

Hon. Barbara Lee, Chair, Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, House Committee on Appropriations

Hon. Hal Rogers, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, House Committee on Appropriations

Hon. Chris Coons, Chair, Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, Senate Committee on Appropriations

Hon. Lindsey Graham, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, Senate Committee on Appropriations

June 15, 2021

Dear Members of Congress,

Warm greetings on behalf of the undersigned organizations in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and the United States who work on human rights, immigrant rights, and in defense of land and natural resources. We are reaching out to you as leaders of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees of the United States Congress to express our concerns regarding the Biden Administration's new policy toward the region, referred to as the United States Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America.

We understand that your committees are in the process of debating and approving next year's budget for the State Department and other U.S. agencies working on international development and foreign relations. In light of this discussion, we urge you to re-consider several key aspects regarding U.S. economic development assistance in Central America. Without a fundamental change to the current direction of U.S. policy, the result will be more hunger, more displacement and more forced migration.

While the issues of violence and insecurity are certainly important factors to understanding the current migration dynamics from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, macro-level investigations from organizations such as [Oxfam](#) and the [United Nations](#) confirm our analysis that economic hardship is currently the strongest driver of displacement and migration in all three countries.

Unfortunately, however, our experiences as organizations in frontline communities in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador and as international solidarity organizations have shown us that, far too often, U.S. policy and programming through the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and other U.S. agencies have been a *cause* of poverty, inequality and displacement of rural and Indigenous communities from their homes and ancestral lands, not a solution. By promoting economic development policies that benefit private sector interests over the well-being of historically marginalized and working-class communities, the possibility of a dignified life has been eliminated for millions of people in our countries.

In the name of investment, U.S. policy frequently promotes the exploitation of land and natural resources, creating conditions in which rural communities, especially, cannot sustain their livelihoods. For example, palm oil plantations and other monocrops, like other extractivist projects, have negatively affected Indigenous and Black peoples in Guatemala and Honduras while local oligarchs and transnational corporations have profited. Similarly, mega projects like

hydroelectric dams and others, which are promoted by various U.S. agencies, have contributed to levels of food insecurity that have reached the “[emergency](#)” category and which result in displacement and forced migration.

In Honduras, before Berta Cáceres was assassinated for her leadership in the struggle against the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project, she [publicly denounced](#) an agreement signed between [USAID and Agua Zarca](#), which USAID only canceled after her assassination. Recently, two employees of the company were found guilty for her murder. The president of the company is also facing trial for her murder, with an additional case pending against him for fraud during the concession process.

In another example, [until recently](#), the State Department and the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) were promoting the Jilamito hydroelectric dam in Honduras despite strong opposition from local communities and despite the fact that people involved in the parent company of the project have been identified as [money launderers](#) by the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa. As was the case with Agua Zarca, the Jilamito project is emblematic of a model of economic “development” in which the local oligarchs, their networks of corruption, and transnational corporations profit off of projects that are environmentally harmful and that result in criminalization, threats, and violence toward communities that attempt to defend their rivers and lands.

Meanwhile, in Guatemala, there is concern that the [USAID funding](#) is leading to displacement of Indigenous communities from their ancestral lands [under the guise](#) of [biodiversity protection](#). Through these projects, the Guatemalan government has militarized the work of environmental conservation while robbing communities of their lands in a continuation of the violence of the civil war.

Furthermore, public-private partnerships, often facilitated with U.S. political and financial support, risk leaving millions losing access to basic public services, including health care and water, that are essential to daily life. In El Salvador, for example, the State Department played an active role in pressuring the government to create a legislative framework for private-public partnerships and designated a significant percentage of the second Millennium Challenge Fund compact for use only by public-private partnerships. We see this type of policy not only as a form of intervention but also as a reflection of a broader goal of weakening the public sector in order to increase profit margins. As a result, the United States is currently [financing several public-private partnerships](#) for water treatment facilities in El Salvador, raising [concerns that corporate use will continue to take priority over community access](#).

Despite strong opposition from local communities, the United States promotes and finances many projects like these that arise from an unsustainable economic model driven by the private sector. Though discussed in terms of being an engine for economic development, at the end of the day, the benefits are very limited and contribute to rising inequality and to the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the elite. The United States bears its share of the responsibility for these outcomes both through its weight at multilateral banks and other international financial institutions but also through its own foreign policy that is carried out through USAID, the State Department, and other agencies.

We hope that, as leaders in the U.S. Congress, you seek to fully understand the true impacts of current U.S. policy in El Salvador, Honduras y Guatemala. We urge you to use the current budget process to demand changes on the part of various U.S. agencies and to ensure that

foreign assistance does not contribute to the very causes of displacement for which it is designated to address.

We understand that various Members of Congress have requested that the following language be included with regard to the State Department and related funding for economic development in Central America.

- None of the funds appropriated by this Act for Central America may be used to finance infrastructure or energy projects that contribute to environmental damage, violate labor laws, disregard community land rights (including ancestral Indigenous land rights), are opposed by local residents, and/or increase private sector participation in the delivery of essential public services such as water, electricity, education, and health care.
- None of the funds appropriated by this Act for Central America under the heading Development Assistance or Economic Support Fund may be used to promote or incentivize private-public partnership initiatives that may lead to the privatization of public services and natural resources.

Including these basic limitations in the upcoming budget would be a positive first step toward a re-imagining U.S. economic cooperation in the region in order to better serve the needs of communities. Based on our organizational experiences and analysis, a good-faith effort by the United States to address the root causes of forced migration would begin with a process of awareness and accountability for how the United States has, historically and in recent years, contributed to the current conditions in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala that continue to cause thousands of people to have to leave their homes in order to survive.

The adoption of these restrictions on funding for the State Department, USAID and other agencies would also reflect a commitment on behalf of the United States to be a “good neighbor” in the hemisphere, as many, including in the U.S., are calling for today, especially in the face of steep global challenges, like climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, that we must resolve together.

Sincerely,

El Salvador

Asociación de Lisiados de Guerra de El Salvador (ALGES)

Asociación Movimiento de Mujeres Mélida Anaya Montes, Las Mélicas

Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de las Juventudes de San Salvador (ADIJUSS)

Colectivo de Derechos Humanos "Herberth Anaya Sanabria"

Comite Nacional Monseñor Romero

Concertación Nacional por un País sin Hambre y Seguro (CONPHAS)

Confederación de Cooperativas de la Reforma Agraria de El Salvador (CONFRAS)

Excombatientes por la Democracia y La Paz

Frente Magisterial

Frente Social y Sindical (FSS)

Fuerza Estudiantil Salvadoreña (FES)

Juventud Popular de El Salvador (JPS)

Las Artesanas de San Marcos

Movimiento de Víctimas por el Cambio Climático (MOVIAC)

Movimiento Popular de Resistencia 12 de Octubre (MPR12)

Resistencia Juvenil Modesto Ramírez

Sindicato de Trabajadoras y trabajadores Sastres, Costureras y Similares (SITRASACOSI)
Unidad de Trabajadores y Organizaciones Sociales y Populares de El Salvador (UNITRASAL)

Guatemala

Activistas Independientes
Asamblea Departamental de los Pueblos de Huehuetenango (ADH)
Asociación Civil Colectivo Madreselva
Asociación Estoreña Para el Desarrollo Integral (AEPDI)
Asociación para la Justicia y la Reconciliación (AJR)
Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos de Guatemala (FAMDEGUA)
La asociación de comunidades para el desarrollo, defensa de la tierra y los recursos naturales (ACODET)

Honduras

Asociación para una Ciudadanía Participativa (ACI PARTICIPA)
Asociación Para Una Vida Mejor de Personas Infectadas/Afectadas por el VIH-SIDA en Honduras (APUVIMEH)
Barracón Digital
Centro de Derechos de Mujeres
Centro de estudios de la mujer-Honduras
Centro de Prevención, Tratamiento y Rehabilitación de las Víctimas de la Tortura y sus Familiares (CPTRT)
Colectiva Feminista Maudalenas
Colectiva Lesbica Bisexual ANAT
Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH)
Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguán
Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas y Negras de Honduras
Equipo Jurídico por los Derechos Humanos
Fundación San Alonso Rodríguez
Instituto de Derecho Ambiental de Honduras (IDAMHO)
Instituto Ecuménico Hondureño de Servicios a la Comunidad (INEHSCO) Honduras
Lucha para Honduras Libre
Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (OFRANEH)
Red Nacional de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos en Honduras

United States

Adorers of the Blood of Christ US Region
Alliance for Global Justice
American Friends Service Committee
Americas Program
Central American Resource Center - Los Angeles (CARECEN-LA)
Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America (CRLN)
CODEPINK
Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes
Denver Justice and Peace Committee (DJPC)
Frente Unido de Inmigrantes Ecuatorianos
Friends of Latin America
Friendship Office of the Americas

GABRIELA, New Jersey
Global Exchange
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ
Guatemala Human Rights Commission - USA (GHRC)
Guatemala Solidarity Project
Haitian Bridge Alliance
Hispanic Federation
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA-JPIC
Honduras Solidarity Network in North America
Human Rights Alliance for Child Refugees and Families
Immaculate Heart Community Commission on Justice for Immigrants and Refugees
Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace (ICUJP)
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice
International Migrants Alliance-USA (IMA-USA)
International Tribunal of Conscience of Peoples in Movement
Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization/Pastors for Peace
InterReligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia
Just Associates
La Voz de los de Abajo Chicago
Latinx Faculty 4 Black Lives Matter
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Loretto Latin America/Caribbean Committee
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Migrant Roots Media
Migrante New Jersey
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON)
National Lawyers Guild Task Force on the Americas
National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights (NNIRR)
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)
New Hampshire - Vermont Guatemala Accompaniment Project
New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia
Nicaragua Center for Community Action
Oberlin Students in Solidarity with Guatemala
Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace
Pax Christi USA
Portland Central America Solidarity Committee (PCASC)
Protect Our Activists
Quixote Center
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Western American Area
School of the Americas Watch
School of the Americas Watch - San Francisco
Servants of Mary, US/Jamaica Leadership Team
SHARE Foundation
Sister Parish
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
Sisters of St. Francis (Oldenburg)
Sisters of the Humility of Mary
Sisters, Home Visitors of Mary
SSND Cooperative Investment Fund

St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America
Task Force on the Americas
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church of Hillsboro, OR
US-El Salvador Sister Cities
Witness at the Border
Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective

International

Asociación Entrepueblos-Entrepobles-Entrepobos-Herriarte (International)
Awaj Foundation (Bangladesh)
Diáspora Hondureña Internacional (DHI) (USA / Canada / Europe)
Foro Honduras Suiza (Switzerland)
Forum on Haitian Migration in the Americas (Haiti / Colombia)
IMA Research Foundation (Bangladesh)
Instituto para la Geografía de la Paz, Cd. Juárez (Mexico)
Movimiento Centroamericano 2 de Marzo (Argentina)
Protección Internacional Mesoamerica (Central America)
Pueblo Sin Fronteras (USA / México)

CC:

Hon. Rosa DeLauro, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations

Hon. Kay Granger, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations

Hon. Patrick Leahy, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

Hon. Richard Shelby, Vice Chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations