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June 30, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We write to you to express our concern for the human rights crisis in Mexico that has become more evident since 43 students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, were taken by force and disappeared in September 2014. We urge you to make the defense of human rights a fundamental part of our bilateral agenda with Mexico.

As you are aware, the students' disappearance is just one of over 25,000 registered cases of people who have disappeared in Mexico since 2007. Tens of thousands of families are still waiting for answers about the whereabouts of their loved ones and for the perpetrators of these crimes to be investigated and held accountable.

We appreciate the United States government's efforts to support the Mexican authorities' investigation into the case of the missing students, a case that highlights a disturbing level of collusion between authorities and organized criminal groups. However, we are troubled that in spite of an extensive investigation, the remains of only one of the 43 students have been identified and many questions remain unanswered about the case. We are pleased that the Mexican government has agreed to have a group of international experts selected by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights review the case, provide technical assistance on the investigation, and present recommendations to the authorities. The experts have already issued preliminary recommendations and will present a full report in the coming months. We expect

that their report will not only provide insight into this tragic case but will also help point the way forward regarding the steps the Mexican government should take to effectively search for missing persons.

As you know, the enforced disappearance of the 43 students took place only a few short months after another serious case of human rights violations in Mexico. On June 30, 2014, Mexican soldiers killed 22 young people in Tlatlaya, a town in the State of Mexico. The Army and the government of the State of Mexico originally reported that the killings occurred as the result of a shootout between soldiers and an alleged criminal gang. Forensic evidence and eyewitness testimony later revealed these claims to be false. In October 2014, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (*Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, CNDH*) determined that soldiers had executed between 12 and 15 of the 22 civilians and had subsequently altered the crime scene in order to make it appear that all were killed in a confrontation. The Commission also found that officials from the State of Mexico's Attorney General's Office coerced three women who had survived the executions to sign self-incriminating documents meant to cover up the executions, using techniques including sexual torture, to force the women to cooperate.

These two cases are not isolated incidents in Mexico; rather they illustrate a broader pattern of grave human rights violations in the country, including cases of torture, arbitrary detentions, kidnapping, and extra-judicial executions. This serious human rights situation has been documented not only by the Department of State's own annual human rights reports, but also by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission, and the United Nations' human rights bodies.

Between 2007 and 2014, the CNDH received 15,420 complaints of human rights violations committed by federal security forces in Mexico, and 8,881 complaints of torture and cruel or inhumane treatment by various Mexican authorities. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture's December 2014 report on Mexico further concluded that torture is widespread and is used by all security forces (that is, both military and civilian authorities at the federal, state, and municipal levels), primarily to obtain coerced statements, which may or may not contain any true information. In this context, it is urgent that Mexico effectively enforce the prohibition on the use of evidence obtained under torture in criminal trials. Furthermore, perpetrators of torture are

rarely punished; Mexico's Federal Judicial Council has acknowledged that there were only four federal convictions for torture between 2005 and June 2013. A February 2015 report by the U.N. Committee on Enforced Disappearance found that enforced disappearances frequently occurred in Mexico and criticized the "near absence" of successful prosecutions in these cases.

The Mexican government has taken important legislative steps to advance human rights protections in Mexico, most notably, a 2014 reform to limit military jurisdiction in cases involving civilians and the 2011 constitutional reforms in the area of human rights. Although these stronger legal protections are undoubtedly important, the most effective way to improve the human rights situation in Mexico is by investigating and holding accountable government agents for the human rights violations they commit.

Mr. Secretary, we were encouraged by the remarks you made last December regarding the missing students. We share your view that "those responsible for this heinous crime have to be held accountable, must be, and communities throughout Mexico must regain their sense of security. Parents whose kids go out and travel from one place to another shouldn't have to worry about whether they might ever return or they find them again."

As you continue to strengthen our important bilateral relationship with Mexico, we encourage you to raise with the Government of Mexico the necessity of bringing justice to the families of the missing students and to the families of the thousands of other missing persons in Mexico. We expect Mexico to adhere to internationally recognized standards for investigations, to apply due process in the criminal justice system, and to take measurable actions to detect and dismantle networks of collusion between organized crime and authorities.

We thank you for the ongoing efforts of the Department of State to enhance accountability and respect for human rights in Mexico.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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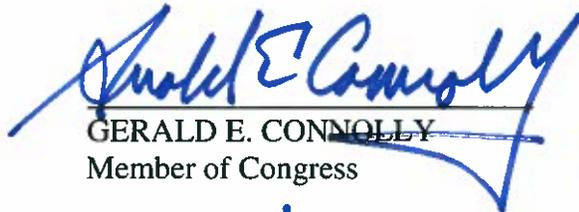
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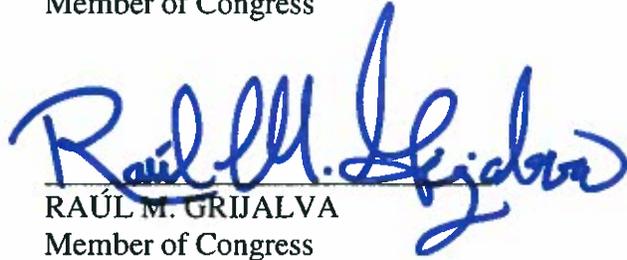
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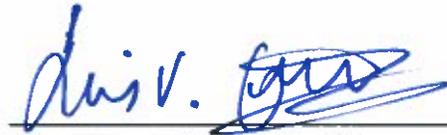
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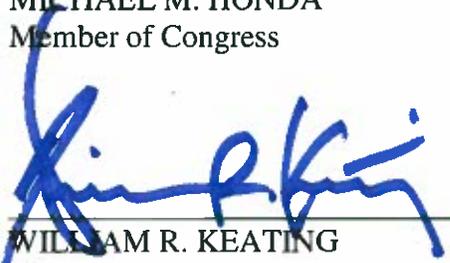
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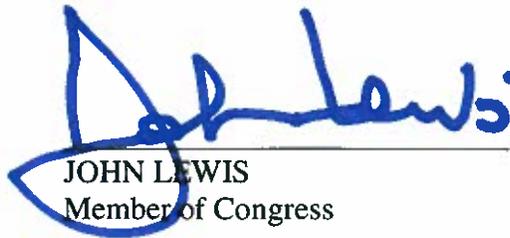
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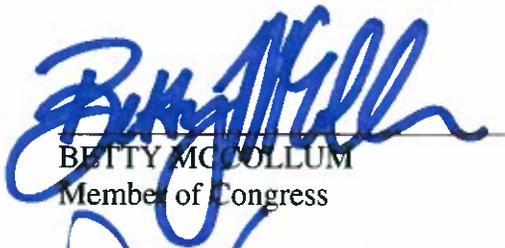
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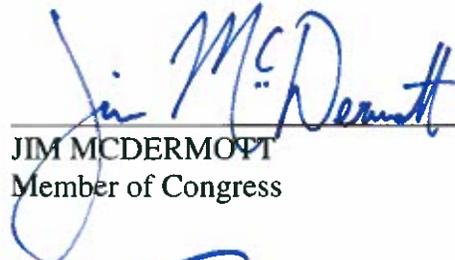
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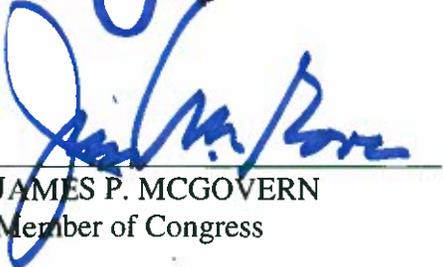
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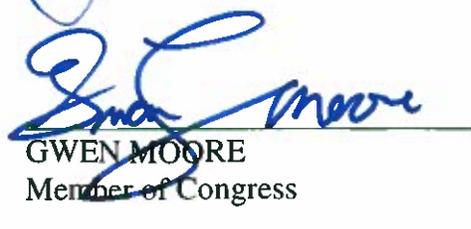
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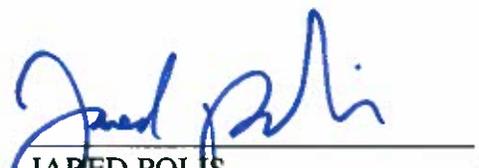
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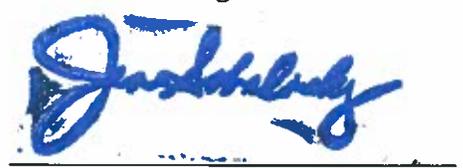
  
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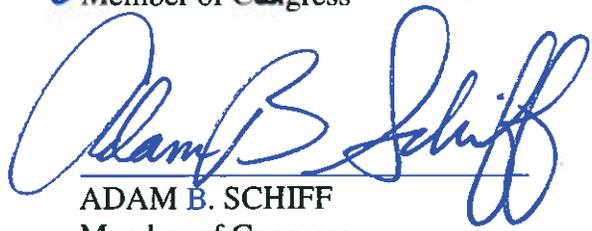
  
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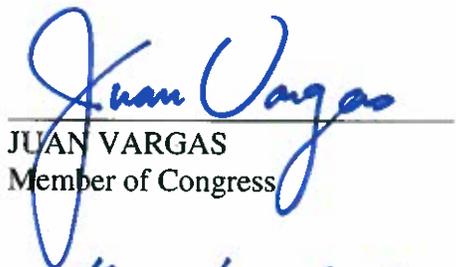
  
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**CC: Anthony Blinken, Deputy Secretary of State**

**Roberta Jacobson, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs**

**Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor**

**Ambassador Anthony Wayne, U.S. Embassy in Mexico**