Right the Wrong: The Case for the Berta Caceres Act (Honduras)

By Rebecca Sumner

***Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reform its foreign aid.***

The U.S. gives Honduras military and law enforcement aid (security aid). Since 2009, Honduras has received nearly $114 million in security aid. Not only that, but the U.S. government also provides training to the Honduran National Police. But the training and funding are sadly misused. Journalists and activists aren’t given the freedom of expression. When they speak out, they are assassinated. Honduras is the most dangerous country for environmentalist activists. Instead of protecting the people, the Honduran security services that we are aiding are oppressing them.

The AFF plan is to pass the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act (H.R. 1299), a bill recently introduced in Congress but not enacted. This Act prohibits funds from being made available to Honduras for its police and military (including for equipment and training) until Honduras’ government has prosecuted members of the police and military for human rights violations, established a judicial system for bringing to justice those members of the police and military, and established that it protects the rights of activists to operate without interference.

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Part of the military problem is domestic policing. The Berta Cáceres Act requires the military to be withdrawn from domestic policing. 14

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Journalist Jonathan Blitzer tells a disturbing story in 2016, writing QUOTE:

Jonathan Blitzer 2016 (Staff writer at The New Yorker. He won a 2017 National Award for Education Reporting for “American Studies; writing and reporting have also appeared in the New York Times, The Atlantic, The Atavist, Oxford American, and The Nation) 11 Mar 2016, “The Death of Berta Cáceres,” <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-of-berta-caceres>

The Honduran activist Berta Cáceres was at home last week, in a town called La Esperanza, when gunmen stormed in and shot her dead. Cáceres, who was forty-four, had known she was in danger. Late last month, while leading a march in a nearby village, she had an altercation with soldiers, police officers, and employees of a Honduran company, Desarrollos Energéticos S.A., or DESA, that she had been fighting for years. In 2010, the Honduran Congress passed a law that awarded contracts to a group of private companies, including DESA, to build dozens of hydroelectric dams throughout the country. Four of the approved dams, which are known collectively as the Agua Zarca Dam, were along the Gualcarque River, in western Honduras, on territory inhabited by the indigenous Lenca people. The Lenca voiced their opposition as soon as the plans became public, around 2011—first with formal votes and entreaties, and, after those were ignored, with road blockages and demonstrations. In the spring of 2013, these turned to violent confrontations with police, who arrested Lenca protesters en masse. That summer, soldiers based out of DESA’s local headquarters opened fire on a crowd of residents, killing one indigenous leader and seriously injuring several others. Cáceres was on the front lines from the start, having founded the group that has organized much of the opposition, the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH).

**END QUOTE.** She’s not alone, there have been many others. The U.S. gives Honduras military and law enforcement aid, so we’re responsible for helping its oppression of human rights. Please join my partner and me as we affirm: The United States Federal Government should substantially reform its foreign aid.

OBSERVATION 1. We offer the following DEFINITIONS.

****Foreign aid****

Britannica copyright 2018 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/foreign-aid>

the international transfer of [capital](https://www.britannica.com/topic/capital-economics), goods, or services from a country or [international organization](https://www.britannica.com/topic/international-organization) for the benefit of the recipient country or its population.

Substantial:

“Of considerable importance, size, or worth.” (*Oxford Dictionary, copyright 2018,* [[*https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/substantial*](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/substantial)](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/substantially)*)*

Reform:

“the improvement or amendment of what is wrong, corrupt, unsatisfactory, etc.” *(Dictionary.com, copyright 2018,* [*http://www.dictionary.com/browse/reform*](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/reform)*)*

OBSERVATION 2. INHERENCY, or the structure of the Status Quo.

FACT 1. Military and Law Enforcement Aid. Honduras gets millions in US security aid funding

Lee Fang and Danielle Mackey 2017 (**Fang**—Journalist; former fellow at the Investigative Fund of the Nation Institute and contributing writer for The Nation. His work has been published by the San Francisco Chronicle, The Progressive, NPR. **Mackey**—Journalist. She’s a senior fellow at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University) 3 Dec 2017 “The President of Honduras is Deploying U.S.-Trained Forces Against Election Protesters,” <https://theintercept.com/2017/12/03/the-president-of-honduras-is-deploying-u-s-trained-forces-against-election-protesters/> [brackets added]

The [Honduran National Police] PNH and elite military police units are among the beneficiaries of generous security-related foreign aid earmarked for Honduras by the U.S. government. Figures compiled by the Security Assistance Monitor show that Honduras has received nearly $114 million in security support since 2009.

FACT 2. Police training. The Honduran National Police (PNH) gets training from the U.S. government

Lee Fang and Danielle Mackey 2017 (**Fang**—Journalist; former fellow at the Investigative Fund of the Nation Institute and contributing writer for The Nation. His work has been published by the San Francisco Chronicle, The Progressive, NPR. **Mackey**—Journalist. She’s a senior fellow at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University) 3 Dec 2017 “The President of Honduras is Deploying U.S.-Trained Forces Against Election Protesters,” <https://theintercept.com/2017/12/03/the-president-of-honduras-is-deploying-u-s-trained-forces-against-election-protesters/> [brackets in original]

The PNH receives extensive training by various branches of the U.S. government. The exact substance of U.S. training for foreign security forces is notoriously difficult to ascertain, but some light has been shed by new data provided by the Departments of State, Defense, Justice, and Homeland Security at the request of Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., and shared with The Intercept by John Lindsay-Poland, a Latin America expert who participated in making the request. In 2015, for instance, the data shows that members of the PNH received courses titled “Advanced Close Quarter Combat,” “Tactical Safety and Survival,” “Communication and Electronic Intelligence,” among others, and received donations, including Toyota trucks and computers. “Multiple Honduran Military and Law Enforcement Units” also received trainings on “Special Forces Advanced Military Operations in Urban Terrain,” “Reconnaissance and Surveillance,” and other themes. “This will support [U.S. Southern Command] Theater Engagement strategy and will improve partner national [counternarcotics] units’ abilities to conduct unilateral and combined [counternarcotics] missions,” reads the text describing the purpose and objective of those courses, as reported by the Defense Department and U.S. Southern Command. Courses listed for the year 2016 were similar. The instructors of the courses both years included federal agencies like the DEA, FBI, and the State Department’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, along with other agencies such as the Chicago police force.

OBSERVATION 3. The PLAN implemented by Congress and the President

1. Congress votes to pass the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act (H.R. 1299). It stops police and military aid to Honduras until human rights reforms are implemented.

2. Funding from existing budgets of existing agencies, with net reduction in federal spending by cutting aid.  
3. Enforcement through the US State Department, with the Secretary of State responsible for certifying when Honduras has met all the conditions.

4. Timeline: October 1, 2019

5. All Affirmative speeches may clarify

OBSERVATION 4. JUSTIFICATIONS

JUSTIFICATION 1. Blood on our hands. We see this in 3 sub-points:

A. Repression and killing. Honduran security forces commonly commit repression and killing of opposition leaders, union organizers and activists

Jonathan Blitzer 2016 (Staff writer at The New Yorker. He won a 2017 National Award for Education Reporting for “American Studies; writing and reporting have also appeared in the New York Times, The Atlantic, The Atavist, Oxford American, and The Nation) 11 Mar 2016, “The Death of Berta Cáceres,” <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-of-berta-caceres>

Earlier this summer, as allegations swirled about who was behind Cáceres’s murder, I spoke with Maria Luisa Borjas, the former inspector general of the Honduran National Police. Borjas spent twenty-six years working in Honduran law enforcement, and was forced out of her post in 2003, after investigating a number of police officers suspected of running death squads. She has been on the receiving end of death threats herself, and when we spoke she told me she was certain her phone was tapped. “Berta Cáceres was a victim of the government in association with a private company,” she told me. “In this case, military officers, the material authors of the murder, were used to eliminate the obstacle that Berta Cáceres posed to the company desa.” The Honduran government has denied any involvement in Cáceres’s murder, and pledged a thoroughgoing investigation. But Borjas told me that it has become standard practice for the police and military to be involved in the “repression and killing” of opposition leaders, union organizers, and activists. “The victims tend to be people from diverse social and economic strata. The principal characteristic they have in common is that they represent a threat or an obstacle to governmental or business interests,” she said.

B. Blood on our hands. Funding Honduran security forces means we have blood on our hands and it’s time to stop.

Rep. John Conyers, Rep. Keith Ellison, Rep. Hank Johnson, Rep. Marcy Kaptur, Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Rep. Jose Serrano 2016 (**Conyers**—Representative for Michigan's 13th congressional district. **Ellison**—represents the fifth district of Minnesota. **Johnson**—Representative for Georgia's fourth congressional district and member of the House Armed Services and Judiciary Committees. **Kaptur**—Representative for Ohio's 9th congressional district. **Schakowsky**—representative for Illinois's 9th congressional district. **Serrano**—Representative for New York's 15th District) 8 July 2016, “America's funding of Honduran security forces puts blood on our hands,” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/08/american-funding-honduran-security-forces-blood-on-our-hands>

Until the Honduran government protects human rights and holds its security forces responsible for their crimes, we should not be working with its police and military. As long as the United States funds Honduran security forces without demanding justice for those threatened, tortured and killed, we have blood on our hands. It’s time to suspend all police and military aid to Honduras.

C. Cáceres Act Solves. The Berta Cáceres Act stops the blood money until Honduras reforms.

Congressional Research Service 2017 ( agency of the U.S. Congress, providing policy and legal analysis to committees and Members of both the House and Senate), 2 Mar 2017, “Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act,” <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1299>

This bill prohibits funds from being made available to Honduras for the police or military (including for equipment and training), and directs the Department of the Treasury to instruct U.S. representatives at multilateral development banks to vote against any loans for the police or military of Honduras, until the Department of States certifies that the government of Honduras has:

* prosecuted members of the military and police for human rights violations and ensured that such violations have ceased;
* established the rule of law and guaranteed a judicial system capable of bringing to justice members of the police and military who have committed human rights abuses;
* established that it protects the rights of trade unionists, journalists, human rights defenders, government critics, and civil society activists to operate without interference;
* withdrawn the military from domestic policing; and
* brought to trial and obtained verdicts against those who ordered and carried out the attack on Felix Molina and the killings of Berta Caceres, Joel Palacios Lino, Elvis Armando Garcia, and over 100 small-farmer activists in the Aguan Valley.

JUSTIFICATION 2. Human Rights. We see this in 2 sub-points.

A. The Problem: Bad human rights conditions in Honduras because of military and police abuse

Dina Meza 2016 (Born in Honduras; recognized by Amnesty International, Index on Censorship and Reporters without Borders for her work as a journalist and human rights advocate; wrote “Reign of Terror,” an in-depth report on threats to Honduran journalists for Index on Censorship’s magazine”), 15 Aug 2016 “The Impact of the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act,” <http://www.sampsoniaway.org/fearless-ink/2016/08/15/the-impact-of-the-berta-caceres-human-rights-in-honduras-act/>

Honduras is being seen for what it is: a country where the weight of the law is not applied when it comes to the military or the police, who benefit from acquittals. The human rights situation in Honduras is ever more dangerous for those who defend these fundamental rights, reveals a report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), who visited the country last year.

B. The Solution: US action is key to promoting human rights and overcoming opposition by those who continue to support the Honduran government

Silvio Carillo 2017 (Berta Cáceres’ U.S.-based nephew. The article was published by The San Francisco Bay Chapter, which is the local branch of the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club is grassroots, volunteer-driven environmental advocacy organization) 4 Oct 2017, “Are Bay Area reps helping Honduras get away with murder?” <https://www.sierraclub.org/san-francisco-bay/blog/2017/10/are-bay-area-reps-helping-honduras-get-away-murder> [brackets added]

In the Sierra magazine article [John] Gibler asks, “Will those responsible get away with murder?” Today, several months after the piece went to print, and 19 months after her murder, my family and I believe the answer is a resounding “yes.” Why are we so pessimistic? The biggest obstacle to change is our own U.S. policy. Some in Congress — including some of our very own Bay Area representatives — want to continue supporting a corrupt government charged with human rights abuses (and with documented ties to drug traffickers) that is aggressively curbing freedom of expression, speech, and press.

2A Evidence: Human Rights in Honduras

DEFINITIONS & BACKGROUND

Text of The Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act (H.R. 1299) – Print out and bring to debate round

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1299/text>

INHERENCY

1. The U.S. continues to give Honduras money

Despite their dangerous track record, the U.S. continues to give Honduras security aid

John James Conyers, Jr, Keith Ellison, Hank Johnson, Marcy Kaptur, Jan Schakowsky and Jose E Serrano 2016 (**Conyers**—US Representative for Michigan's 13th congressional district. **Ellison**—Representative Keith Ellison represents the fifth district of Minnesota and serves as co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. **Johnson**—US Representative for Georgia's fourth congressional district and a member of the House Armed Services and Judiciary Committees. **Kaptur**—Representative for Ohio's 9th congressional district. **Schakowsky**—US representative for Illinois's 9th congressional district. **Serrano**—US Representative for New York's 15th District) 8 July 2016, “America's funding of Honduran security forces puts blood on our hands,” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/08/american-funding-honduran-security-forces-blood-on-our-hands>

Despite this dangerous track record, the United States continues to pour money into Honduran security forces. The US has already allocated at least $18m to Honduran police and military for 2016. Barack Obama’s 2017 budget request calls for increased funding for the Honduran police and military. In addition, the Inter-American Development Bank has lent $60m to the Honduran police, with US approval.

2. Honduran Police trained by the U.S.

The Honduran police is trained by the U.S. and all three of the groups (TIGRES, Cobras, and PNH) have been denounced for human rights violations

Lee Fang and Danielle Mackey 2017 (**Fang**—Journalist; former fellow at the Investigative Fund of the Nation Institute and contributing writer for The Nation. His work has been published by the San Francisco Chronicle, The Progressive, NPR. **Mackey**—Journalist. She’s a senior fellow at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University) 3 Dec 2017 “The President of Honduras is Deploying U.S.-Trained Forces Against Election Protesters,” <https://theintercept.com/2017/12/03/the-president-of-honduras-is-deploying-u-s-trained-forces-against-election-protesters/>

The Comando de Operaciones Especiales, or Cobras, are riot police trained by U.S. SWAT teams. The Tropa de Inteligencia de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad, or TIGRES, were formed to fight urban violence and organized crime in 2014 by Hernández as he took office promising to bring down the world’s highest peacetime murder rate. The TIGRES are paid a higher salary than traditional Honduran police, and they have also benefited from close coordination with multiple U.S. military bases in Honduras. A video obtained by the Wall Street Journal shows Green Beret units training with the TIGRES in the mountains of Honduras. The militarized units, known to operate at night with uniforms that disguise officers’ faces, have featured widely in Hernández’s political campaigns as the president has championed his war on crime. But the TIGRES, Cobras, and PNH have all been denounced for human rights violations.

SIGNIFICANCE

1. Lives Lost

In Honduras, one woman dies violently every 17 hours on average. The impunity rate for crimes against women is 95%

Alice Driver 2018 (Freelance journalist and translator based in Mexico City whose work focuses on migration, human rights and gender equality. She has worked for REVEAL at the Center for Investigative Reporting, CNN, PRI.org, CBC Radio, BBC News. **Flores López**—Austra Bertha Flores López was Berta Cáceres’ mother) 24 Apr 2018, “Assassins murdered Honduran activist Berta Cáceres. Her mother and daughters have taken up the fight.” <https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-04-24/assassins-murdered-honduran-environmental-activist-berta-c-ceres-her-mother-and>

A few months after Berta Cáceres's murder, two more activists were murdered. In Honduras, one woman dies violently every 17 hours on average, and the impunity rate for crimes against women is 95 percent. Activists and human rights defenders, especially women, are frequently the targets of such violence. The equality that Flores López and her daughter and granddaughters are fighting for has not become a reality for most women in the country.

120 land and environmental defenders have been killed since 2010

teleSUR 2018 (Latin American multimedia platform oriented to lead and promote the unification of the peoples of the SOUTH (Geopolitical concept that promotes the struggle of peoples for peace, self-determination, respect for Human Rights and Social Justice) It reports on news from around the world) 2 Mar 2017, “1 Year After Berta Caceres' Murder, Activists Demand US Stop Funding Abusive Honduran State Forces,” <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Activists-Demand-US-Stop-Funding-Abusive-Honduran-State-Forces-20170301-0019.html>

According to a recent report by the international rights organization Global Witness, 120 land and environmental defenders have been killed in Honduras since 2010 after an increase in state-sanctioned abuses in the wake of the 2009 U.S.-backed military coup.

101 environmental activists killed in Honduras between 2010-2014

Jonathan Blitzer 2016 (Staff writer at The New Yorker. He won a 2017 National Award for Education Reporting for “American Studies; writing and reporting have also appeared in the New York Times, The Atlantic, The Atavist, Oxford American, and The Nation) 11 Mar 2016, “The Death of Berta Cáceres,” <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-of-berta-caceres>

Between 2010 and 2014, a hundred and one environmental activists were killed in Honduras, which is one of the most dangerous countries in the world, and the most perilous for environmental activists, according to a report from Global Witness. Ninety-eight per cent of violent crimes in Honduras go unsolved. A week after Cáceres’s assassination, there is little clarity on how it happened.

Journalists in danger: Honduras is 140th in the world classification on press freedom

Dina Meza 2017 (Born in Honduras. She’s been recognized by PEN International, Amnesty International, Index on Censorship and Reporters without Borders for her work as a journalist and human rights advocate; wrote “Reign of Terror,” an in-depth report on threats to Honduran journalists for Index on Censorship’s magazine), 30 Oct 2017 “Crimes Against Journalists: The State Prosecutor is Merely a Machine for Counting Deaths,” <http://www.sampsoniaway.org/fearless-ink/2017/10/30/crimes-against-journalists-the-state-prosecutor-is-merely-a-machine-for-counting-deaths/>

This violence has drawn international attention in a country which occupies second position, after Mexico, where exercising the profession is very dangerous, putting the country 140th in the 2017 world classification on press freedom, according to Reporters Without Borders. One conclusion which could be reached is that the intolerance of diversity of ideas provokes deadly attacks against social commentators and journalists, whilst the State of Honduras is incapable of demonstrating otherwise.

Journalists killed: Honduras is one of the most dangerous countries to practice journalism

Dina Meza 2016 (Born in Honduras. She’s been recognized by PEN International, Amnesty International, Index on Censorship and Reporters without Borders for her work as a journalist and human rights advocate. This article was **translated** by Katherine Wingfield-Dobbs), 15 Aug 2016 “Between Bullets and Censorship: A column by Dina Meza,” <http://www.sampsoniaway.org/fearless-ink/2016/08/15/the-impact-of-the-berta-caceres-human-rights-in-honduras-act/>

Honduras has one of the world’s highest murder rates. It is also one of the most dangerous countries to practice journalism, ranking 129th out of 180 in the 2014 World Press Freedom Index. Journalists are regularly threatened, attacked, and killed for their work. The Honduran government fails to punish those who use violence against reporters, essentially granting them impunity.

When journalists are not given freedom of speech, freedom of expression dies

Dina Meza 2017 (Born in Honduras. She’s been recognized by PEN International, Amnesty International, Index on Censorship and Reporters without Borders for her work as a journalist and human rights advocate. This article was **translated** by Katherine Wingfield-Dobbs), 30 Oct 2017 “Crimes Against Journalists: The State Prosecutor is Merely a Machine for Counting Deaths,” <http://www.sampsoniaway.org/fearless-ink/2017/10/30/crimes-against-journalists-the-state-prosecutor-is-merely-a-machine-for-counting-deaths/>

But it is important to highlight that if there is a State that generates violence against journalists, we cannot hope that it will act against impunity because it is not going to control itself. It would need a political and ethical iron will to finally do something. When they kill a journalist, they are placing a deadly trap on democracy. The role played by journalists and social commentators is vital because by not allowing them to exercise their profession peacefully, it deprives society of information and freedom of expression dies every day.

Each crime that goes unpunished leads to more crimes

Dina Meza 2017 (journalist born in Honduras; recognized by PEN International, Amnesty International, Index on Censorship and Reporters without Borders for her work as a journalist and human rights advocate), 30 Oct 2017 “Crimes Against Journalists: The State Prosecutor is Merely a Machine for Counting Deaths,” <http://www.sampsoniaway.org/fearless-ink/2017/10/30/crimes-against-journalists-the-state-prosecutor-is-merely-a-machine-for-counting-deaths/>

Every death carries with it silence which creates self-censorship in the press – leaving each crime in the nebula sends out a message of death and fear. “An attack on the principals of transparency and accountability as well as on the right to hold opinions and take part in public debates, which are essential in a democracy. When such crimes remain unpunished, this encourages similarly violent acts and can result in the silencing and self-censorship of communicators”, pointed out the UN’s Reporter for Freedom of Expression and Opinion.

2. Human Rights Violations

Human rights defenders and activists are abused

Amnesty International 2018 (non-profit organization, advocacy for human rights; more than 7 million members) 22 Feb 2018, “Honduras 2017/2018,” <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1425039.html>

Human rights defenders, particularly environmental and land activists, continued to be at risk of human rights abuses. They were subjected to smear campaigns by both state and non-state actors to discredit their work, and were regularly targeted with intimidation, threats, and attacks. In June, three members of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) were attacked by armed assailants while they were in a car, returning from a meeting. Local NGOs said that the justice system continued to be misused to harass and discourage human rights defenders. Unnecessary and excessive use of force by security forces during peaceful protests was also reported.

Attacks against human rights defenders go unpunished

Amnesty International 2018 (Global movement of more than 7 million people who take injustice personally. They’re campaigning for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all), 22 Feb 2018, “Honduras 2017/2018,” <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1425039.html>

The vast majority of attacks registered against human rights defenders remained unpunished, as a result of multiple obstacles hindering investigations and trials. There was little progress in the investigation into the killing in March 2016 of Berta Cáceres, the Indigenous environmental defender and co-founder of COPINH. The public hearings of eight suspects detained in relation to the case were postponed on multiple occasions. Independent experts revealed a lack of due diligence in the investigations, including a lack of prosecution of other individuals potentially involved in the crime. There was no information about any progress made by the Public Prosecutor in identifying those responsible for planning her killing.

Honduran human rights activists haven’t faced this much danger since the 1980s

Professor Lauren J. Carasik 2016 (Clinical Professor of Law and Director of the International Human Rights Clinic at Western New England University School of Law. Education: B.A., Earlham College, J.D., Northeastern University School of Law) 16 Aug 2016, “Blood in Honduras, Silence in the United States,” <http://bostonreview.net/editors-picks-world-us/lauren-carasik-blood-honduras-silence-united-states>

At a U.S. congressional briefing in April, Honduran human rights activist Bertha Oliva Nativí testified that activists had not faced such dangers since the 1980s. “Now, it’s like going back to the past,” she said. “We know there are death squads in Honduras.”

This is a human rights crisis in which no one is safe

Rep. John Conyers, Rep. Keith Ellison Rep., Hank Johnson, Rep. Marcy Kaptur, Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Rep. Jose E Serrano 2016 (**Conyers**—Representative for Michigan's 13th congressional district. **Ellison**—Representative Keith Ellison represents the fifth district of Minnesota. **Johnson**—Representative for Georgia's fourth congressional district. **Kaptur**—Representative for Ohio's 9th congressional district. **Schakowsky**—representative for Illinois's 9th congressional district. **Serrano**—US Representative for New York's 15th District) 8 July 2016, “America's funding of Honduran security forces puts blood on our hands,” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/08/american-funding-honduran-security-forces-blood-on-our-hands>

The murder of Berta Cáceres illustrates a bleak state of affairs in Honduras. Corruption, impunity and judicial and institutional weaknesses have created a human rights crisis in which no one is safe – not even a world-famous recipient of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize.

3. No justice

Example: Berta Cáceres murder case isn’t being investigated

Rep. John Conyers, Rep. Keith Ellison Rep., Hank Johnson, Rep. Marcy Kaptur, Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Rep. Jose E Serrano 2016 (**Conyers**—Representative for Michigan's 13th congressional district. **Ellison**—Representative Keith Ellison represents the fifth district of Minnesota. **Johnson**—Representative for Georgia's fourth congressional district. **Kaptur**—Representative for Ohio's 9th congressional district. **Schakowsky**—representative for Illinois's 9th congressional district. **Serrano**—US Representative for New York's 15th District) 8 July 2016, “America's funding of Honduran security forces puts blood on our hands,” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/08/american-funding-honduran-security-forces-blood-on-our-hands>

On 2 March 2016, armed men burst into the home of Berta Cáceres, a prominent environmental and indigenous activist in Honduras, and shot her to death. Earlier that day, the government had rescinded Ms Cáceres’s meager security detail, leaving her unprotected. Of the 33 threats against her, including death threats, none had been investigated. Members of the Honduran military have been implicated in her murder, and requests by the global community for an independent investigation have been ignored.

4. Police Corruption

High-ranking Honduran police officials face US criminal charges

Associated Press 2018 (journalists Christopher Sherman, Martha Mendoza and Garance) 26 Jan 2018, “Honduras’ national police chief helped cartel move 1,700 lbs. of cocaine, report says,” <http://www.chicagotribune.com/ct-honduras-police-cocaine-20180126-story.html> (DEA—Drug Enforcement Administration)

High-ranking Honduran police officials have been accused of ordering assassinations, trafficking cocaine and leading criminal gangs. At least six former National Police officers are currently facing U.S. criminal charges in a federal court in New York and the DEA says their investigations into Honduras police corruption are still active.

Honduran police are widely documented as corrupt

Rep. John Conyers, Rep. Keith Ellison Rep., Hank Johnson, Rep. Marcy Kaptur, Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Rep. Jose E Serrano 2016 (**Conyers**—Representative for Michigan's 13th congressional district. **Ellison**—Representative Keith Ellison represents the fifth district of Minnesota. **Johnson**—Representative for Georgia's fourth congressional district. **Kaptur**—Representative for Ohio's 9th congressional district. **Schakowsky**—representative for Illinois's 9th congressional district. **Serrano**—US Representative for New York's 15th District) 8 July 2016, “America's funding of Honduran security forces puts blood on our hands,” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/08/american-funding-honduran-security-forces-blood-on-our-hands>

The Honduran police are widely documented to be corrupt. In August 2013, a government commission charged with cleaning up the police admitted nearly three-quarters of the police force were “beyond saving”. Human Rights Watch reports: “The use of lethal force by the national police is a chronic problem. Investigations into police abuses are marred by inefficiency and corruption … and impunity is the rule.”

The police knew Cáceres was in trouble and they did nothing. Honduran army has a hit list

Jonathan Blitzer 2016 (journalist, staff writer at The New Yorker; writing and reporting have also appeared in the New York Times, The Atlantic, The Atavist, Oxford American, and The Nation) 17 Aug 2016, “Should the U.S. Still Be Sending Military Aid to Honduras?” <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/should-the-u-s-still-be-sending-military-aid-to-honduras>

Cáceres, who spent the last three years of her life in and out of hiding, said repeatedly that the military was after her. In 2013, she told Al Jazeera, “The army has an assassination list of 18 wanted human rights fighters with my name at the top.” In the months before her death, she reported dozens of threats to state authorities. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (I.A.C.H.R.) had urged the Honduran government to take “precautionary measures” for her security. The danger she was in was no secret.

Honduran government leader admits: Law enforcement and military are corrupt

Laura Blume 2016 (PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at Boston Univ; graduated from Simmons College in 2013 with a BA in Political Science and Public Policy) 22 May 2016, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY, “¡Basta Ya! The United States is Overdue for a New Policy Approach in Honduras,” <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/news/052216.Honduras-InternationalAffairsReview.pdf>

In 2011, the Vice President of the Honduran Congress cited a report that up to 40% of police were involved in organized crime. Corruption at the highest levels of Honduran institutions has previously foiled U.S. missions in the country. Even American trained and monitored Honduran special operators have been accused of pocketing a $1.3 million share of illegal proceeds seized during an operation. Given the high levels of corruption found across Honduran institutions, U.S. military and law enforcement assistance has not achieved the stated goal of diminishing violence.

Honduran security forces use abuse human rights

WASHINGTON POST 2017 (journalist Ishaan Tharoor, reporter covering foreign affairs, geopolitics and history; writes about foreign affairs for The Washington Post; Yale University, BA, honors in history and ethnicity, race and migration), 4 Dec 2017 “The crisis in Honduras should matter to the U.S.,” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/12/04/the-crisis-in-honduras-should-matter-to-the-u-s/?noredirect=on>

All the while, the country's security forces, enriched and empowered in the shadow of the U.S. war on drugs, have been accused of human rights abuses and targeting dissidents, including allegations surrounding the 2016 assassination of Berta Cáceres, an environmental activist and outspoken opponent of Hernández. “The Honduran security forces are using our tax payer dollars to repress peaceful demonstrations against stolen elections,” said Cáceres’s U.S.-based nephew, Silvio Carillo, to the Intercept. “We are giving Juan Orlando Hernández money so he can get away with murder.”

EXAMPLE: TIGRES officers stole $1.3 million from cocaine traffickers in a raid

Lee Fang and Danielle Mackey 2017 (**Fang**—Journalist; former fellow at the Investigative Fund of the Nation Institute and contributing writer for The Nation. His work has been published by the San Francisco Chronicle, The Progressive, NPR. **Mackey**—Journalist. She’s a senior fellow at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis University) 3 Dec 2017 “The President of Honduras is Deploying U.S.-Trained Forces Against Election Protesters,” <https://theintercept.com/2017/12/03/the-president-of-honduras-is-deploying-u-s-trained-forces-against-election-protesters/>

The TIGRES in particular are said to have been used to harass political opponents and simply rob the cartels they are designed to rein in. Shortly after the formation of the unit, TIGRES officers assigned to work with the U.S. Embassy on counternarcotics operations stole $1.3 million from cocaine traffickers targeted in a raid. Most controversially, there have been allegations that TIGRES were involved in the harassment of Berta Cáceres, an internationally known and respected human rights and environmental activist who was assassinated last year.

5. Washington has blood on its hands

By continuing to arm and support the Honduran military, Washington has blood on its hands

teleSUR 2018 (Latin American multimedia) 2 Mar 2017, “1 Year After Berta Caceres' Murder, Activists Demand US Stop Funding Abusive Honduran State Forces,” <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Activists-Demand-US-Stop-Funding-Abusive-Honduran-State-Forces-20170301-0019.html>

Human rights activists argue that Washington has blood on its hands for its complicity in abuses carried out by Honduran state forces. One year after the assassination of Honduran Indigenous leader Berta Caceres, human rights organizations and Indigenous communities continue to demand justice in the case, while the international branch of the struggle pressures to an end of U.S. funding for police and military forces accused of human rights abuses in the Central American country.

By funding the Honduran government, the U.S. is funding violence creation

Jonathan Blitzer 2016 (journalist, staff writer at The New Yorker; writing and reporting have also appeared in the New York Times, The Atlantic, The Atavist, Oxford American, and The Nation) 17 Aug 2016, “Should the U.S. Still Be Sending Military Aid to Honduras?” <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/should-the-u-s-still-be-sending-military-aid-to-honduras>

“There’s a great deal of evidence that the U.S. is funding *violence* *creation* by the government on a grand scale,” Dana Frank, a Honduras expert at the University of California, Santa Cruz, told me. “Members of the Honduran élite and the government officials they work with know quite well that the corrupt criminal-justice system largely guarantees them impunity, and they continue to test what they can get away with, including widespread violence by state security forces. They have a long history of all kinds of astonishingly open criminal behavior.”

The U.S. is helping to fund human rights violations

Jonathan Blitzer 2016 (journalist, staff writer at The New Yorker; writing and reporting have also appeared in the New York Times, The Atlantic, The Atavist, Oxford American, and The Nation) 17 Aug 2016, “Should the U.S. Still Be Sending Military Aid to Honduras?” <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/should-the-u-s-still-be-sending-military-aid-to-honduras>

Last month, a group of Democratic congressmen introduced the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act. In a Guardian op-ed laying out their rationale, the bill’s sponsors said, “As long as the United States funds Honduran security forces without demanding justice for those threatened, tortured, and killed, we have blood on our hands. It’s time to suspend all police and military aid to Honduras.” This wasn’t the first time that members of Congress expressed concern about supporting Honduras’s newly militarized and expanded police force. Last summer, months before Cáceres’s death, twenty-one congressmen wrote a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry to register their unease over complaints of human-rights violations committed by government forces that the U.S. was helping to fund. The U.S. allocated about eighteen million dollars in aid to the Honduran police and military in 2015; Honduras is also included in the Alliance for Prosperity, a seven-hundred-and-fifty-million-dollar aid package for the northern triangle of Central America.

Washington shouldn’t be funding human rights abuses

Professor Lauren J. Carasik 2016 (Professor of Law and Director of the International Human Rights Clinic at Western New England University School of Law. Education: B.A., Earlham College, J.D., Northeastern University School of Law) 16 Aug 2016, “Blood in Honduras, Silence in the United States,” <http://bostonreview.net/editors-picks-world-us/lauren-carasik-blood-honduras-silence-united-states>

But there have been pivotal moments in history when the tide has turned against U.S.-allied repressive states, such as the killing of Jesuit priests in El Salvador in 1989, which spurred international condemnation of the Salvadoran government and prompted Washington to rethink its support. The death of Cáceres should be one of those moments. This time, Washington should act quickly to stop its money from funding human rights abuses in Honduras before more blood is spilled.

The U.S. is supporting the violence and ongoing human rights violations in Honduras

Kimberly Krone 2018 (Youth justice attorney with American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)’s Immigrant Rights Program in Newark, New Jersey where she provides legal representation to immigrant children and youth) 3 Apr 2018, “The U.S. is supporting human rights violations in Honduras—here’s what we can do about it,” <https://www.afsc.org/honduras-delegation> [brackets added]

As a supporter of [President Juan Orlando Hernandez] JOH and his security forces, the United States is complicit in the violence and ongoing human rights violations in Honduras. The U.S. has provided millions of dollars in weapons, training, and other support for the Honduran military and police, bolstering a violent and corrupt regime that has operated with impunity. And in the weeks after the election—despite ongoing disputes over the results, violence against protesters, and concerns raised by the international community—the U.S government announced its support of JOH as the winner.

SOLVENCY

Part of the military problem is domestic policing. The Berta Cáceres Act requires the military to be withdrawn from domestic policing.

Rep. John Conyers, Rep. Keith Ellison Rep., Hank Johnson, Rep. Marcy Kaptur, Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Rep. Jose E Serrano 2016 (**Conyers**—Representative for Michigan's 13th congressional district. **Ellison**—Representative Keith Ellison represents the fifth district of Minnesota. **Johnson**—Representative for Georgia's fourth congressional district. **Kaptur**—Representative for Ohio's 9th congressional district. **Schakowsky**—representative for Illinois's 9th congressional district. **Serrano**—US Representative for New York's 15th District) 8 July 2016, “America's funding of Honduran security forces puts blood on our hands,” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/08/american-funding-honduran-security-forces-blood-on-our-hands>

President Hernández’s response is misguided. He’s extended the military into domestic policing, in violation of the Honduran constitution. The expanded military police have killed unarmed men passing through checkpoints. They’ve tear gassed and beaten members of opposition party Libre inside the main hall of Congress. They’ve arrested and beaten a prominent advocate for children, Guadalupe Ruelas, after he criticized the government. Creating a military police is clearly not the solution.

The Berta Cáceres Act denies security aid until the Honduran security forces’ human rights violations are brought to justice

Silvio Carillo 2017 (Berta Cáceres’ nephew. The article was published by The San Francisco Bay Chapter, which is the local branch of the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club is grassroots, volunteer-driven environmental advocacy organization) 4 Oct 2017, “Are Bay Area reps helping Honduras get away with murder?” <https://www.sierraclub.org/san-francisco-bay/blog/2017/10/are-bay-area-reps-helping-honduras-get-away-murder> [brackets added]

On March 2, 2017, the first anniversary of Bertita’s murder, Georgia Representative Hank Johnson introduced H.R.1299 the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act. This legislation would deny the government of Honduras $18 million in security aid until human rights violations by Honduran security forces cease and their perpetrators are brought to justice — including Berta’s killers and the masterminds behind the plot. The legislation would also deny Honduran police and military further training, which they have been using to repress peaceful dissent and commit human rights abuses.

ADVOCACY

The AFL-CIO (The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations)

Anne Knipper 2016 (wrote for the AFL-CIO, The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations; voluntary federation of 55 national and international labor unions that represent 12.5 million working men and women) 8 July 2016 “AFL-CIO Supports Suspension of All U.S. Funding for Honduran Security Forces,” <https://aflcio.org/2016/7/8/afl-cio-supports-suspension-all-us-funding-honduran-security-forces>

The AFL-CIO supports the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, which would suspend all funding to Honduran security forces. These forces have engaged in well-documented cases of excessive use of deadly force, abuse of power and entrenched corruption. Just this week, another indigenous activist, Yaneth Urquia Urquia, was kidnapped and murdered. The AFL-CIO calls for a suspension of funding from the U.S. Congress and loans from multilateral development banks until abuses by security forces stop and those responsible are prosecuted. The United States has politically and financially supported years of failed programs to reform the national security institutions of Honduras. U.S. support should no longer go toward institutions that have long acted with impunity and exhibited an entrenched culture of corruption and violence. These security forces have been implicated in persistent violation of human rights against a broad range of Hondurans, including rural workers, journalists, LGBT activists, trade unionists, indigenous communities and those of African descent defending land rights.

Berta Cáceres’ family advocates the B.C. Act

teleSUR 2018 (Latin American multimedia platform) 2 Mar 2017, “1 Year After Berta Caceres' Murder, Activists Demand US Stop Funding Abusive Honduran State Forces,” <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Activists-Demand-US-Stop-Funding-Abusive-Honduran-State-Forces-20170301-0019.html>

Caceres’ family sent a letter Thursday to U.S. Representative Norma Torres to ask for her support for the Berta Caceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, which was reintroduced the same day to the House of Representatives after stalling without adequate support since last year.  
**END QUOTE. THE ARTICLE GOES ON TO SAY IN THE SAME CONTEXT, QUOTE:**Caceres’ family also highlighted in the letter the involvement of active and former members of the military — including suspects trained at the infamous U.S. School of the Americas — in her murder, underlining the urgent need for more rigorous conditions on security aid to Honduran state forces. A former member of the military police in Honduras revealed to the Guardian that her name had been at the top of a “hit list” that a U.S.-trained unit received. “A government that fails to protect its citizens and whose security forces are implicated in attacks and killings of activists should not be receiving security funding and training from the U.S. government,” the letter stressed, adding that Caceres' murder is only one example among scores of assassinations, attacks and other forms of intimidation targeting activists in the country.

The Berta Cáceres Act has endorsements by over a hundred faith, labor, environmental and human rights organizations

Witness for Peace 2017 (WFP is a politically independent, nationwide grassroots organization of people committed to nonviolence and led by faith and conscience. Their mission is to support peace, justice and sustainable economies in the Americas by changing U.S. policies and corporate practices that contribute to poverty and oppression in Latin America and the Caribbean) (**ethical** **disclosure**: the article is undated but contains references to events that took place in 2017), “The Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act,” <http://witnessforpeace.org/bertacaceresact/>

The Berta Cáceres Act is a landmark bill introduced by Rep. Hank Johnson (D-GA) and currently co-sponsored by 60 Members of the House of Representatives. The Berta Cáceres Act has found immediate and broad support including endorsements by the AFL-CIO, the Sierra Club, the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), and over a hundred other faith, labor, environmental, and human rights organizations. Berta’s family and organization COPINH immediately applauded the action and praised the leadership of these Members of Congress.

Past time to suspend Honduras aid and pass the Berta Caceras Act

Rep. John Conyers, Rep. Keith Ellison, Rep. Hank Johnson, Rep. Marcy Kaptur, Rep. Jan Schakowsky and Rep. Jose E Serrano 2016 (**Conyers**—US Representative for Michigan's 13th congressional district. **Ellison**—represents the fifth district of Minnesota. **Johnson**—US Representative for Georgia's fourth congressional district and a member of the House Armed Services and Judiciary Committees. **Kaptur**—US Representative for Ohio's 9th congressional district. **Schakowsky**—US representative for Illinois's 9th district. **Serrano**—US Representative for New York's 15th District) 8 July 2016, “America's funding of Honduran security forces puts blood on our hands,” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/08/american-funding-honduran-security-forces-blood-on-our-hands>

Enough is enough – it’s past time to suspend the aid and instruct the US Treasury department to vote no on all loans from multilateral development banks to security forces in Honduras. The Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act (HR 5474) would suspend those funds – and prohibit international loans providing for security assistance – from being dispersed unless Honduras makes serious inroads to addressing blatant human rights violations by police and military forces. Once justice is restored and impunity for human rights abuses ends, we’ll reconsider.

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