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\(^1\) 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\(^2\), including Sandra Maribel Sánchez\(^3\), 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.\(^4\) (Padre Melo), have also been threatened. Tegucigalpa police reportedly chased and attacked a journalist\(^5\) who refused to hand over his camera and beat and tear gassed another reporter\(^6\) 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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\(^1\) http://defensoresenlinea.com/las-campanas-de-descrÃ©dito-y-de-odio-siempre-preceden-la-muerte/
\(^3\) http://www.canadianjesuitsinternational.ca/2018/08/27/threat-against-honduran-journalist/
\(^6\) http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/748-brutalidad-policial-contra-periodista-de-conexihon
documenting human rights violations. Those have included citizens from the United States, 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. 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. 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

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7 https://www.cjr.org/analysis/honduras-us-embassy-journalists-election.php
9 https://twitter.com/reedlindsay/status/938507810970710016
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
Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

Nita M. Lowey
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Bradley S. Schneider
Member of Congress

Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

José E. Serrano
Member of Congress
Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress

Peter Welch  
Member of Congress

Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

Paul D. Tonko  
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth  
Member of Congress

CC: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo