

# Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

October 24, 2018

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We are deeply troubled by the false accusations and threats against human rights defenders, journalists, and international human rights observers in Honduras, including threats against U.S. citizens. A recent wave of smear campaigns<sup>1</sup> escalated the danger facing Hondurans and others who document or attempt to speak out against abuses to their land rights, freedom of association and the press, and other basic rights. We request your immediate assistance to address four specific issues.

First, journalists have received death threats<sup>2</sup>, including Sandra Maribel Sánchez<sup>3</sup>, the long-time Tegucigalpa correspondent for the Jesuit-owned station Radio Progreso. The station and its staff, including director Rev. Ismael Moreno Coto, S.J.<sup>4</sup> (Padre Melo), have also been threatened. Tegucigalpa police reportedly chased and attacked a journalist<sup>5</sup> who refused to hand over his camera and beat and teargassed another reporter<sup>6</sup> while she was covering a student protest. Multiple social media attacks have been launched against journalists covering mining and hydroelectric dam projects. Those opposing these projects—in particular, members of the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ)—have also faced serious attacks.

Second, threats have been levied against human rights advocates, including Americans. Smear campaigns have extended to targeting U.S. human rights groups, including delegations to Honduras led by Witness for Peace. Ongoing public intimidation campaigns continue against the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) and the family and an attorney of murdered environmentalist Berta Cáceres.

Third, the Honduran government has denied entry or expelled non-Hondurans for

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<sup>1</sup> <http://defensoresenlinea.com/las-campanas-de-descredito-y-de-odio-siempre-preceden-la-muerte/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://criterio.hn/2018/08/23/oacnudh-expresa-su-preocupacion-ante-amenazas-contr-la-periodista-sandra-maribel-sanchez/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.canadianjesuitsinternational.ca/2018/08/27/threat-against-honduran-journalist/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2268-gobierno-orquesta-campana-de-odio-y-desprestigio-en-contra-de-defensores-de-ddhh>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/agresion-fisica/880-antimotines-golpean-a-camarografo-que-realizaba-cobertura-a-manifestacion>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/748-brutalidad-policial-contr-periodista-de-conexihon>

documenting human rights violations.<sup>7</sup> Those have included citizens from<sup>8</sup> the United States<sup>9</sup>, Spain, Italy, Germany, France and Canada. In February, three reporters from the Associated Press who reported that the leadership of the National Police had engaged in drug trafficking, were threatened with legal action and seizure of their phone records<sup>10</sup>. Additionally, Billy Joya, the reported death squad leader, has threatened political opposition leaders and Bertha Oliva, the director of the Committee of Families of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras (COFADEH).

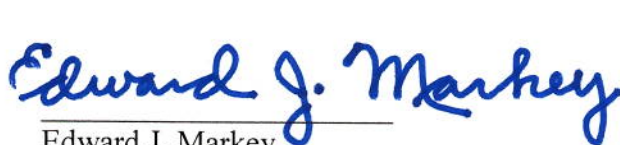
Fourth, in late September, a U.S. citizen, Annie Bird, the director of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission, and a British citizen, Nina Lakhani, a reporter for *The Guardian*, were targets of an intimidation campaign in the press that falsely accused them of fomenting armed rebellion.<sup>11</sup> For more than a decade, Bird has been documenting human rights abuses in Honduras, focused on the Aguán Valley. She has twice previously been the subject of verbal threats from Colonel German Alfaro, former director of the Honduran military in the Aguán and presumed head of military intelligence for the Honduran Armed Forces. Lakhani is the most prominent foreign journalist writing about the Cáceres case.

This is an alarming pattern that continues to escalate. We ask that you immediately communicate these concerns to the Government of Honduras and request that it investigate these attacks, determine if state security forces were involved, and bring the perpetrators to justice. Furthermore, we ask that you direct the State Department to provide Congress with a detailed assessment of the efficacy of current Honduran government efforts to protect freedom of expression and that the State Department reassess its certification of human rights conditions in Honduras.

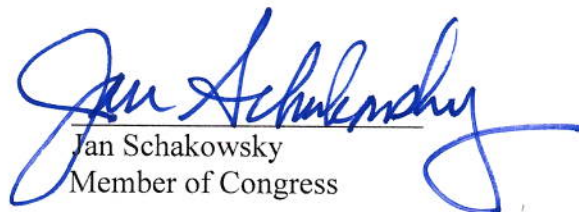
We also request your administration to immediately investigate threats against American citizens, report the findings to Congress, and include in the report a description of the actions taken in response. Finally, we request that you immediately and forcefully issue a public statement of concern regarding the pattern of attacks, and making clear that violations of basic human rights are unacceptable and contrary to conditions placed on U.S. security assistance.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/honduras-us-embassy-journalists-election.php>

<sup>8</sup> <http://defensoresenlinea.com/carta-abierta-a-los-respetables-miembros-del-cuerpo-diplomatico-internacional-y-organismos-internacionales-con-presencia-yo-enfoque-en-honduras/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://twitter.com/reedlindsay/status/938507810970710016>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ap.org/ap-in-the-news/2018/ap-objects-to-honduran-top-cop-s-ask-for-phone-records>

<sup>11</sup> <https://cpj.org/2018/09/freelance-reporter-covering-environmental-activist.php>



Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator



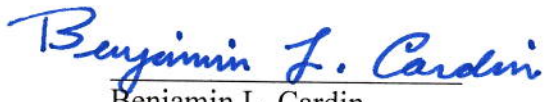
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



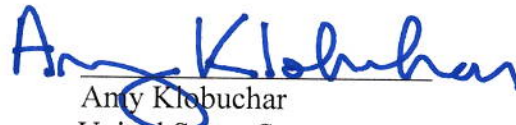
Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



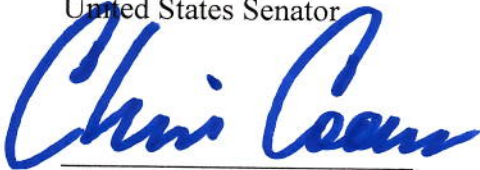
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Chris Coons  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



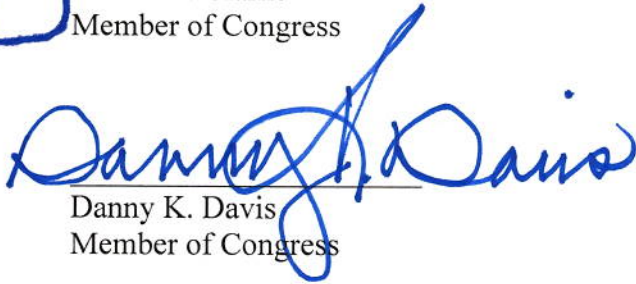
Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress

  
Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress

  
Emanuel Cleaver  
Member of Congress

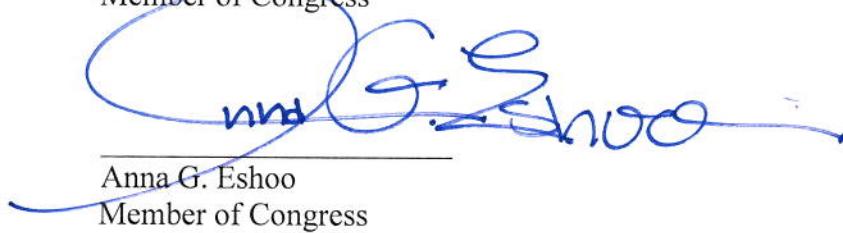
  
Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress

  
Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress

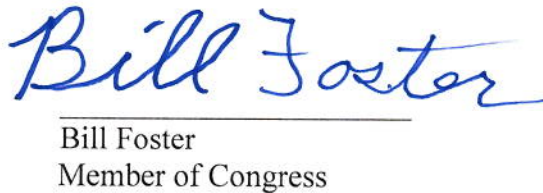
  
Rosa L. DeLauro  
Member of Congress

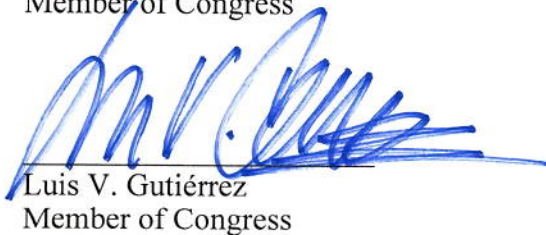
  
Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress

  
Keith Ellison  
Member of Congress

  
Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress

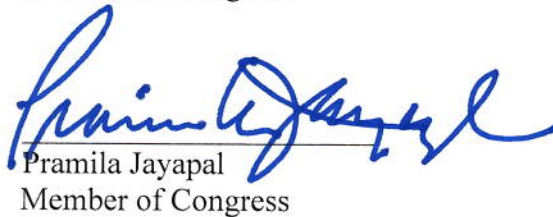
  
Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

  
Bill Foster  
Member of Congress

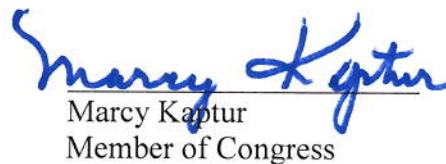
  
Luis V. Gutiérrez  
Member of Congress

  
Denny Heck  
Member of Congress

  
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress

  
Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress

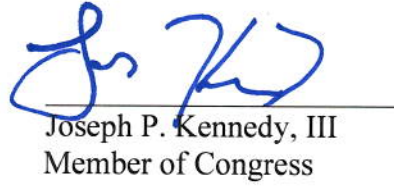
  
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress

  
Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress



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Robin L. Kelly  
Member of Congress



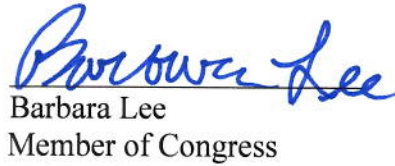
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Joseph P. Kennedy, III  
Member of Congress



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Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



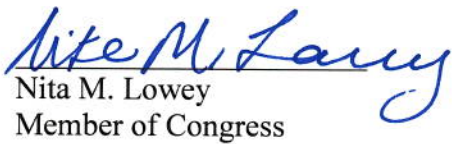
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Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress



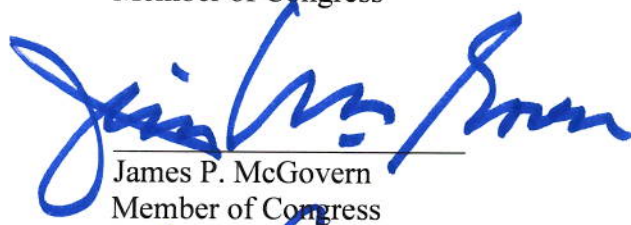
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Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress



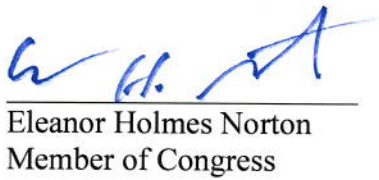
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Nita M. Lowey  
Member of Congress



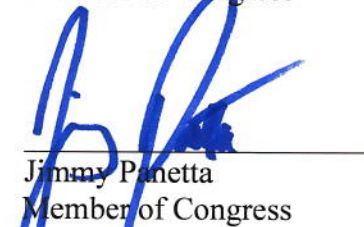
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James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress




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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



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Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



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Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress



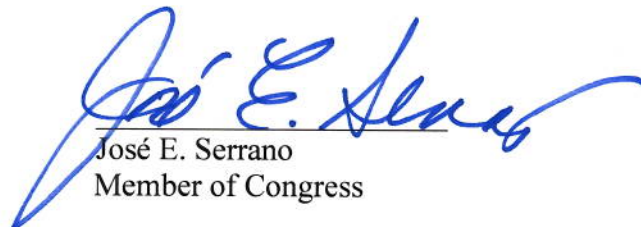
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Bobby L. Rush  
Member of Congress



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Bradley S. Schneider  
Member of Congress




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José E. Serrano  
Member of Congress




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Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress



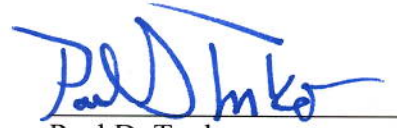
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Peter Welch  
Member of Congress



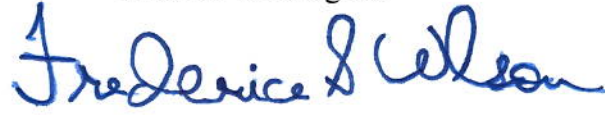
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Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



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Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress



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Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress



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John Yarmuth  
Member of Congress

CC: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo