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Congress of the United States
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COMMITTEE ON RULES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
REGIONAL WHIP

March 24, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington D.C. 20520

The Honorable Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Secretary Blinken and National Security Advisor Sullivan,

Thank you for appointing a Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle, a reflection of the Biden Administration's prioritization of the region. As we pivot from the cruel policies of the past to a humane immigration system, we also need to be clear of the true cause of what drives vulnerable migrants to the border -- that of rampant corruption and poor governance in their home countries. Given the high-level visit to the region, I implore you to resist sending money directly to the hands of corrupt officials. Our foreign assistance should not validate and prop up would-be authoritarians, nor should it be wasted on corrupt public actors who benefit from public funding rather than those who need it most.

The Trump Administration relegated anti-corruption efforts to the bottom of the policy priority list. Where we had made progress advancing rule of law, corrupt politicians and elites exploited the absence of international pressure, as well as the dual humanitarian crises of the pandemic and multiple hurricanes, to strengthen their hand politically and build their coffers. In Guatemala, the military used our own security assistance to intimidate our embassy. Guatemala's elites are packing their courts with cronies to protect their own corrupt interests, rather than impartially enforce the rule of law. Recent federal court proceedings in the United States revealed that Honduras's President, Juan Orlando Hernandez, protected drug traffickers while boasting about bringing drugs to the U.S. In El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele uses his influence to discredit legitimate democratic processes and institutions. These governments have shown us what they care about. They cannot be trusted to administer U.S. assistance to advance democratic values and benefit their people.

As a Member of the Appropriations State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, my goal is to ensure that U.S. taxpayer funding results in the most impact, including when it comes to the Northern Triangle. Therefore, I would like to work with you in severely restricting funding that goes to central governments of the region. Instead, our foreign assistance should go to civil society, non-governmental organizations, multilateral institutions, and other credible institutions that have a proven track record of helping individuals and vulnerable communities. When necessary, funding should only be provided directly to parts of the host governments that have had no credible allegations of corruption. We also need to ensure that the conditions placed on

funding are not a mere box checking exercise that the governments can overcome with cosmetic gestures. Rather, any funding should also require robust certification efforts, including regular outcome reporting data to show how it is impacting U.S. policy goals.

President Biden knows the region well and championed anti-corruption when he was Vice President. We also need to learn from the past and the unfortunate reality of our partners' lack of political will. We will only ensure a safer, more fair life for the millions of people living in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras if we ensure our efforts reach the people.

By directing our foreign assistance to reputable partners in the Northern Triangle, I believe we will be able to foster meaningful change in the Northern Triangle. I look forward to working with you and your teams in this regard, and thank you for your commitment to the region.

Sincerely,



Norma J. Torres

CC:

Ricardo Zúñiga, Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle

Juan Gonzalez, Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs, National Security Council