

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 14, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

Nearly three years have passed since an increase in arrivals of Central American refugee children and families at the U.S.- Mexico border generated a major public debate about how we as a country should respond. It has become clear that without significant changes in U.S. policy to address the root causes of migration in Central America, a policy of merely trying stop people from leaving the region will remain ineffective, not to mention inhumane.

The upcoming Central America Security and Prosperity conference in Miami provides the perfect opportunity to further develop regional solutions to the humanitarian crises that have caused large-scale displacement of communities in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. As Members of Congress committed to advancing human rights in our hemisphere, we encourage you to make the defense of human rights a cornerstone of any and all discussions at the conference. It is particularly important that we work with Mexico to expand its capacity to process and integrate refugees.

We are concerned, however, by proposals from Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly and other senior officials to enlist the assistance of Mexico's security forces to address citizen insecurity in Central America in light of widespread human rights abuses at the hands of these forces. We are especially wary of suggestions that the United States deepen security collaboration with Mexico along its southern border due to evidence that Mexico's Southern Border Program has led to wide-spread human rights violations and abuses against migrants and asylum-seekers.

Unfortunately, to date the government of Mexico has been unable to make meaningful progress toward addressing abuses committed by its own security forces. As the State Department reported in 2015 and again in 2016, "The most significant human rights-related problems included involvement by police and military in serious abuses, such as unlawful killings, torture, and disappearances. Impunity and corruption in the law enforcement and justice system remained serious problems." The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the United Nations, and Mexico's National Human Rights Commission have also documented the prevalence of these abuses and high rates of impunity.

We also encourage you to use the Central America Security and Prosperity conference to address abuses being committed by criminal groups as well as Mexican police, immigration, and military officials against migrants and asylum seekers. Since the Mexican government launched the Southern Border Program in 2014 with U.S. support, Mexico has dramatically increased immigration enforcement, deporting over 170,000 Central Americans in 2015, including over 36,000 children, representing a doubling of the number of Central Americans deported in 2013. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and others have expressed concern that the Government of Mexico is deporting Central Americans in violation of international proscriptions against refoulement of refugees.

Furthermore, international human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as local religious and service organizations in Mexico and Central America report that the Southern Border Program has forced migrants and asylum seekers to travel through ever more remote areas making them easy prey of criminal groups. In 2014 Amnesty International found 60% of Central American women and girls were sexually assaulted while in transit through Mexico. A May 2017 report by Doctors Without Borders found that 68 percent of the migrants they interviewed in Mexico had been victims of violence during their journey to the United States, nearly one-third of the women had been sexually abused.

This human rights situation on Mexico's southern border merits immediate attention by the State Department and all other agencies involved in supporting the Southern Border Program. Through the State Department's Migration and Refugee Assistance account, the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration provides critical overseas assistance and U.S. resettlement programs that must be part of any comprehensive solution to refugee protection. We also urge the State Department and relevant agencies to re-evaluate U.S. cooperation with security forces patrolling borders within Central America, including Guatemala's Inter-Agency Task Forces, in order to avoid the replication of the patterns of abuse taking place in Mexico.

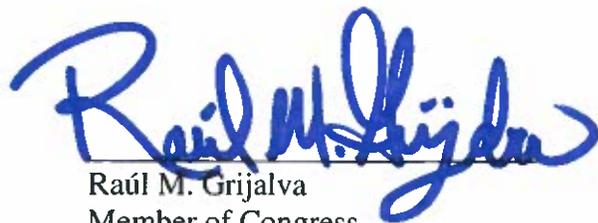
It is important that Mexico come into full compliance with international human rights standards, particularly its treatment of migrants and asylum-seekers. We encourage you to use the upcoming Central America Prosperity and Security conference as an opportunity to make the defense of human rights and protection for asylum seekers a cornerstone of all discussions with your regional counterparts and any multi-lateral commitments that result from the conference.

Thank you for attention to this important issue and we look forward to your response

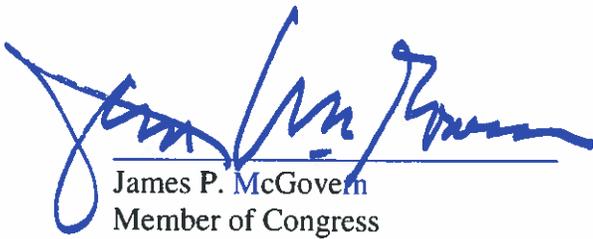
Sincerely,



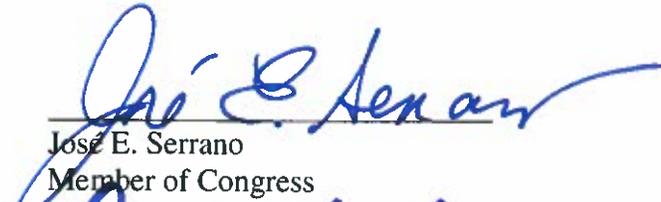
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

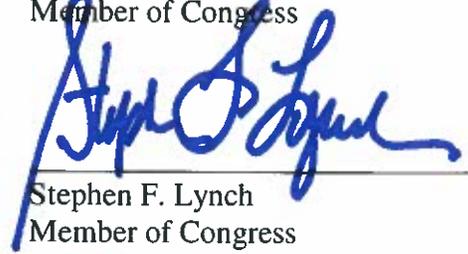


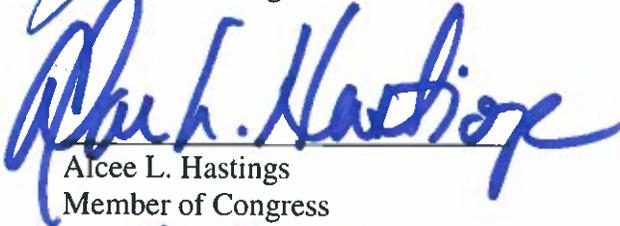
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

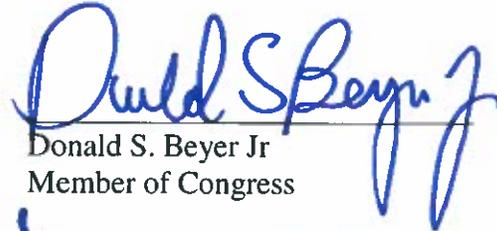

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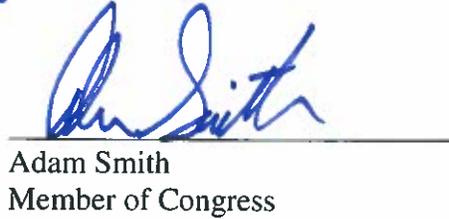

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Jose E. Serrano
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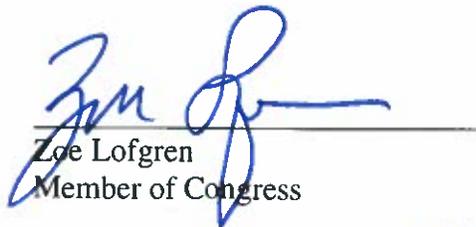

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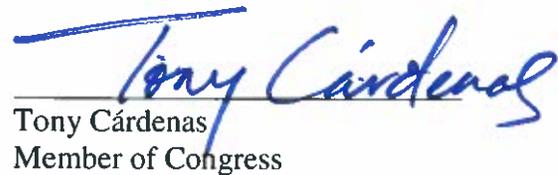

Adam Smith
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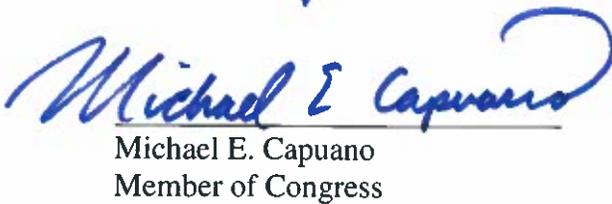

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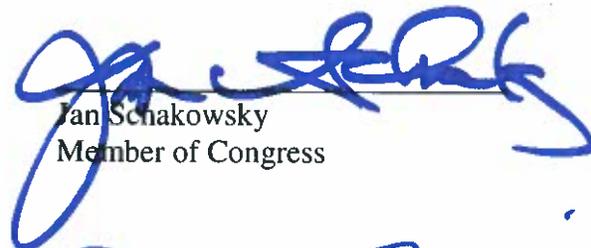

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

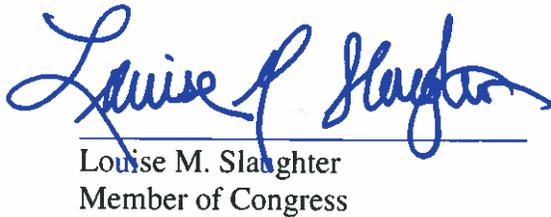

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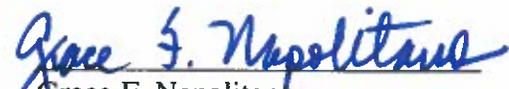

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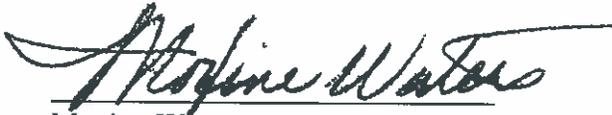

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