May 2, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary of State Kerry,

We write to urge the State Department to ensure that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) is actively involved in the investigation into the murder of acclaimed Honduran human rights activist Berta Cáceres.

We continue to mourn the March 3, 2016 murder of Ms. Cáceres and, less than two weeks later, the murder of her colleague Nelson Garcia. We are acutely aware that skepticism abounds regarding the willingness and capacity of Honduran authorities to carry out an effective investigation in this case. Such skepticism has been expressed not only among Ms. Cáceres’ colleagues and family members, but also by members of the international community, including Members of the United States Congress.

In this context, the family of Ms. Cáceres and the organization that she led, COPINH, have requested the involvement of the IACHR. Given the high profile of this case and the degree of skepticism toward the official investigation, we believe that IACHR involvement is warranted. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you encourage the Government of Honduras to work with the IACHR and with the family and legal representatives of Ms. Cáceres to enter an agreement that would provide for active IACHR involvement in this case.

We know that U.S. authorities have been providing some technical assistance to Honduran authorities in this investigation. Furthermore, we understand that the government of Honduras has requested the assistance of the Honduras office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as well as the Organization of American States-sponsored Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH). However, neither the OHCHR Honduras office nor the MACCIH are fully operational yet. Moreover, while the Organization of American States has approved the MACCIH’s involvement in aspects of the case pertaining to corruption, OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro has made very clear that the human rights aspects of the case are within the jurisdiction of the IACHR.
Additionally, there is a compelling precedent for IACHR involvement in an active criminal investigation. Following the September 26, 2014 disappearance of 43 students in Iguala, Mexico, the Government of Mexico, along with the families and legal representatives of the disappeared students, entered into agreement with the IACHR to create a Group of Experts. That group, which consisted of internationally-recognized prosecutors and criminal justice experts, was tasked with assisting the Government of Mexico in searching for the students, investigating the circumstances of their disappearance, and assisting the Government of Mexico in developing policies related to enforced disappearance.

The work of the Group of Experts has been widely acclaimed, and Members of the United States Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, have been strongly supportive of the Group. Their work has also given hope to the families of the victims and to the human rights community in Mexico. While the circumstances of Ms. Cáceres’ murder are in many ways distinct from the circumstances of the disappearance of the 43 students in Mexico, we absolutely believe the U.S. government should press for robust IACHR involvement in the investigation of the Berta Cáceres case. Honduras deserves the same fidelity to the rule of law.

Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

NORMA J. TORRES
Member of Congress

SAM FARR
Member of Congress

JAN SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress

RAUL M. GRIJALVA
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