

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

January 27, 2022

The Honorable Anthony Blinken  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

With today's inauguration of Xiomara Castro as President of Honduras, we are writing to encourage you to work closely with her administration to strengthen U.S.-Honduras relations. In engaging with this new government, we believe that the State Department should elevate a number of priorities, including combatting corruption and impunity, protecting human rights, strengthening democratic institutions, and promoting inclusive economic growth and development. If the new Honduran government can successfully strengthen the rule of law and expand economic opportunity, it will advance our countries' shared interest in enabling every Honduran to pursue a life of dignity and prosperity in their home country.

We were encouraged by President-elect Castro's campaign commitment to form a new commission backed by the United Nations to prosecute corruption. We believe that corruption is at the core of Honduras' economic and political development challenges and is a key driver of migration to the U.S. Under outgoing President Hernández, Honduras took steps backward in its efforts to address corruption and impunity by ending the mandate of the Organization of American States-backed anti-corruption commission, changing laws to reduce prison sentences for corruption convictions, and limiting the ability of the Public Ministry to investigate and prosecute corruption cases. We urge you to make clear to the Castro Administration that combating corruption is a top priority in our bilateral relationship. The United States should be ready and willing to support the new administration's anti-corruption agenda, including through ramped-up assistance to the Specialized Prosecutorial Unit Against Corruption Networks (UFERCO) to help deliver on Hondurans' longstanding demand that nobody should be above the law.

A key test for the Castro Administration will be whether it makes Honduras' theoretical commitments on human rights much more concrete. First and foremost, this means prosecuting violations of human rights and ending impunity for perpetrators of attacks on human rights

defenders, including environmental and land rights defenders. It also means giving the Ministry for Human Rights the necessary autonomy and authority to improve human rights protections without political interference and strengthening the protection mechanism for human rights defenders and journalists. We urge you to push this new administration to remove recently enacted restrictions on civil society organizations' operations and publicly defend the rights to free assembly and association. We hope the Honduran government will use its current seat on the UN Human Rights Council to consistently defend universal human rights and work with the United States following our return to that body.

We also ask that you encourage Honduras to retain its diplomatic recognition of Taiwan. For decades, Taiwan has contributed to the political and economic development of Latin America and the Caribbean. Taiwan provided personal protective equipment to countries throughout the region in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased its humanitarian support to Honduras in the wake of Hurricanes Eta and Iota.

The United States and Honduras should renew our efforts to reduce violence and insecurity, which are key drivers of instability and forced migration. In the coming months, we fully expect Honduras to cooperate with the U.S. regarding the prosecution and, when necessary, extradition of corrupt officials and drug traffickers to the United States to ensure they face justice. The State Department should deepen cooperation with the new administration on reducing gang recruitment, supporting at-risk youth, and more aggressively combatting femicide and gender-based violence.

The U.S. and Honduran governments must also work together to expand economic opportunity and reduce the economic pressures driving migration. We encourage the State Department to continue its efforts to attract private sector investment to the region. At the same time, we believe these efforts should be carried out in consultation with local communities. Moreover, increased foreign investment must generate local employment opportunities if it is going to have a meaningful impact in reducing migration. We applaud USAID's effort to prioritize locally-led development and hope that USAID's increased local focus will enable it to further elevate the needs of historically marginalized populations including women and girls, the Garifuna population and other indigenous communities in designing and implementing our assistance programming.

We welcome the Biden Administration's decision to send a high-level delegation led by Vice President Harris to attend the inauguration. We look forward to working closely with the State Department in the coming months to strengthen the bilateral relationship, advance our two countries' shared interests, and help promote a sense of hope among the Honduran population that a brighter future is possible.

Sincerely,



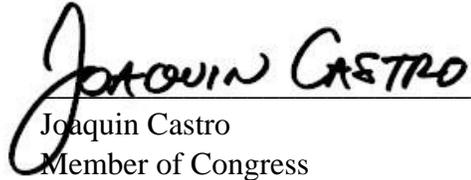
Albio Sires  
Member of Congress



Norma J. Torres  
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks  
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Samantha Power, Administrator, USAID