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November 25, 2009

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear President Obama,

On November 29th, the de facto regime that rules Honduras is set to hold elections under highly questionable and troubling circumstances. The period leading up to these elections has been marred by violent repression, the suspension of basic civil liberties and frequent violations of freedom of speech. Meanwhile, Honduras' elected president remains in the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa, surrounded by forces loyal to the coup regime, while many members of his cabinet have been forced into exile.

While most of the governments of the Western Hemisphere, including Brazil and Argentina, have signaled that they will not recognize the outcome of elections held in such unfair and undemocratic conditions senior State Department officials have rejected this consensus and indicated that the U.S. administration is considering recognizing the results of the Nov. 29 electoral process.

I believe that this is a grave mistake and I strongly urge you to reconsider this position while there is still time.

It is worth briefly highlighting some of the alarming incidents that have occurred and continue to occur under the coup regime:

- Violent military and police repression that has led to thousands of arbitrary detentions, beatings, torture and a number of deaths of peaceful demonstrators. These incidents have been carefully documented by Honduran and international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the Inter American Commission for Human Rights and the Center for Justice and Law (CEJIL).
- Frequent attacks against press freedom, including the prolonged closure of television and radio media opposed to the coup, the frequent interruption of broadcasts, threats and attacks targeting journalists.

- The repeated suspension of basic freedoms of Honduran citizens such as freedom of assembly and movement, including a 22-day long period of formal suspension of these rights.
- Evidence of the Honduran armed forces transgressing their military functions and collecting the personal data of leaders of opposition to the coup.
- A growing number of candidates are withdrawing from the electoral race, including prominent presidential, congressional and mayoral candidates from the three largest of Honduras' political parties. To withdraw as a candidate takes some courage, since spokespeople of the coup regime have stated that those boycotting the electoral process will be "punished," such punishments including prison sentences.
- Finally, the coup regime has refused any negotiated settlement that would lead to the restoration of constitutional order. In the negotiation process that was supposed to reverse the coup and restore the constitutional order and elected president, the regime has consistently engaged in delay tactics with the apparent aim of seeking legitimacy through the holding of elections on November 29.

These and other incidents have contributed to a climate of fear, censorship and repression that preclude the possibility of conducting free and fair elections on November 29th.

Many observers have recognized this reality that the State Department seems to be avoiding.

Christopher Sabatini, former the Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the National Endowment for Democracy, was quoted in Time Magazine saying "You can't use an election to clean the slate after a coup. It just threatens to roll back democratic norms in Central America by decades."

Similarly, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka declared earlier this month in a letter to Secretary Clinton that "The current environment in Honduras, including an illegitimate government in power, makes free, fair and open elections impossible."

Our regional partners have clearly stated that, in order for there to be acceptable conditions in which to hold elections, democracy must first be restored. The 23-member Rio Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries, announced on November 6th that "the immediate restitution of President Jose Manuel Zelaya to the post he was elected to by the Honduran people constitutes an indispensable requirement for the reestablishment of constitutional order, the rule of law, and the democratic fabric of Honduras (...) and for it to be possible to recognize the outcome of the elections set to take place this November 29th."

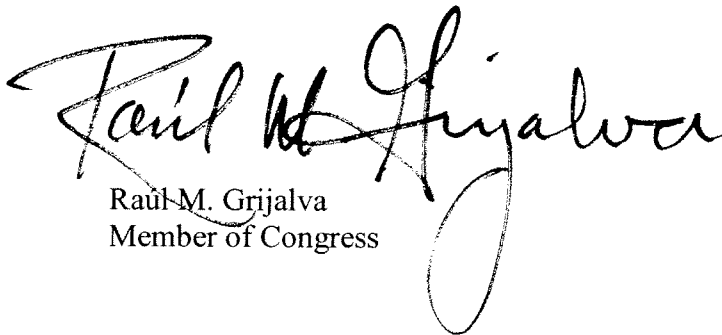
On November 18th the Presidents of Brazil and Argentina reiterated their opposition to the "elections" of November 29th by issuing a joint declaration stating that they will not recognize them.

The U.S. Administration, however, has adopted a position at odds with the values of democracy and freedom that our nation is founded upon and the position expressed by the rest of the hemisphere. Thus, while the 33-member Organization of American States, of which the U.S. is a member, has decided against sending a delegation to monitor these elections, the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute, which receive most of their funding from the State Department and the U.S. Congress, are planning on sending delegations to monitor the Nov. 29 elections.

Mr. President, on Nov. 19 you stated that "Our commitment to protect and support free speech, human rights, and democratic governance at home and around the world also cuts across the foreign policy/domestic policy divide." This rhetoric is fine and good, but it must be applied to Honduras and realized with action.

In just a few days, an electoral farce will unfold in Honduras, as the coup regime calls on citizens to vote in conditions that can in no way be considered free and fair. It is my sincere hope that you will instruct your Secretary of State to join the rest of the hemisphere in rejecting the legitimacy of these elections and continue working with our partners to restore constitutional rule in Honduras.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress