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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
Subcommittee on Water and Power  
Subcommittee on Parks, Forests and  
Public Lands – *Ranking Member*

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood,  
Elementary and Secondary Education  
Subcommittee on Higher Education and  
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March 8, 2012

Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
US Department of State  
Harry S. Truman Building  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

As we celebrate International Women's Day and the many remarkable advances women have made on behalf of peace and equality, let us also recognize that much more work – particularly in Mexico and Latin America – needs to be done to help champions of human rights and women's rights achieve their goals.

On March 5, 2011, I wrote to you that if “the Mérida Initiative human rights requirements are not met, by law, 15 percent of the specified funds must be withheld.” That program – our primary effort to combat narcotics-related violence in Mexico – has indeed failed to protect even basic human rights but continues to receive full funding. The U.S. government has an obligation to ensure that our financial assistance to our law enforcement partners abroad is focused on preventing abuses, improving investigations and delivering justice. I respectfully urge you in honor of International Women's Day vigorously to enforce the human rights requirements in all foreign operations and military projects funded by Congress, not just in Mexico and Central America but all over the world.

Female human rights activists are diverse. They are mothers and sisters seeking justice for disappeared or murdered relatives, indigenous women organizing against displacements, young women advocating for health services, and women pursuing justice in cases of gender-based homicide and intra-family violence. Unfortunately, these brave women face alarming rates of violence as they fight for their community's rights. Particularly worrisome are the escalating levels of violence in Mexico and Central America.

Violence in the region has increased at an alarming rate. More than 50,000 people have been killed and more than 250,000 displaced in Mexico alone since 2009. The Center for Women's Rights in Honduras registered 210 femicides in the first 7 months of 2011; today, an average of one woman is murdered per day. In Guatemala there were 40,000

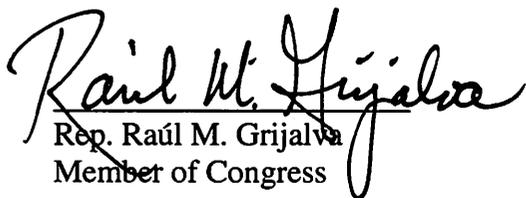
registered cases of violence against women in 2010, with only 1 percent resulting in sentencing. This level of impunity is greatly troubling to me.

As a toxic mix of organized crime groups, growing poverty, weakened and corrupt institutions and lawless private security forces take control throughout the region, women's bodies are being used as a battleground for turf wars, resources and power. Women have, necessarily, taken a leading role battling against impunity and corruption even as they continue to suffer from threats, intimidation, sexual violence and even death in reprisal for their work.

Given the close relationship between the United States, Mexico, and the nations of Central America, it is imperative that bilateral support to the region enhances security for women in order to guarantee their long-term safety and the rule of law. At a time when the United States is providing training, equipment, and other support to Mexican and Central American security forces, it has become increasingly urgent to examine how increased security measures are contributing to violence against women in this region.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for supporting these very brave women, who are risking their lives in the pursuit of justice and democracy.

Very sincerely,

  
Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

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