

Rights Action
February 28, 2012

Call your Member of Congress to sign Schakowsky “Letter on Human Rights in Honduras”

DEADLINE: Thursday, March 1

- Please re-post and re-publish this information
- Encourage other U.S. citizens to take action with their own member of congress.

HONDURAS – CAPITAL OF ...

Since the June 2009 military coup in Honduras, the country – now ruled by an illegitimate, military backed regime - has become known as:

- The murder capital of the world
- A journalist-killing capital of the world
- An LGBT killing capital of the world
- And, most recently, the inmate killing capital of the world

The situation of repression, violence, corruption and impunity could not be worse. State repression has reached levels similar to the 1980s.

IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED

Congress just reconvened in Washington. NOW is the time to contact your Representative in Congress again to ask them to sign the Schakowsky letter in support of human rights in Honduras.

On Tuesday, February 14, 2012, U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) circulated a House sign-on “Dear Colleague” letter (see below) addressing the ongoing human rights crisis in the Aguán region of Honduras. The letter now has 18 signers. Our goal is to get at least the 87 signers of last year’s McGovern letter on Honduras.

All Reps in the U.S. House are eligible to join in signing. It will be open for signature until Thursday, March 1.

We need your help in securing the signature of your rep on this letter. If your rep was among the 87 members of the House who signed-on to the McGovern letter on Honduras in May 2011 (the full list is attached), it should be easy for them to sign on to this letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton raising ongoing egregious human rights concerns, and calling again for suspension of U.S. military and police aid to Honduras as called for in the McGovern letter last year. If your rep did not sign, now is the time to ask him or her to sign on!

- The Congressional Switchboard number is (202) 224-3121
- If you do not know the name of your Rep in Congress, type in your zip code to find out at this website (upper right corner): <http://www.house.gov/representatives>

Ask to speak with the aide who handles foreign policy. Use the script below in speaking with the aide. If the aide does not recall seeing the letter, ask for his or her email address so that you can send a copy of the letter (see below). If the foreign policy aide is not available, ask to leave a message on his or her answering machine. Be sure to ask for the name foreign policy staffer so you can follow up.

SCRIPT: “My name is _____. I am a constituent in (town / city neighborhood). I am calling to ask Rep. _____ to join in signing the Schakowsky letter in support of human rights in Honduras. Has Rep. _____ seen this letter? Can I count on him/her to sign on? The deadline to sign on is Thursday, March 1. Please call me this week at (your phone number) to let me know if you have seen the letter, and if Rep_____ will sign it.”

For a Rep to sign on to the letter, the legislative staffer who handles foreign policy must email Nina Besser in Rep. Schakowsky’s office to inform her:

Nina Besser
202.225.2111
nina.besser@mail.house.gov

Please contact the aide every few days until the deadline to make sure that the staffer has asked the Rep to sign on. If your rep agrees to sign

on, please notify Gary Cozette at gcozette@crln.org and cozettelada@ameritech.net so we can confirm the signature against our lists.

CURRENT LIST OF SIGNERS - AS OF MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27

1. Schakowsky (IL)
2. McGovern (MA)
3. Davis (IL)
4. Woolsey (CA)
5. Grijalva (AZ)
6. Jackson (IL)
7. Lee (CA)
8. Doyle (PA)
9. Rush (IL)
10. Lewis (GA)
11. Honda (CA)
12. Clarke (NY)
13. Price (NC)
14. Capuano (MA)
15. Gutierrez (IL)
16. Van Hollen (MD)
17. Cohen (TN)
18. Farr (CA)

From: The Honorable Janice D. Schakowsky
Date: 02/14/2012

Dear Colleague,

Please join me in signing the attached letter on the concerning human rights situation in Bajo Aguán, a fertile valley in northern Honduras.

Forty-five people associated with peasant organizations as well as a journalist and his partner have been killed in the Bajo Aguán area between September 2009 and February 8, 2012 in the context of unresolved land conflicts. Private security guards on farmlands in dispute are cited by witnesses as the perpetrators of many of these crimes,

according to information presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) by international and Honduran human rights groups. In some cases, the security guards are reported to have acted in collusion with army and police agents. Seven security guards have also been killed during this time period.

This critical situation was the subject of an IACHR hearing in October 2011. The IACHR concluded that it is “particularly concerned about the situation in the Bajo Aguán region of Honduras.... The Commission received information regarding the criminalization of the campesino struggle and the militarization of the area, which has reportedly placed the peasant farmers and human rights defenders in the Bajo Aguán in a state of high risk.” The abuses taking place in Bajo Aguán reflect a larger pattern of human rights violations in the country, where human rights defenders, journalists, community leaders and opposition activists are the subject of death threats, attacks, and extrajudicial executions.

The letter encourages the State Department to urge the Honduran government to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the murders and to take steps to protect small farmer association leaders, human rights defenders, and others at risk. It calls for a suspension of military and police assistance, and notes the obligation of the State Department to vigorously enforce Leahy Law and foreign operations appropriations law provisions and ensure that U.S. assistance does not flow to military or police personnel who have violated human rights.

If you have any questions or to sign the letter, please contact Nina Besser in my office at 202.225.2111 or nina.besser@mail.house.gov.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rep. Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State

2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We are concerned with the grave human rights situation in the Bajo Aguán region of Honduras and ask the State Department to take effective steps to address it. The abuses taking place in this area of the country reflect a larger pattern of human rights violations in which human rights defenders, journalists, community leaders and opposition activists are the subject of death threats, attacks, and extrajudicial executions. We appreciate the November 9, 2011 State Department statement urging Honduran authorities to take measures to end the violence and impunity in the Bajo Aguán. We urge you to continue to pressure the Honduran government to protect the fundamental human rights of its citizens, and to investigate and prosecute abuses.

Forty-five people associated with peasant organizations have been killed in the Bajo Aguán area between September 2009 and February 8, 2012. One additional peasant association member, Francisco Pascual López, remains disappeared since May 2011. Seven security guards, a policeman, a journalist and his partner, and three other persons have also been killed.

This critical situation was the subject of an Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) hearing in October 2011. The IACHR concluded that it is “particularly concerned about the situation in the Bajo Aguán region of Honduras.... The Commission received information regarding the criminalization of the campesino struggle and the militarization of the area, which has reportedly placed the peasant farmers and human rights defenders in the Bajo Aguán in a state of high risk.”

Private security guards on farmlands in dispute are cited by witnesses as the perpetrators of many of these crimes, according to information presented to the IACHR by human rights groups. In some cases, the security guards are reported to have acted in collusion with army and police agents. In mid-August, the Honduran government initiated a joint military-police action in Bajo Aguán known as Operation Xatruch II. At

least nine peasant organization members, including two principal leaders, have been killed since this operation was launched.

According to information presented to the IACHR by human rights groups, police and military associated with Xatruch II tortured community members. In one case, the 17-year-old son of a peasant leader was allegedly tortured by police and military, doused with gasoline and threatened with being burned or buried alive. On November 1, a group of small farmers and their families returning from visiting a cemetery were fired upon, allegedly by private security guards. One was killed and four wounded, one of whom subsequently died.

These cases have yet to be effectively investigated and prosecuted. In September 2011, Human Rights Watch reported that while some arrest warrants have been issued, no one has been arrested or charged for these killings. While the Honduran judicial system has failed to effectively prosecute perpetrators of extrajudicial executions, it has been remarkably efficient in issuing arrest warrants for Bajo Aguán peasant organizers. Legal proceedings have been initiated against at least 162 small farmers and more than 80 were temporarily arrested, largely on charges of trespassing and theft of farm produce, between January 2010 and July 2011.

Underlying the violence are long-standing land conflicts that urgently need to be resolved. Land in the Bajo Aguán was titled to small farmers by a government agrarian reform initiative in the 1970s. According to peasant associations, fraud and coercion subsequently were used to force many to sell their lands.

Several associations reached an agreement with the Zelaya government to resolve the land conflicts, and, when this agreement was not fulfilled after the June 2009 coup, small farmers began occupations of the lands they claim as their own. An agreement reached between the Lobo government and peasant groups in April 2010 to transfer land to their communities has not been implemented. The Honduran government has also failed to comply with provisions of Honduran law that mandate that state-owned land belonging to the former Regional Military Training Center in the Bajo Aguán area be transferred to landless farmers. Further, the government has not protected the rights of settled

communities with long-term legal titles to their land, which have been attacked and evicted.

We know you share our firm belief that given U.S. support for the Honduran government, including assistance for the police, military and judicial system, we have an obligation to ensure that human rights are respected. Indeed, it is our understanding that the United States is providing training to the 15th Battalion of the Honduran military which is operating in the Bajo Aguán region.

We ask you to urge the Honduran government to take immediate action to protect human rights in the Bajo Aguán region and throughout the country. This should include investigating and prosecuting those responsible for the murders, threats and other abuses, including the intellectual authors of such abuses, and immediately suspending, investigating and as appropriate prosecuting members of the military and police credibly alleged to have committed or acted in collusion with such abuses. We urge the State Department to request an accounting of the specific status of these cases and provide us with an assessment on their status rather than just a general evaluation of efforts to strengthen the judicial system.

The Honduran government should provide basic protective measures, in consultation with beneficiaries, to witnesses, victims, human rights defenders, and peasant leaders at risk in the region. We also believe that the Honduran government should regulate the private security companies that have, thus far, acted with impunity. In addition, the Honduran government should comply with the agreements already signed with peasant associations to address the land conflicts in Bajo Aguán and seek comprehensive solutions to lack of access to land and livelihoods that underlie this conflictive situation.

We also ask you to suspend U.S. assistance to the Honduran military and police given the credible allegations of widespread, serious violations of human rights attributed to the security forces. We note that the foreign operations appropriations bill for FY12 requires the State Department to certify that the Honduran government “is investigating and prosecuting in the civilian justice system, in accordance with Honduran and international law, military and police personnel who are credibly alleged to have violated human rights, and the Honduran military and police are

cooperating with civilian judicial authorities in such cases.” In addition to the Bajo Aguán cases, there are numerous other allegations of police and military involvement in threats, excessive use of force and extrajudicial executions. For example, the U.S.-supported Truth Commission, which examined 20 emblematic human rights cases resulting in death that took place in the period between the June 2009 coup until the Lobo government took office, determined that more than three-quarters can be attributed to excessive use of force by army or police, or selected killings by government agents. The overwhelming majority of such abuses remain in impunity.

The U.S. government has an obligation to vigorously enforce the Leahy provisions included in laws governing both foreign operations and defense appropriations funding. We request specific information about efforts made by the U.S. Embassy to apply the Leahy provisions in relation to abuses allegedly committed by members of the police and military in the Bajo Aguán, including in relation to the 15th Battalion and the various police and military units that have participated in Operation Xatruch II.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter concerning strengthening the rule of law in Honduras.

Sincerely,

cc: Ambassador Lisa Kubiske

Maria Otero, Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs

Roberta Jacobson, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs

Michael H. Posner, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Frank Mora, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere Affairs

Daniel Restrepo, Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs, National Security Council

Kathleen FitzPatrick, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Senator Patrick Leahy, Chair, Senate Foreign Operations Subcommittee

HONDURAS DELEGATION, MAY 19-28, 2012

“The Coup vs. Democracy: Struggle of the Popular Movements”

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GUATEMALA DELEGATION, JULY 7-15, 2012

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Write to: info@rightsaction.org

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UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

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