

March 2, 2012

Dear Representative:

We, the undersigned U.S. trade unions, representing nearly 15 million members, write to draw your attention to a Dear Colleague letter initiated by Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) on the systemic, continuing human rights violations in Honduras, with a particular focus on the Bajo Aguán region.

The letter calls on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to suspend all U.S. police and military aid to Honduras until the Lobo Administration stops violating human rights through state agents, ensures the investigation and prosecution of military and police personnel who have committed human rights abuses, and takes steps to protect small farmer association leaders, human rights defenders, which includes labor activists, and other at-risk populations.

Representative Schakowsky's letter to Secretary Clinton highlights some of the most prominent and egregious examples of human rights violations in Honduras, which are part of a pattern of violations that has plagued the labor movement since the coup. In one recent incident, on December 6, 2011, Honduran soldiers chased members of the teachers' unions—who were participating in a peaceful march—through the streets. When the teachers took refuge in the office of a teachers' union, police and military surrounded the building for two hours. On December 20, 2011, heavily armed police and military launched tear gas at members of the teachers' unions protesting unpaid wages. These attacks follow over two years of violence directed towards union leaders and protesting workers by state security forces.

We are also deeply concerned by the ongoing human rights violations in the Bajo Aguán region in northeastern Honduras. Between September 2009 and February 8, 2012, a violent land-dispute has resulted in the death of forty-five people connected to campesino organizations, one journalist, and his partner. Witnesses say that private security guards perpetrate much of the violence, in some cases working closely with state military and police officers. In October 2011, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) reported that it was concerned about the “militarization of the area, which has reportedly placed the peasant farmers and human rights defenders in the Bajo Aguán in a state of high risk.” In one case, the police and military allegedly tortured the 17-year-old son of a campesino leader, dousing him with gasoline and threatening to burn or bury him alive.

The violence directed towards the campesinos in the Bajo Aguán represents a fraction of the violence, torture and harassment reportedly undertaken by the Honduran police and military against human rights defenders, trade unionists, peasant groups, and others. We respectfully ask you to sign the letter initiated by Representative Schakowsky calling on Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to immediately suspend all police and military aid to Honduras until the Lobo Administration ends state-initiated violence and impunity, investigates and prosecutes members of the police and military responsible for human rights abuses, monitors the activities of private security companies, and provides basic protective measures for campesino activists, human rights advocates, members of the opposition, and other targeted populations, including trade unionists.

To sign on to the letter, please contact Nina Besser at 202.225.2111 or nina.besser@mail.house.gov.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

AFL-CIO

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)

Communications Workers of America (CWA)

International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)

Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA)

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United Auto Workers (UAW)

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW)

United Steelworkers (USW)