

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

August 7, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.  
Washington, D.C., 20502

Dear President Obama,

As you know, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009 a military coup took place in Honduras. The democratically elected president, Manuel Zelaya, was kidnapped by soldiers and flown to Costa Rica in his pajamas. In the hours that followed, media outlets favorable to the deposed president were censored, demonstrators were repressed and members of the presidential cabinet were detained or went into hiding.

We appreciate very much that you and members of your administration have strongly condemned the coup, and have supported the efforts of the Organization of American States and Costa Rican President Oscar Arias to resolve the crisis. We also believe that the concrete measures that the administration has taken in response to the coup – including the suspension of \$16.5 million in military aid – have sent a strong message to Honduras' de facto regime.

We are, however, increasingly concerned by the many reports of flagrant human rights violations that are being committed under the current de facto regime. Peaceful protests have been violently repressed, and protestors have been shot by the military, with at least one killed, and many wounded. The media has been censored, independent radio and TV stations have been shut down, political organizers have been detained and intimidated and fundamental civil liberties have been suspended. These abuses have been documented and condemned by the Inter American Commission for Human Rights and organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders.

The respected Honduran Committee for the Relatives of the Disappeared Detainees (COFADEH, by its Spanish Initials) recently released an alarming report documenting the many critical injuries and even deaths that have resulted from police and military repression, the hundreds of arbitrary detentions of peaceful citizens, the attacks perpetrated against media outlets that have criticized the coup and other grave violations of human rights.

Meanwhile, the Miami Herald and other news outlets have reported on the media “blackout” that has occurred and the closure of media outlets and intimidation of journalists that have spoken out against the coup. It seems clear that tight control of the media landscape is seen by the regime as a necessary complement to police and military repression if they are to maintain their grip on power.

In the words of COFADEH director Bertha Oliva “ the last few days have been an uncanny repeat of atrocities that we thought were left behind in the 1980s: forced detentions, murder and violent repression of peaceful protesters, media censorship and suspension of constitutional rights.” Though human rights organizations have condemned these violations, Oliva states “the stifling of dissent has only intensified inside the country.”

It is this increasingly alarming situation that compels us to urge you to take further action.

In the past, as you have pointed out, our government has sometimes associated itself with regimes whose actions clash with our principles, and this is especially true in Honduras where – according to both soldiers and victims interviewed by the Baltimore Sun and other U.S. newspapers -- the CIA and other U.S. government agencies were allegedly involved in training the death squads that carried out extrajudicial killings and torture in the early 1980s.

It is precisely in light of this unfortunate history that the words of the president of the United States can have a resounding impact in Honduras today. Furthermore, over the weekend of July 18 and 19, the talks mediated by President Arias seemed to break down. President Zelaya agreed to all the conditions proposed by President Arias, and the de facto regime, which has always been clear that they will reject any compromise which involves President Zelaya’s return, rejected the Arias proposals.

We therefore urge you to publicly denounce the use of violence and repression of peaceful protestors, the murder of peaceful political organizers and all forms of censorship and intimidation directed at media outlets.

Finally, we urge you to take further measures against the de facto government. The State Department should fully acknowledge that a military coup has taken place and follow through with the total suspension of non-humanitarian aid, as required by law. Even more importantly, we ask that you instruct the Treasury Department to freeze the bank accounts and assets of individuals involved in the coup, and deny them entry into the United States. We believe that these measures, which would have no adverse effect on the people of Honduras, could be effective in exercising the pressure needed for the de facto government to abandon its uncompromising stance.

Sincerely,



Raúl Grijalva  
Member of Congress



James McGovern  
Member of Congress

  
José E. Serrano  
Member of Congress

  
John Conyers Jr.  
Member of Congress

  
Chaka Fattah  
Member of Congress

  
Mike Honda  
Member of Congress

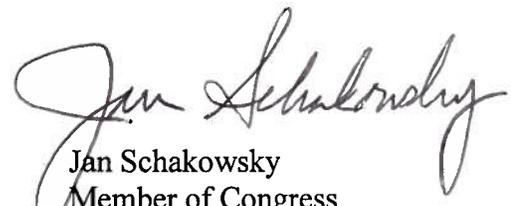
  
Barbara Lee  
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Dennis J. Kucinich  
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William Delahunt  
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Sheila Jackson Lee  
Member of Congress

*Linda J. Sánchez*

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