

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 10, 2020

His Excellency Nayib Armando Bukele Ortez
President of the Republic of El Salvador

Dear President Bukele:

As you know, we are longtime supporters of a strong U.S. – El Salvador relationship and of the need to continue to partner to ensure a better future for both of our countries. Today, we write to express our deep concern regarding your government’s increased hostility towards independent and investigative media outlets in El Salvador. A free press is a central pillar of any democracy, and it is of the utmost importance that our countries redouble our commitment to protect journalists as they carry out their courageous work every day.

In particular, we are alarmed by recent attacks against El Faro, one of Central America’s top independent, investigative outlets. El Faro’s first-rate journalism is well-respected not only in El Salvador but also throughout the international community. Its credibility has been attacked by your government through anonymous articles in government-administered media. In addition, we are extremely troubled by your Finance Ministry’s aggressive audit of El Faro’s finances which appears to be an effort to intimidate them.

Last Friday, El Faro published a months-long investigation on your government’s reported negotiations with MS-13. Following the publication of this article, your National Prison Director Osiris Luna announced the he had given full access to the Attorney General’s office to investigate “maliciously spread news” which was “totally false.”

Unfortunately, these actions follow a pattern of attacks on the Salvadoran press. The Salvadoran Association of Journalists has reported more than 60 documented attacks on the press since you assumed office last year. In particular, we are concerned by cyber-attacks and break-ins targeting media outlets investigating your government’s COVID-19 response. In July, the magazine *Gato Encerrado* was the victim of a cyber-attack that resulted in the loss of everything the outlet published over the past 6 months. That same month, *Gato Encerrado* reporter Julia Gavarrete’s computer was stolen from her house while she was at the Presidential House covering a government event. A similar incident occurred on July 13th when a man broke into the apartment of the editor of *Disruptiva* magazine while he and his family were sleeping and stole two computers and a map of the municipality where the magazine was conducting a COVID-19 infection monitoring experiment. We urge immediate investigations of these incidents.

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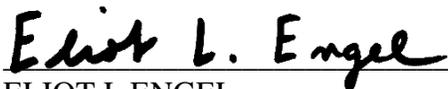
The international community is following these attacks on press freedom very closely. On May 18, 2020, the State Department transmitted a document to Congress regarding El Salvador which stated, "Journalists critical of government policy face threats, many of which are fueled by Bukele's treatment of them on social media. These efforts, which include selectively choosing to pull advertising from media outlets critical of its policies in order to shape content, undermine the healthy and open exchange of views that freedom of the press allows and does not promote independence of the media."

The State Department is not alone in sharing these concerns. The Organization of American States' Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have voiced similar sentiments over the past year.

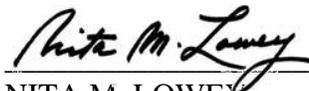
While disagreements between government officials and the media are bound to occur in any democracy, we believe that governments must always ensure full respect for press freedom. We urge you to treat our concerns with the seriousness in which we convey them.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

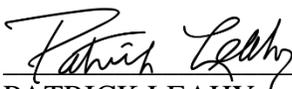
Sincerely,



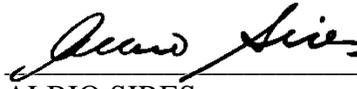
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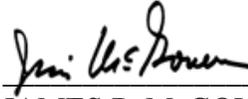
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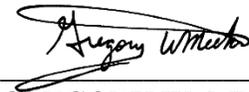
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