

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 8, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
Department of State  
2201 C St NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As the Department of State plans for a U.S.-Honduras Strategic Dialogue, we write to express our support for U.S. efforts to engage with President Xiomara Castro's administration on the importance of tackling endemic corruption in Honduras. In particular, we urge you to press the new Honduran government to take the concrete steps needed to restore Hondurans' faith in their government.

Transparency International recently ranked Honduras 157th out of 180 countries on its Corruption Perceptions Index. Corruption in Honduras has led to increased irregular migration to the United States, lack of accountability for violence committed against ordinary Hondurans, and a weakened economic environment that stalls Honduras' potential for growth. Congress continues to provide robust assistance for Central America, including for anticorruption efforts, and we are pleased that the Biden Administration is prioritizing this issue with President Castro. Vice President Harris's January visit to Honduras was President Castro's first meeting with a foreign leader following her inauguration, and the Biden Administration's announcement of over \$1 billion in private sector investment in Honduras and the Central America region demonstrates U.S. commitment to the Honduran people.

We welcome President Castro's formal request to the United Nations in February 2022 calling for assistance to create the International Commission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (CICIH). We also recognize the Honduran Congress's March 1 repeal of the *Ley de Secretos*, or State Secrets Law, which is an important step to promoting transparency within the Honduran government.

We also applaud the Honduran government's separate arrests of ex-President Juan Orlando Hernandez and former police chief Juan Carlos Bonilla Valladares for extradition to face drug trafficking charges here in the U.S. As you are well aware, strengthening the rule of law in Honduras, including by supporting an independent judiciary free from political influence, is important to ensuring that citizens have confidence in their government and that businesses can compete on a level playing field.

We strongly urge you to work closely with the Castro Administration to ensure the incorporation of lessons learned from prior commissions. In particular, we ask that the Department of State urge the Castro Administration, the UN Department of Political and

Peacebuilding Affairs, and the Honduran Congress to ensure the Commission has a strong mandate to root out corruption and impunity, receives the necessary funding to achieve its mission, endures beyond the current administration, and sufficiently consults with Honduran civil society organizations, who are key stakeholders in fighting corruption. We also request your advocacy with the Honduran government to ensure the selection of an independent and well-qualified Commissioner. While President Castro's request to the UN is an overall positive step, we recognize that significant and sustained efforts by her administration and the Honduran Congress will be critical to standing up the Commission and ensuring its long-term success.

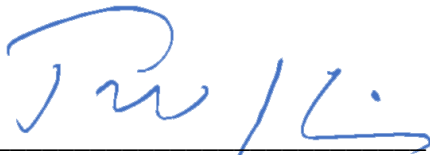
Establishing the necessary legislative framework to create and sustain the Commission and protecting the independence of key Honduran investigators, prosecutors, and judges will not be easy. Nonetheless, these steps are vital to empowering the Commission to confront the entrenched interests of corrupt actors backed by drug traffickers and criminal organizations. Given that the Commission's activities are likely to elicit backlash and retribution, our collective support is imperative, especially when the Commission begins making substantive progress. Given the importance of these efforts, we request that the Department provide our offices with a briefing regarding specific actions the Biden Administration will take to sustain anticorruption efforts in Honduras following the Strategic Dialogue.

Over the years, the United States has supported efforts to mitigate factors driving irregular migration from Honduras to the U.S., including through predecessor organizations such as the Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras, whose work led to the indictment of over 100 corrupt officials and the creation of anti-corruption courts that have strengthened the rule of law in Honduras. Today, we express our support for this new entity and urge the Department to help ensure that critical foundational steps are taken to guarantee its independence and effectiveness, especially ahead of next year's Supreme Court and Attorney General selection processes. Each of these will be fundamental to promoting the rule of law and helping Honduran citizens find safety and opportunity in Honduras.

Rampant corruption has been a longtime scourge in Honduras, holding back the dynamism of the Honduran people and impeding the country's social, economic, and political development. We must seize this window of opportunity to make overdue progress on this critical issue.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



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Patrick Leahy  
United States Senator