

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 25, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to express our ongoing concerns with the case of David Castillo in Honduras and to urge you to closely monitor the trial, ongoing investigations, and related cases involving human rights defenders. The March 2, 2016 murder of Honduran indigenous rights defender Berta Cáceres, Coordinator of the Lenca organization COPINH, provoked indignation in Honduras and around the world. Ms. Cáceres was murdered while supporting Indigenous Lenca communities in opposing the Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Project that was being advanced through a public limited company created for the project, Desarrollos Energéticos S.A. (DESA).

The trial of DESA hydroelectric company CEO and former military intelligence officer, David Castillo, is expected to conclude within two weeks. Prior to Castillo's trial, on November 29, 2018, four paid assassins, an active duty military officer, and two former DESA executives were convicted of murdering Cáceres. Three other prosecutions are related to fraud and abuse of power in the granting of the permits and contracts for the Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Project.

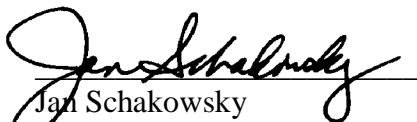
As Members of Congress we have observed with great concern reports of widespread collusion among government officials, state and private security forces, organized crime, and members of the private sector, and the failure of the Government of Honduras to protect the rights, interests, and physical security of indigenous peoples in land and natural resources disputes. Holding both material and intellectual authors accountable in Berta Cáceres' case is essential for progress in addressing impunity in Honduras and ensuring the protection of activists. While related prosecutions and investigations indicate that others were involved in a range of crimes surrounding her murder, and even in her murder, five years later no further indictments have been made.


The independence of the judiciary, crucial to the democratic process, remains a major challenge in Honduras. Problems such as judicial delays, corruption, impunity, human rights violations, citizen insecurity and violence are some of the factors that have called into question the government's commitment to justice in this and other human rights cases.

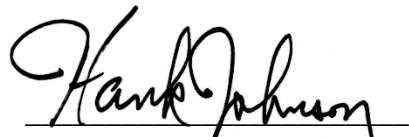
We are also concerned with the continued reports of repression of human rights defenders and environmentalists all too similar to the reports of violence and irregularities surrounding the Agua Zarca dam project before Berta Cáceres' murder. These include the Los Pinares mine affecting the Guapinol River, among many others.

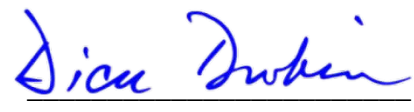
Berta Cáceres' murder is an emblematic case. It is essential that the final decision on the David Castillo trial and other ongoing investigations into Cáceres' murder be monitored closely by the international community. Progress in achieving accountability for her murder is a necessity for progress toward justice and protection for human rights defenders and other activists in Honduras.


Sincerely,

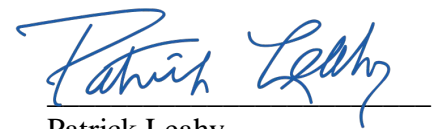
  
Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

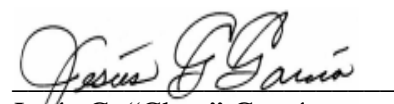
  
Jeffrey A. Merkley  
U.S. Senator


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

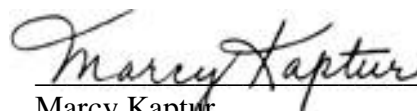
  
Richard J. Durbin  
U.S. Senator


  
Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress

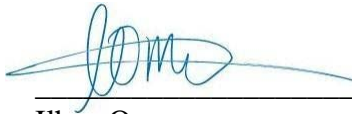
  
Patrick Leahy  
U.S. Senator

  
Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress

  
Edward J. Markey  
U.S. Senator

  
Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress

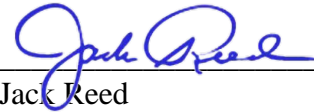
  
Elizabeth Warren  
U.S. Senator



Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen  
U.S. Senator



Jack Reed  
U.S. Senator

**Co-Signers:**

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