pacheco Tinoco, an active general at the time of his appointment who only resigned his commission in January 2015 after objections were raised by several local and international actors, including human right defenders. Prior to serving in this role, Mr. Pacheco was in charge of the National Inter-Institutional security force (FUSINA), an inter-agency task force – combining police, military personnel, intelligence agencies, and prosecutors – created by President Hernández. The ministry currently controls the police, the immigration agency, the merchant marine, and the civil aeronautics agency, among other key government institutions.

We are concerned about Honduran media reports that in mid-May of this year, a team of 300 U.S. military and civilian personnel, including Marines and the FBI, conducted “rapid response” training with 500 FUSINA agents, using U.S. helicopters and planes, despite allegations regarding the agency's repeated involvement in human-rights violations.

On February 2, 2015, the Administration submitted its FY 2016 budget request. The request included a \$1 billion fund for Central America, most of which flows to the governments of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador to assist them in addressing major issues driving migration from the region to the United States. We understand how important it is to address the root causes of migration to the United States, but want to make sure those U.S. taxpayer dollars are not used for military-style policing, activity that could, in fact, be one of the causes of this migration as it exacerbates violence in the country.

We strongly support the reassessment of U.S. security cooperation with the Honduran government required by the FY2015 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill and the aid limitations in the Leahy Law and are concerned about the Department's implementation of these statutes.

Congress has shown its continued support for a reassessment of U.S. security cooperation with the Honduran government by requesting inclusion of conditioning language in the FY16 State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill. Furthermore, pursuant to these statutory requirements, we urge the suspension and re-evaluation of further training and support for Honduran police and military units until the Honduran government adequately addresses human rights abuses.

We ask that you provide our offices with a detailed description of how the Department of State is currently implementing these statutes, including what metrics the Department is using to assess whether the Honduran government has adequately addressed human rights abuses.

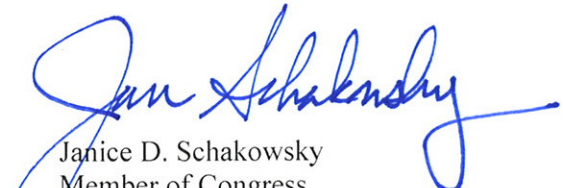
In addition, we ask the State Department to continue efforts to urge the Honduran government to implement serious and concrete measures to address military and police abuses, and to halt the continued involvement of the military in domestic law enforcement.


Finally, we request a full itemized report on the use of funds allocated for U.S. security assistance to Honduras in the State and Foreign Operations Appropriations law for FY2015 and for upcoming FY2106 appropriations legislation.

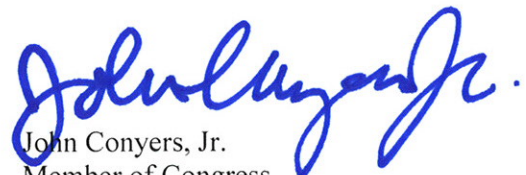
Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this important matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

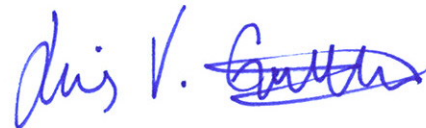

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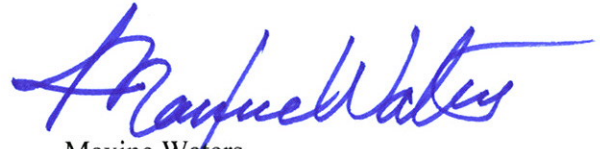

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