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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

December 6, 2016

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

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

Dear Secretary Kerry and Secretary Lew:

We write to follow up on our letter of March 17, 2016, signed by 62 Members of Congress, in which we expressed our concerns regarding the murder of Berta Cáceres -- the internationally-renowned Honduran Indigenous rights advocate-- and regarding human rights and U.S. policy in Honduras more generally. Since that time, our fears have only increased.

We are concerned that the Government of Honduras continues to unduly limit access to the investigation into the murder of Ms. Cáceres and shooting of Gustavo Castro, a key witness who was shot along with Ms. Cáceres. Under Honduran law, victims and their families have the right to actively participate in the prosecution of the case; however, Ms. Cáceres's investigative file remains secret seven months later. This significantly constrains the family's legally guaranteed involvement in the case and limits its ability to advocate for a speedy prosecution of those implicated.

We are also alarmed that Honduran authorities were careless in handling the case file, as the file was allowed off government property and subsequently stolen. This raises further questions about the ability of Honduran authorities to manage Ms. Cáceres's case and impartially prosecute the case.

We were pleased to learn that five suspects were arrested in connection with Ms. Cáceres's murder in May 2016 and a sixth suspect was arrested in September. Those arrested include: a current employee of the hydroelectric dam development company DESA, the builder of the dam that Ms. Cáceres and the Lenca Indigenous communities in Rio Blanco actively opposed; an active duty major in the Honduran military; and two former members of the Honduran military, one of whom was also a former employee of DESA.

Concerns remain that authorities have not brought into custody those that allegedly masterminded Ms. Cáceres's murder, and authorities also did not seize relevant evidence during searches of DESA headquarters. On June 21st, the *Guardian* reported that a former soldier in a U.S.-funded Special Forces unit recounted he had seen Ms. Cáceres's name on a death list allegedly belonging to the Honduran military. This, along with the identities of those previously arrested, suggests the involvement of high-ranking Honduran military figures in Ms. Cáceres's assassination.

We welcome the November 14, 2016, announcement of the creation of the International Expert Advisory Panel (GAIPE), which was formed at the request of the Cáceres family with the support of COPINH and multiple civil society organizations. We hope that GAIPE can contribute to an impartial and independent examination of the pending criminal investigation. However, the GAIPE does not have access to information beyond that available to the family. In our March 2016 letter, we requested your assistance in pressuring the Honduran government to support an Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) -led independent international investigation of Ms. Cáceres's case. Despite offers of assistance from the IACHR, the Government of Honduras has not allowed such an investigation to proceed nor has the State Department taken a clear and public position in support of an independent IACHR investigation. We ask that you do so immediately.

Furthermore, violence against rights activists continues. COPINH activist Nelson García was killed in March 2016 and threats have forced his family to flee Honduras. In October 2016, Tomás Gómez Membreño, Ms. Cáceres's successor as the general coordinator of COPINH, and Alexander García, a local COPINH leader in Llano Grande, survived assassination attempts. Most recently, on October 18, 2016, four masked men gunned down two land reform advocates from the cooperative MUCA in the Aguán Valley -- an area where over 150 land rights advocates have been killed since 2009. MUCA members are protected by the IACHR, as was Ms. Cáceres, but the Honduran government has not yet complied with the commission's protection order.

Finally, American taxpayer money should not be given to a government facing accusations of operating outside the rule of law and collaborating in targeted assassinations. We request that the U.S. government immediately suspend all police and military aid to Honduras until these mounting human rights concerns are addressed. We were disturbed to learn that on September 30, 2016, the Department of State certified the Honduran government had complied with the human rights conditions placed on aid in the FY2016 Appropriations Act, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The Act's requirements for aid included the protection of human rights defenders and other political activists, prosecution of security forces who have committed human rights abuses, and the removal of the military from internal policing. Violations of these and other threshold requirements for aid have not been adequately addressed. We ask for the Department of State to reconsider immediately its decision. In addition, we reiterate the concerns expressed in our March 2016 letter regarding the termination of the Agua Zarca dam and reconsideration of U.S. support for loans from multilateral development banks to Honduras.

It is our hope that Ms. Cáceres's death will lead to greater justice for the Honduran people. We appreciate your assistance in the realization of that goal and the consideration of the above requests.

Sincerely,



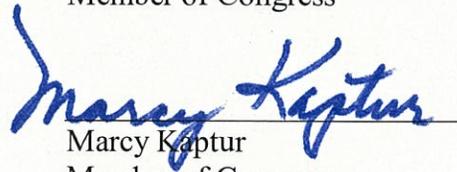
Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



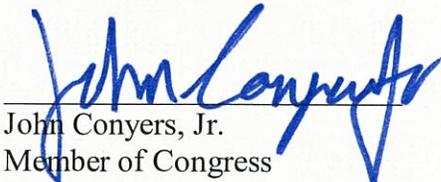
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



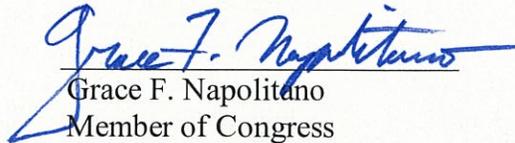
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress



Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress



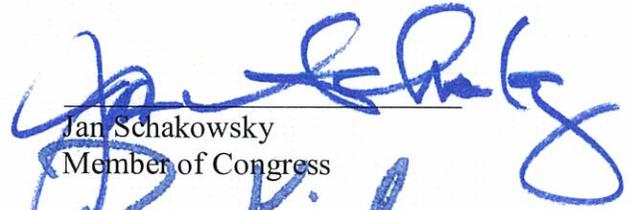
Beto O'Rourke
Member of Congress



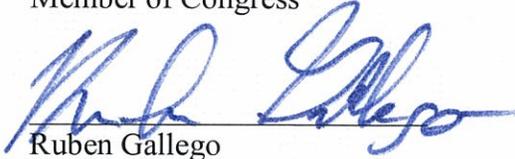
David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Ron Kind
Member of Congress



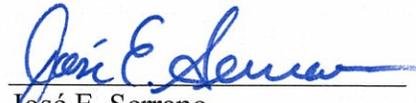
Betty McCollum
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Mike Honda
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Mark Pocan
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José E. Serrano
Member of Congress



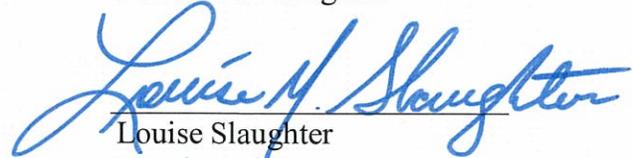
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



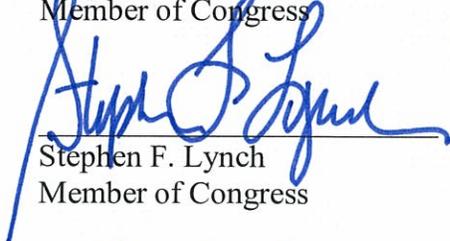
Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



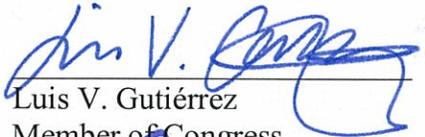
Louise Slaughter
Member of Congress



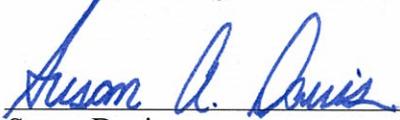
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



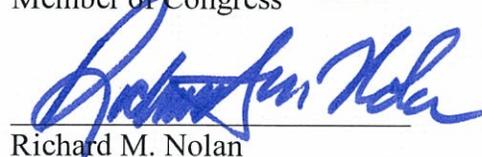
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



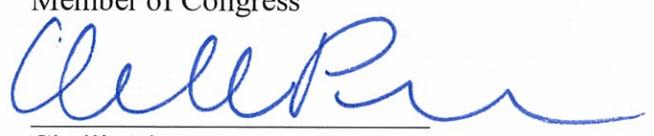
Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress



Susan Davis
Member of Congress



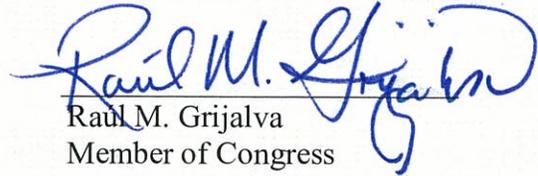
Richard M. Nolan
Member of Congress



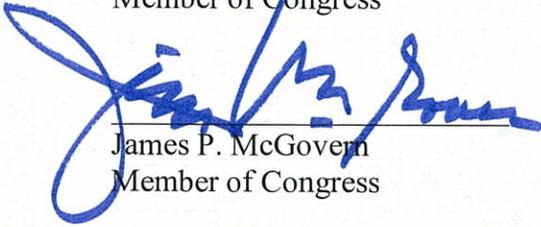
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Raul M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress