

January 30, 2013

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

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to express our concern regarding the grave human rights situation in Honduras, and in particular the dire situation of Afro-Indigenous Hondurans in the aftermath of the June 2009 military coup.

We request a thorough and credible investigation on the tragic killings of May 11 in Ahuas to determine what exactly occurred and what role, if any, was played by U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents. We also call for an immediate investigation into alleged abuses perpetrated by Honduran police and military officials in the country.

We are troubled to hear of the threats and repression targeting Afro-Hondurans who have bravely voiced their alarm over the steady deterioration of democracy in their country. We are also concerned regarding acts of violence and intimidation against Afro-Indigenous people defending their historic land rights. We are particularly disturbed to learn of the effects of a militarized counternarcotics policy on Afro-Honduran communities, and the participation of U.S. agents in operations that have led to the deaths of Afro-indigenous civilians.

On May 11, 2012, four Afro-Indigenous villagers, including a 14-year-old boy, were killed during the course of a drug interdiction raid in Ahuas, Honduras. Three others were seriously wounded. At least ten U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents participated in the mission as members of a Foreign-Deployed Advisory Support Team (FAST), a DEA unit first created in 2005 in Afghanistan. According to the New York Times, Honduran police agents that were part of the May 11 operation "told government investigators that they took their orders from the D.E.A."

We understand that this tragic incident has been extremely traumatic for the otherwise peaceful and tightly knit community of Ahuas. Although Honduran human rights groups and international organizations such as Human Rights Watch have demanded that U.S. and Honduran authorities conduct a thorough and impartial investigation of this incident, the investigation has not been properly conducted. For instance, official inquiries into the matter have been perfunctory, and deeply flawed. Credible testimony indicates that the victims were innocent bystanders and not drug traffickers. As Honduran authorities have yet to address the issue, our government should press ahead with a full investigation to better determine exactly what occurred and what role was played by U.S. agents.

On June 22, the Fraternal Organization of Black People of Honduras (OFRANEH), one of the most prominent groups representing Afro-Indigenous Hondurans, objected to what it views to be racially

biased, "outrageous and dangerous" statements given to the New York Times and the Washington Post by U.S. officials following the May 11 killings. OFRANEH claims U.S. officials made unsubstantiated accusations of drug trafficking against the entire Afro-indigenous communities in the Moskitia region of Honduras.

OFRANEH states that since the coup, drug traffickers have been increasingly targeting Afro-Indigenous communities, claiming their traditional lands, and killing those who stand in their way. Human rights groups confirm that the Honduran judiciary has done little to defend the basic rights of these communities. For instance, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States has ordered the State of Honduras to cease and desist from approving any title transfers on land in the Afro-Indigenous community of Triunfo de la Cruz in order to protect its vulnerable population from attacks by drug traffickers anxious to secure access to the Caribbean. Currently, many more Afro-Indigenous communities seek similar protection. We note that, even in this context, Afro descendent and Indigenous leaders assert that the U.S. -backed drug war in Honduras hurts their communities.

In addition, since the country's June 2009 military coup, according to numerous reports, the rate of impunity of alleged abuses perpetrated by state security forces has risen to unprecedented heights. According to Honduras' leading human rights organization, the Committee of Families of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), over the last three years, more than ten thousand complaints have been filed regarding police and military abuses, very few of which have been investigated. Furthermore, State security forces are also directly carrying out repression against government critics. For instance, Afro-indigenous leader, Miriam Miranda, president of OFRANEH, was physically attacked and arrested by a departmental police chief in May 2011.

Finally, we strongly recommend a review on the implementation of counternarcotics operations carried out by our government in Honduras taking into account the unique conditions and high vulnerability of Afro-descendent and indigenous communities, who are disproportionately affected by drug trafficking activities.

Sincerely,

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Gregory W. Meeks  
Member of Congress

John Conyers, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Karen Bass  
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress

Sam Farr  
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutierrez  
Member of Congress

Michael M. Honda  
Member of Congress

John Lewis  
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush  
Member of Congress

Frederica Wilson  
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson-Lee  
Member of Congress

Lacy Clay  
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Raúl M. Grijalva  
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Jared Polis  
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Emmanuel Cleaver II  
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Paul D. Tonko  
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Jackie Speier  
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Rosa L. DeLauro  
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George Miller  
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Zoe Lofgren  
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Doris O. Matsui  
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Peter Welsh  
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Janice D. Schakowsky  
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Danny K. Davis  
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Edward J. Markey  
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Charles Rangel  
Member of Congress

John Tierney  
Member of Congress

Yvette Clarke  
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Gary Peters  
Member of Congress

David Cicilline  
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Chaka Fattah  
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Michael E. Capuano  
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Jim Langevin  
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Michael H. Michaud  
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Maxine Waters  
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James P. Moran  
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Earl Blumenauer  
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Lois Capps  
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Keith Ellison  
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Marcy Kaptur  
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Alcee L. Hastings  
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John Yarmuth  
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Louise M. Slaughter  
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Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress

Donna F. Edwards  
Member of Congress

Jim McDermott  
Member of Congress

Al Green  
Member of Congress

Ed Pastor  
Member of Congress

David Price  
Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen  
Member of Congress

Cc Michele M. Leonhart, Administrator, Drug Enforcement Administration

Cc Lisa J. Kubiske, U.S. Ambassador to Honduras

Cc Ricardo Zuñiga, Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere