

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 22, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Secretary Rubio:

On May 21, 2026, at least 19 peasant farmworkers were massacred on an African palm oil plantation in Rigos, Trujillo, in the Lower Aguán region of Honduras.¹ A few days later, the Honduran National Congress passed legislation that appears to favor agricultural conglomerates at the expense of small-scale farmers, risking the further concentration of arable land and limiting access to sustainable work.² This law could also further weaken environmental protections, as well as the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. In light of these and other recent developments, we urge the United States government to advocate with the government of Honduras for the specific actions outlined below.

For many years, and especially since the 1992 Law for the Modernization and Development of the Agricultural Sector, violence and impunity have plagued the Lower Aguán region of Honduras, stunting development and fueling migration. This violence is not attributable solely to non-state actors. As recently as October 2023, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found that Honduran military and police forces have used violence to evict peasant farmworker encampments and concluded that the Honduran state is ultimately responsible for violations of the rights to life, personal integrity, personal liberty, freedom of expression, freedom of association, private property, and judicial protection.³

The May 21 massacre in Rigos must be understood within its broader historical and political context. While organized crime and killings related to land disputes are not uncommon in this area, a massacre of this scale is unheard of, and it appears to be the deadliest single attack against rural farmworkers in Honduras since the 1990s. According to the conflict monitor Acled, the month the massacre took place – May – was the deadliest in the Bajo Aguán region since it began collecting data in 2018.⁴ Decades of evidence indicate that such acts are not merely the product of rogue individuals, but rather part of a broader pattern used to impose and consolidate

¹ PBS News, “Gunmen open fire in 2 separate attacks in Honduras, killing at least 25.”

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/gunmen-open-fire-in-2-separate-attacks-in-honduras-killing-at-least-25>

² Contracorriente, “Congreso Nacional aprueba ley que protege a la agroindustria en medio de la agudización del conflicto agrario en el Bajo Aguán.” <https://contracorriente.red/2026/06/10/ley-protege-a-agroindustriales-y-profundiza-conflicto-en-bajo-aguan/>

³ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, “IACHR Files Honduras Case with IA Court over Violations of the Rights of Members of the Aguán Campesino Movement.” https://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=%2Fen%2Fiachr%2Fmedia_center%2FPRelases%2F2023%2F251.asp&utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁴ Acled, *Latin America and the Caribbean Overview: June 2026*, <https://acleddata.com/update/latin-america-and-caribbean-overview-june-2026>

territorial control.⁵ In September 2025, Members of Congress wrote to the State Department regarding the assassination of Juan López, a community and religious leader who was killed just a few miles away from Rigos.⁶ We recognize the attention of the U.S. Embassy in Honduras to the matter during the investigation of the case. While this investigation has made meaningful progress, the case remains unresolved, and significant concerns persist that the intellectual authors of the crime may not be held accountable.⁷ The persistence of impunity for past assassinations contributes significantly to conditions in which such violence continues to recur today.

On June 3, 2026, the Honduran National Congress passed the Law for the Strengthening and Protection of the Agroindustrial Sector, Energy, Tourism, Livestock, and Small Agricultural Producers in Honduras.⁸ This legislation decrees the protection of agroindustry as a national priority and introduces judicial preference for agroindustrial companies in the case of land disputes. It also grants preferential treatment to agroindustrial infrastructure, transportation networks, supply chains, and related investments, and expands these protections beyond agroindustry to tourism, ranching, and energy.

Furthermore, it criminalizes various forms of protest commonly employed by disenfranchised rural communities, including land occupations, roadblocks, strikes, and other forms of collective action. The law requires authorities to intervene immediately in agrarian disputes, without adequate consideration of historical land claims or meaningful efforts at impartial mediation and community protection consistent with human rights principles, thereby increasing the risk of violent confrontations. Following the terrorism law that was passed two weeks prior — which creates an open-ended definition of terrorism and could allow the government to prosecute groups exercising their democratic right to peaceful protest as terrorists — this criminalization may accelerate on a devastating scale.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras clearly stated the potential negative impacts of this legislation,⁹ and the Catholic Bishop of Trujillo, Monsignor Jenry Ruiz, described the law as "treason against the homeland and against the interests of the Honduran people."¹⁰

⁵ Centro de Estudio para la Democracia, "Weekly Analysis | The Rigos Massacre: Violence, Land, and Impunity in the Lower Aguán" <https://cespad.org.hn/analisis-semanal-la-masacre-de-rigos-violencia-tierra-e-impunidad-en-el-bajo-aguan/>

⁶ McGovern, Schakowsky, Ramirez Demand Justice for Slain Human Rights Defender Juan López <https://mcgovern.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=400247>

⁷ America, "In Honduras, justice for Juan López and the community he fought to protect remains uncertain" <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/dispatches/2026/06/17/honduras-arrests-justice-juan-lopez-tocoa/>

⁸ Infobae, "Congreso hondureño discute Ley para proteger al sector agroindustrial ante invasiones de tierras" <https://www.infobae.com/honduras/2026/05/28/congreso-hondureno-discute-ley-para-proteger-al-sector-agroindustrial-ante-invasiones-de-tierras/>

⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras (@OACNUDHNN), "La Oficina destaca además que..." <https://x.com/OACNUDHNN/status/2062356299099103499/photo/1>

¹⁰ Jenri Ruiz, "El Congreso Nacional aprueba ley contra la soberanía nacional..." <https://www.facebook.com/jenry.ruiz.56/posts/pfbid02WB8548y28aLQH38upKhbVcjQQoDwz7rZJn1EiY1pYZ3g69HGrb9ohtyj68pGSKPDI>

It risks exacerbating tensions and contributing to further violence in the region, and it leaves some of the country's most vulnerable communities with little legal recourse against some of the most powerful economic actors in Honduras.

The legislation was first invoked on July 6, when more than 200 police officers used tear gas and live ammunition to evict Garifuna community members from disputed ancestral land in San Juan, Tela. Five Garifuna were arrested and charged with aggravated trespassing, and although they have since been released, the charges remain pending, fueling significant protests.¹¹ Likewise, the law was also invoked in an attempted eviction of over 80 families on disputed land in Tulito, Choluteca, in southern Honduras, on August 6, 2026.

Given the gravity of the Rigos massacre and the risk of escalation associated with this new legislation, we believe that the United States government must support meaningful action to prevent further violence and promote accountability. We therefore urge the State Department to encourage the Honduran government to:

1. Establish, in coordination with the United Nations, an international investigative commission, with the participation of local and national stakeholders, to identify all those responsible for the Rigos massacre at every level. Such a commission is essential to ensuring public confidence in the investigation and minimizing the risk of corruption or political interference;
2. Provide the Public Prosecutor's Office with the resources and political will necessary to dismantle criminal organizations operating in the Lower Aguán region and ensure that all forms of collaboration, protection, or collusion involving state agents are identified, investigated, and prosecuted; and
3. Pursue comprehensive and sustainable solutions to land and territorial struggles that address their structural and historical causes, uphold the rule of law, and contribute to a more just and equitable future for all Hondurans.

Peace, stability, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and sustainable economic development in Honduras are firmly in the strategic interests of the United States. Violence, corruption, and impunity undermine regional stability, facilitate the expansion of criminal activity, and contribute to the conditions that drive migration. We therefore urge the State Department to

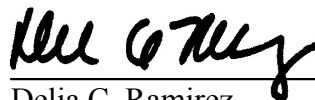
¹¹ Criterio.hn “*Garifunas mantienen resistencia y exigen anular juicio y derogar Ley Agroindustrial en Honduras*” <https://criterio.hn/garifunas-mantienen-resistencia-y-exigen-anular-juicio-y-derogar-ley-agroindustrial-en-honduras/>

prioritize these recommendations within the framework of the U.S.-Honduras bilateral relationship and to keep Congress informed of the specific steps taken to advance these objectives.

Sincerely,



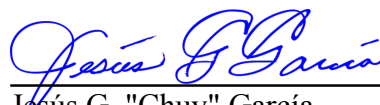
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



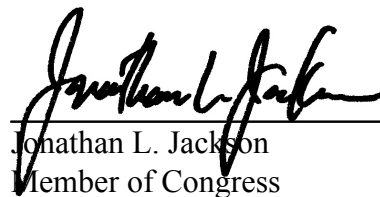
Greg Casar
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



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



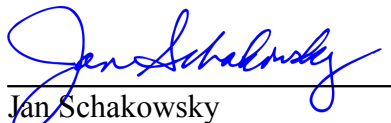
Jonathan L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



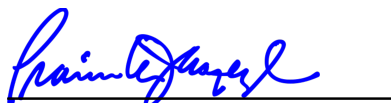
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



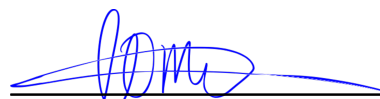
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



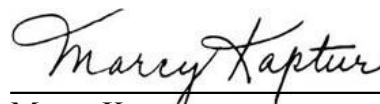
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



Lateefah Simon
Member of Congress