

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 15, 2016

Sr. Salvador Sánchez Cerén
President
Republic of El Salvador
Casa Presidencial
San Salvador, El Salvador, C.A.

Dear President Sánchez Cerén,

We respectfully write to urge you to establish a national commission to investigate and help resolve the cases of Salvadorans who disappeared during the period of the Salvadoran civil war.

As you well know, the 1993 U.N.-sponsored Truth Commission, which reported on human rights abuses during the 12-year civil war, more than 5,000 people were forcibly disappeared, most often by security forces or “heavily armed men in civilian dress.” Human rights and victims’ groups estimate the numbers might be as high as 10,000 disappeared. None of these cases has ever been fully investigated. Many family members have no knowledge about what happened to their spouses, parents, siblings or other relatives, and they have been unable to bury their dead or find closure to their grief and suffering.

Recently, a group of Salvadorans and Salvadoran-Americans whose family members were forcibly disappeared during the war came to Washington, DC to talk about their efforts to uncover the truth about what happened to their loved ones. They told moving and powerful stories about missing parents and loved ones.

It is our understanding that family members of the disappeared and victims’ groups are calling on the Government of El Salvador to launch a commission to investigate these cases and identify what happened to the disappeared. We support this call, and we encourage you to exercise your leadership and establish such a commission. An effective commission will require investigative capacity, forensic capacity, and access to Salvadoran military, intelligence other records in El Salvador. With your support, such a commission could do much to address the pain and uncertainty that the families of the disappeared continue to experience.

We strongly support the national commission created by the Salvadoran government to investigate and locate children who were forcibly and/or involuntarily separated from their natural parents and relatives during the civil war. That commission, although not perfect, is generally viewed as making an important contribution to reuniting families and healing wartime wounds. A similar commission on the disappeared could also make an important contribution to reconciliation and to healing for these long-suffering families and communities.

Today, as El Salvador seeks to strengthen its criminal justice system and consolidate the rule of law, it needs to address unresolved human rights cases, including forced disappearances. Creating a commission on the disappeared and opening investigations into unresolved cases will not only bring a measure of peace to the families of victims, it will also demonstrate the willingness of your Administration to overcome the legacy of impunity and its commitment to pursue abuses, wherever they might lead. These steps will help strengthen rule of law and reinforce equality before the law, principles that both the U.S. and the Salvadoran governments pledged as part of the Alliance for Prosperity.

Please know that we have asked President Obama to declassify all remaining U.S. records relevant to the search for El Salvador's disappeared and the circumstances surrounding forced disappearances during the civil war. We have also asked him to support the establishment of such a commission on the disappeared by the Salvadoran government.

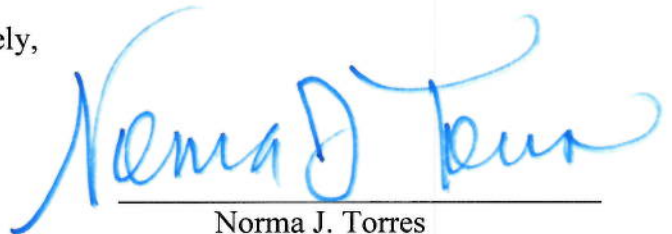
Mr. President, we believe establishing a commission to investigate and resolve cases of the disappeared would be an important and positive step in relieving the suffering of so many Salvadoran families and communities, and for Salvadoran society as a whole. We also believe that it would advance your own priorities to promote reconciliation, strengthen justice and rule of law, and consolidate peace in El Salvador.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you on this serious human rights issue.

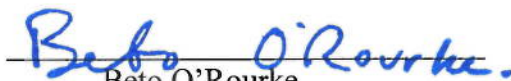
Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress




Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress




Beto O'Rourke
Member of Congress



Alan S. Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress

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Zoe Lofgren

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Barbara Lee

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Grace F. Napolitano

Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

Jared Polis

Jared Polis
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Maxine Waters

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

Sam Farr

Sam Farr
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio

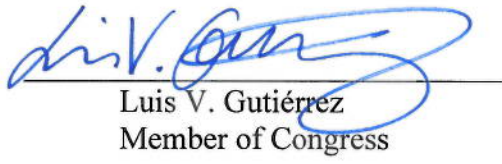
Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

Michael M. Honda

Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress

Donna F. Edwards

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Member of Congress


Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress
