

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

August 9, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to express our concern about the ongoing human rights crisis in Mexico and the continuing lack of justice for thousands of victims. We urge you to put strengthening the rule of law and defending human rights at the top of our bilateral agenda with Mexico. Given the significant U.S. support for Mexico's security forces, we remain troubled by the 27,000 unresolved cases of people who have disappeared in Mexico since 2007, and the slow pace of reform in the military, law enforcement, and justice sectors. Finally, as detailed in a recent Amnesty International report, Mexico's persistent use of torture in criminal investigations is particularly disturbing. We encourage you to raise with Mexican authorities the importance of respecting human rights, completing competent investigations, and bringing to justice those who violate human rights.

The Mexico section of the Department of State's 2015 Human Rights Report notes: "*The most significant human rights-related problems included law enforcement and military involvement in serious abuses, such as unlawful killings, torture, and disappearances. Impunity and corruption in the law enforcement and justice system remained serious problems.*" The prevalence of human rights violations in Mexico and the alarmingly low number of perpetrators held accountable for these crimes have also been documented by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and United Nations' human rights bodies.

There is no better example than the unresolved case of the 43 students who disappeared while in the custody of Mexico's security forces in the town of Iguala, Guerrero State, in September 2014. Despite the high level international scrutiny that the case has garnered, the Government of Mexico has made little progress in securing justice for these families, calling into question its commitment to uphold human rights.

While we applauded the Government of Mexico's inviting an Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts to assist Mexican authorities in the investigation, we remain troubled that Mexico let the Experts' mandate lapse without following up on many of the recommendations. The Experts' April 24, 2016 final report reiterated the lines of investigation that should be explored. The report also highlighted how the Government of Mexico impeded the investigation and obstructed justice, including strong indications that evidence was tampered with and suspects tortured to coerce confessions.

At the same time, we appreciate the Department of State's statement supporting the Experts' work. We share the hope expressed in the statement that "*Mexican authorities will carefully consider the report's recommendations, evaluate suggested actions to address the issue of forced disappearances, provide support to the victims' families, and continue their efforts to bring the perpetrators of this terrible crime to justice.*" We also support efforts by the Government of Mexico, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and students' families to develop a mechanism to follow up on the Experts' work and ensure progress is made in the investigation.

We believe that the United States' ongoing engagement with the Government of Mexico on this case is critical to discovering what happened to the 43 students and holding the perpetrators accountable, including Mexican officials who have obstructed the investigation.

As Mexico strengthens its legal framework to address disappearances, we encourage you to raise our concerns about the thousands of cases in which justice has not been done, including the Iguala, Tlatlaya, and Oaxaca cases (the latter two are described briefly below). We also urge you to actively explore how we can collaborate with Mexican authorities to improve their capacity to register and search for the disappeared, eliminate the pervasive use of torture, and to investigate and prosecute those responsible for these crimes.

In the Tlatlaya case, 22 civilians were massacred by Mexican soldiers in June 2014. After an exhaustive investigation, Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights concluded that 12 to 15 of the civilians were extra-judicially executed by Mexican soldiers and that soldiers subsequently altered the crime scene to make it appear as if the victims were killed in a confrontation. Given the forensic evidence and eyewitness testimonies in this case, it is unfortunate that in May 2016 a Mexican federal civilian judge ordered the release of the remaining three soldiers who faced charges related to this crime.

Equally troubling are reports of at least eight people killed and more than 100 injured during violent clashes on June 19, 2016, between the Mexican Federal Police and protesters in Oaxaca. Mexican authorities should employ force proportionate to the circumstances; government security forces should not attack teachers who are expressing dissatisfaction with government policies. Instead, we encourage the government to foster a dialogue with the Oaxacan teachers, and to fully investigate how the protesters were killed in the clashes.

We welcome the Mexican Attorney General's Office's (PGR) commitment to prosecute and punish the perpetrators of the crimes committed in Tlatlaya. However, it is troubling that since 2007—despite thousands of complaints submitted to Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights against the Mexican Army—only two soldiers have been convicted by civilian courts for grave human rights violations. We are also seriously concerned that in the Iguala incident, the PGR's medical reports found that 70 percent of the detainees had injuries indicating torture or mistreatment. Nationally, the PGR reported that torture cases more than doubled between 2013 and 2014. This meshes with a just released Amnesty International report that details Mexican security forces' persistent use of sexual violence against women as a form of torture. Despite the widespread use of torture in Mexico, the Government of Mexico reported only 15 convictions of federal agents for this crime since 2003.

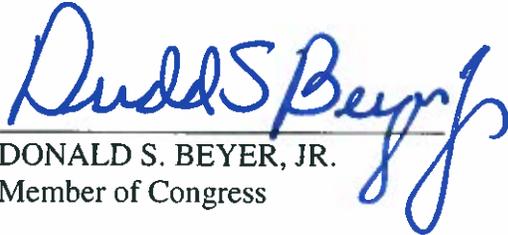
We commend the Government of Mexico for taking important legislative steps to advance human rights protections and to reform its criminal justice system. However, having good laws

on the books does not ensure justice; Mexican authorities must enforce the law and respect human rights. Mr. Secretary, as you work to continue to strengthen the United States' important relationship with our ally and neighbor, we strongly encourage you to emphasize the need for Mexico to effectively combat these human rights abuses. Thank you again for leading the State Department in this difficult work and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



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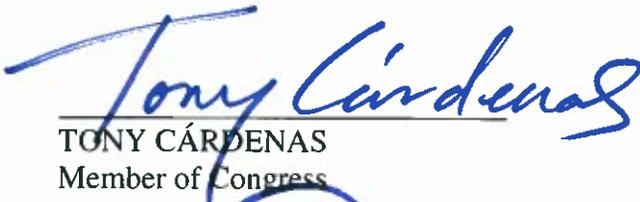
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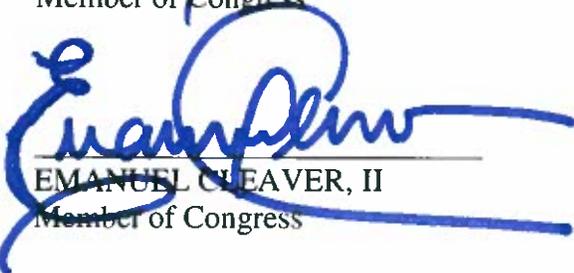
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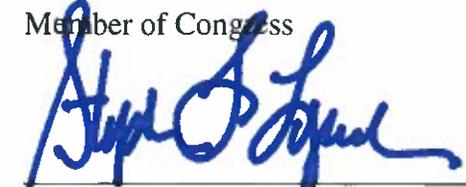
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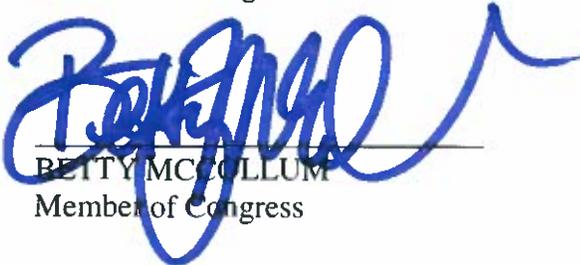
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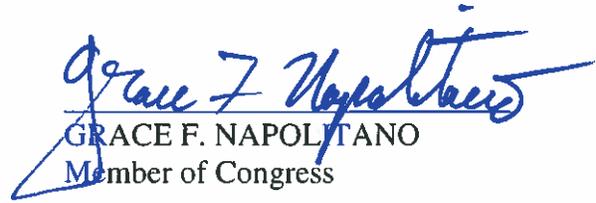


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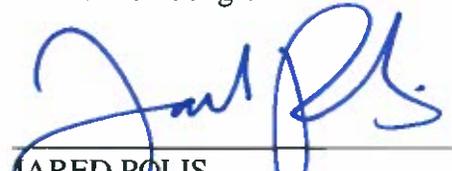
  
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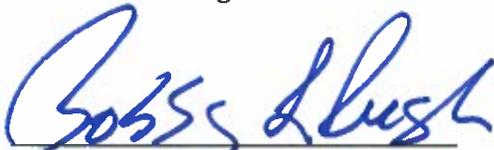
  
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