

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 16, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Jacob Lew
Secretary
U.S. Department of Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Kerry and Secretary Lew:

We write to urge you to act expeditiously to address appalling levels of violence and extreme violations of civil rights in Honduras. We are profoundly saddened and angered by the brutal assassination of Berta Cáceres, and appalled by our government's continuous assistance to Honduran security forces, so widely documented to be corrupt and dangerous.

To combat harsh violations of human rights and a growing culture of impunity in Honduras, we request that the Department of State and the Department of Treasury use all possible resources to achieve the following:

- Significant pressure on the Honduran government to sign an agreement with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to create an independent international investigation into the murder of Berta Cáceres, as requested by her family;
- Strong pressure on the Honduran Public Prosecutor to allow Berta Cáceres' family limited access to the investigation, including proposing independent experts.;
- Significant pressure on the Honduran government to implement and comply with the precautionary measures granted by the IACHR to Berta Cáceres' family, members of COPINH, and Gustavo Castro;
- Significant pressure on the Honduran government to immediately institute and fund a system of protection for the social activists, human rights defenders, and members of the political opposition who remain at risk, from providers of each individual's choosing. This system could be modeled after other systems in place in countries such as Colombia and Mexico;
- A review of the scheduled increase in funding for the Honduran security forces. We strongly believe that the U.S. government should immediately stop all assistance to Honduran security forces, including training and equipment, given

the implication of the Honduran military and police in extrajudicial killings, illegal detentions, torture and other violations of human rights;

- The review of U.S. support for loans to projects in Honduras from U.S.-funded multilateral development banks, including the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund to ensure no future awards are funding projects in Honduras that undermine the land rights of indigenous people and small farmers; and
- Significant pressure on the Honduran government to immediately and permanently stop the Agua Zarca dam, following the request made by Senator Leahy.

The murder of Ms. Cáceres, the co-founder and coordinator of COPINH, the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, should trigger the strongest possible diplomatic response. She was internationally renowned for her courageous work defending indigenous land rights and opposing environmentally destructive megaprojects. In 2015, she was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize.

The killing of Ms. Cáceres fits into a broad pattern of attacks against and targeted killings of Honduran activists, and community leaders since 2009, in which state security forces have allegedly been involved. COPINH has been a frequent target. In July 2013, the Honduran armed forces shot and killed Tomás García, a COPINH Lenca community leader, while he was peacefully protesting against the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam. Amnesty International reports that Cáceres and other COPINH leaders have been subjected to judicial persecution and have faced "unfounded charges in relation to their actions as human rights defenders." In 2013, Cáceres was jailed on a falsified charge of weapons possessions, and only freed thanks to the pressure of Amnesty International and an international outcry.

We also note that many other Honduran social activists, members of the political opposition, and human rights defenders have been victims of targeted killings and attacks. According to Global Witness, Honduras was the most dangerous country in the world for environmental activists in 2015. International human rights bodies including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Reporters Without Borders, the United Nations, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights have all documented a dramatic increase in targeted killings of journalists, legal professionals, LGBTI activists, land rights activists, labor activists, Afro-Indigenous and Indigenous activists, and other activists in the years since the 2009 military coup.

Disregarding her family's request, Ms. Cáceres' body was subjected to an autopsy by Honduran officials without the presence of an independent forensic expert. Such action underscored the danger of allowing the Honduran government--with its established track record of corruption and subversion of the rule of law, including the destruction of evidence--to proceed further in the investigation without independent international oversight.

Honduras and the world have lost an extraordinary advocate for environmental and social justice. We must now do everything in our power to ensure that her tragic

assassination will serve as a catalyst for positive change in Honduras, not just empty promises and more of the same. Therefore, we urge you to carefully rethink our country's close and supportive relationship with the Honduran government.

We look forward to your response to our heartfelt concerns about terrible human rights violations in Honduras.

Sincerely,



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
Member of Congress



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress



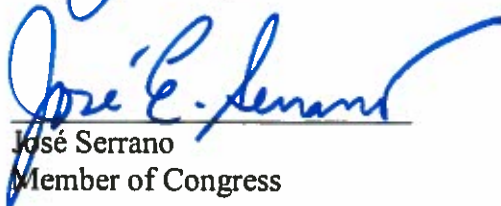
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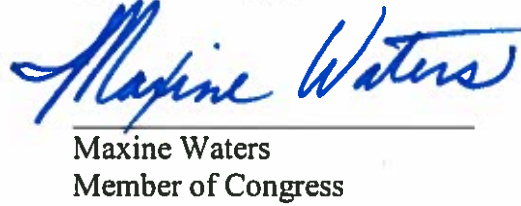


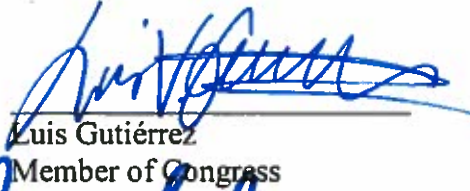
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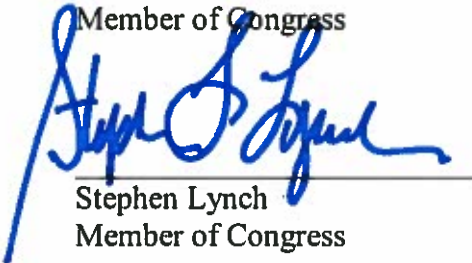

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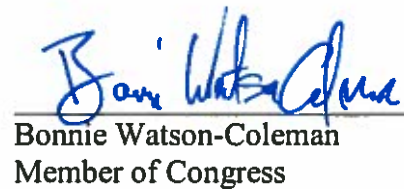

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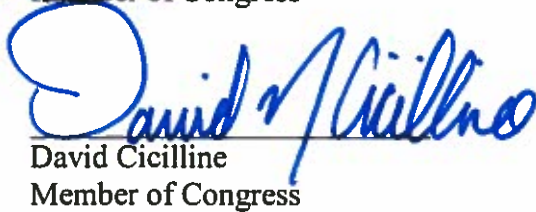

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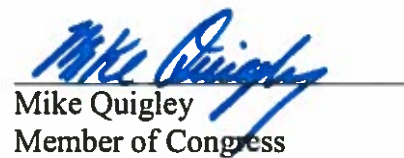

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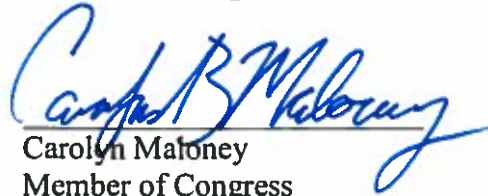
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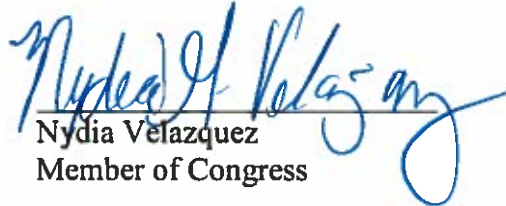
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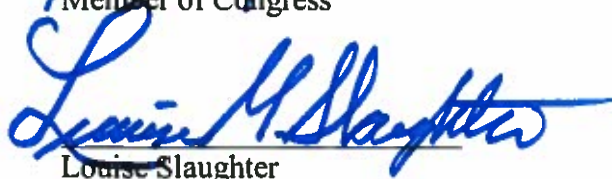
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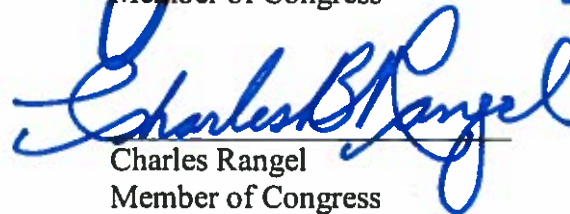

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