

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 16, 2016

Vice President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Vice President:

We are both saddened and outraged by the recent murder of Berta Cáceres in Honduras. As you know, Berta was a true champion for social justice. As the Coordinator of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) and the winner of the 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize, Berta was a role model for indigenous leaders and environmental activists throughout the world.

Given your role as the Obama Administration's point person on U.S. policy towards Central America, we write to request that you take three actions in response to this terrible tragedy.

First, we ask that you urge the Honduran government to allow the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to conduct an independent investigation into Berta's murder. In addition to the ongoing domestic investigation, there must be a credible and trusted international review of her murder. We hope that you will continue to offer U.S. law enforcement support for both the Honduran investigation and any international review.

Second, as you know, a large portion of U.S. assistance to Honduras is conditioned on the protection of human rights and support for the rule of law. The Honduran government's commitment both to ensuring Berta's murderers are brought to justice and to strengthening protection mechanisms for Honduras's most vulnerable human rights leaders will be essential as Congress evaluates future support for the country. We respectfully ask that FY 2016 assistance to Honduras be adjusted to more significantly focus on both the improvement of the country's justice system and the strengthening of its protection mechanisms. This means ensuring that those who provide protection to human rights leaders in the future are fully vetted and trusted.

Third, we respectfully request that you provide us with a description of how U.S. assistance to Honduras will be adjusted to meet these goals.

To ensure that U.S. taxpayer dollars are well-spent, we need a strong commitment by the governments of the Northern Triangle to combat their internal challenges. That is why continued aid must include strong conditions. It is our sincere hope that the Honduran government will take immediate steps to reform its justice system, investigative capacity, and protection mechanisms for vulnerable individuals. These should include human rights, women's, indigenous, and environmental advocates like Berta, as well as trade unionists and leaders in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, many of whom have been the victims of homicide in the country.

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We commend your leadership in addressing the root causes of child migration from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. You and President Obama have rightly emphasized the importance of supporting the people of these countries by improving citizen security and promoting economic development. U.S. assistance to Central America should help ensure that no child is forced to make the perilous trek from Central America to the U.S. – Mexico border.

Thank you for your continued efforts on U.S. policy toward Honduras and your commitment to a more secure and prosperous Central America.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign Affairs



NITA M. LOWEY
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations

Cc: Secretary of State John F. Kerry
Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas A. Shannon
Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta S. Jacobson
U.S. Ambassador to Honduras James D. Nealon