

May XX, 2014

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to express concern about the ongoing human rights situation in Honduras. As a new President and Congress have recently taken office, we ask the State Department to use its leverage to urge the Honduran government to protect the fundamental human rights of its citizens, end the use of military forces for law enforcement, investigate and prosecute abuses, and, more broadly, restore the rule of law.

Almost five years after the 2009 coup ousting President Zelaya, egregious violations of human rights continue. The Associated Press has documented ongoing death-squad style killings by Honduran police. Independent media and human rights organizations continue to report that vulnerable groups, including members of the LGBT community and indigenous and campesino activists, are being targeted and killed. Basic labor rights are routinely violated and union leaders have received increased death threats in recent months.

Instead of implementing reforms to address those pervasive problems, the Honduran government adopted policies that threaten to make the human rights situation even worse. The former and current administrations have promoted the militarization of police forces and use their armed forces for domestic law enforcement. In August 2012, a new Military Police was created, with a projected size of at least 5,000. That force has committed human rights abuses while engaged in policing, such as the October 2013 raid on the home of opposition activist Edwin Espinal. Members of the armed forces are also implicated in the killing of Tomás Garcia in July 2013. Because of a continuing record of human rights abuses by the Honduran police and military, Members of Congress have repeatedly called for a cessation of U.S. aid to the country's security forces.

Those and other human rights abuses have not been effectively investigated or prosecuted in recent years. According to the National Commissioner for Human Rights, during the last administration, dozens of lawyers and journalists were killed and 97 percent of cases regarding these suspected human rights abuses remain unpunished. The non-governmental group Rights Action cites allegations of almost 100 killings of land rights activists in the area of Bajo Aguán. According to a Human Rights Watch study, there is "virtually complete impunity for crimes" believed to be associated with land conflicts in that region of the country.

We are also concerned about recent developments impeding Hondurans' freedom of speech and association. In the first two months of 2014, the Honduran government published a new decree revoking the legal status of over ten thousand non-profit organizations, including a wide range of opposition groups. Those groups include women's and environmental organizations, a prominent group that regularly reports on press freedom issues, and schools.

Finally, we are concerned about reports that last year's election in Honduras was not free and fair. The human rights group COFADEH reports that at least 18 members of the leading opposition party LIBRE were assassinated in the lead-up to the election, with an additional six LIBRE-affiliated individuals and a well-known progressive journalist killed in the weeks after. Election observers documented widespread vote-buying activities, acts of intimidation, and cases of citizens' names being eliminated from voting rolls. Challenges by opposition parties regarding discrepancies in the vote were not transparently addressed by the Supreme Electoral Council.

We ask that you pay close attention to those issues, strictly evaluating U.S. support and training for the Honduran police and military in accordance with human rights conditions placed in the 2014 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations law. We also ask that you fully enforce the Leahy Law, which prohibits assistance to individuals or units of any foreign military or police body that commit gross human rights abuses with impunity. The State Department, along with our embassy in Honduras, must take a consistent and public stance supporting those threatened with human rights abuses, and strongly encourage the investigation and prosecution of those perpetuating crimes, including state agents.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Members of Congress