

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 15, 2023

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to urge you to ensure that the U.S. Embassy in Honduras is continually engaging the Honduran government to combat corruption while protecting the environmentalists in the Bajo Aguan region from future violence and attacks, and ensuring that their demands are fully and fairly attended to. These demands include the definitive cancelation of the Los Pinares mining licenses, and the investigation into the murders of human rights defenders and environmentalists by the Tegucigalpa-based special prosecutor of crimes against life. We are concerned that the Biden administration's Root Causes Strategy for Central America, centered on encouraging prosperity and the conditions families need to build sustainable lives, may be undermined by powerful corporations engaged in corruption.

On June 15, Oqueli Dominguez Ramos was murdered in his home in Guapinol, on the North Coast of Honduras. The 42-year-old had just returned home from taking his young daughter to a medical appointment when two men pulled up on a motorbike. One entered the grounds that Oqueli shared with his family and announced he was there to massacre them. After his sisters and mother rushed to try and stop the armed assailant, Oqueli was fatally shot in the back. His mother, Catalina Ramos, was left injured with a gunshot wound in the leg and the two murderers drove off. It was 10:30 AM.

Members of the Dominguez family are vocal opponents of the illegal installation of the Los Pinares open pit iron ore mine in the Carlos Escaleras Botaderos Mountain National Park. Just five months earlier, Catalina's other son, Ali, was also murdered by men on motorbikes when he returned home from work with his friend Jairo Bonilla. Her third son Reynaldo was forced to leave home after receiving targeted threats. Both Ali and Reynaldo spent time in jail due to false allegations made by the Los Pinares mining company and prosecuted by a judicial system fraught with corruption.

Los Pinares mining company was initially a joint venture between the U.S. steel giant Nucor and the Honduran conglomerate EMCO Group, owned by Ana Facusse and her husband Lenir Perez. On April 28, the Miami home of Lenir Perez and Ana Facusse, registered to their Delaware Corporation "Emco Holding," was raided by the FBI, apparently in relation to an investigation into Nucor. Though Nucor claims its direct investment in Los Pinares ended in October 2019, it is strongly suspected the company retains interests in Los Pinares.

Faced with verbal threats and growing intimidation and defamation, including bot campaigns on

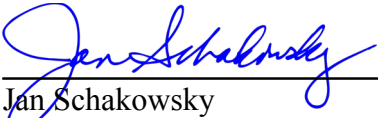
U.S.-based social media platforms, the Municipal Committee in Defense of Public and Common Goods of Tocoa sent the Honduran government an urgent request for a meeting to resolve the conflict provoked by the illegal installation of the megaproject, and the campaigns targeted at the environmental defenders and their families. This was less than 24-hours before Oqueli's murder. The letter detailed more than six years of struggle by the Committee to denounce the illegalities of the project, the contamination in the national park caused by the megaproject, the lack of response to the numerous complaints filed by members of the Committee in response to threats and the online defamation campaign, and the lack of independent investigation into the murders of environmental defenders. Even after Oqueli's murder, the Honduran government has failed to respond to the situation of risk faced by defenders.

EMCO and other corporations backed by Ana Facusse's father, Miguel Facusse, have long been accused of violence, illicit influence in the judicial system, and even connections to drug trafficking. EMCO was implicated in the 2013 kidnapping of two European human rights observers with the Honduran Accompaniment Project/PROAH. In 2014 the Inter American Court of Human Rights of the Organization of American States found that Honduras had denied justice to the family of environmentalist Carlos Escaleras after local courts irregularly closed investigations when hitmen responsible for Escaleras' murder confessed they had been hired by Miguel Facusse. Facusse's interests in the Bajo Aguan region, where the Los Pinares mine is located, began with what is widely denounced as massive, violent and illegal grabs of agrarian reform and indigenous Garifuna lands by Facusse's Dinant corporation. This year alone, seven land rights defenders in disputes with Dinant have been killed.

We are concerned by the level of support the corporations associated with the Facusse family have enjoyed from the international community, including access to financing from multilateral development banks and investment from a major US corporation, despite evidence of involvement in corruption, violence and other human rights violations. We are further concerned that the actions of these kinds of companies and a failure to counter them will undermine the Biden Administration's objectives in the region.

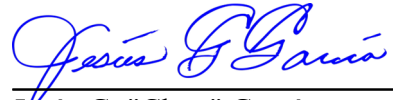
We are encouraged by the current Honduran government's important efforts to support investigations into these violent networks through initiatives such as the Tripartite Commission, a joint commission of the government with internationally recognized independent human rights experts, and the long-awaited United Nations-supported initiative, the International Commission Against Impunity in Honduras (CICIH). We urge the Embassy to show strong support for these initiatives as well as to do all in its power to ensure that the Bajo Aguan environmentalists' demands for justice are met.

Sincerely,



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Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



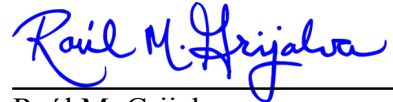
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Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress



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Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress



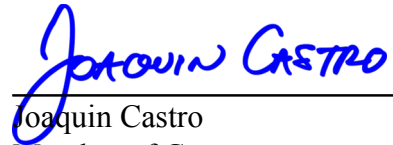
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Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



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



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Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress



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Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



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Kevin Mullin  
Member of Congress



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Cori Bush  
Member of Congress



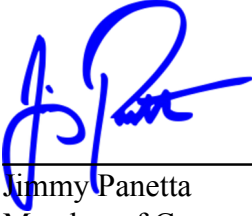
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Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress



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Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress



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Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



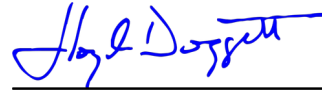
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James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



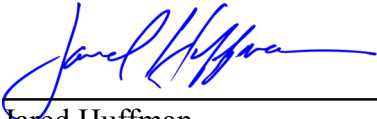
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Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress



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Lloyd Doggett  
Member of Congress



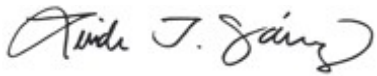
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Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



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Rashida Tlaib  
Member of Congress



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Linda T. Sánchez  
Member of Congress



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Ritchie Torres  
Member of Congress