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July 1, 2009

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The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I would like to take this opportunity to raise growing concerns about the U.S. approach to human rights, democratic principles, rule of law, and constitutional institutions in the Western Hemisphere, focusing on your Administration's response to the constitutional crisis in Honduras and the U.S. role at the Organization of American States and the United Nations with respect to this situation.

I expected the Administration to adopt a deliberative, responsible approach to developments in Honduras. However, the U.S. stance from the onset appears to have been focused on supporting one individual, President Jose Manuel Zelaya Rosales, irrespective of the Honduran constitution, rule of law, and democratic institutions. This myopic, Zelaya-centric approach has intensified in the last 72 hours since reports surfaced that the Honduran military had taken Mr. Zelaya into custody and that Mr. Zelaya had departed Honduras.

There are numerous conflicting reports about the events that have transpired in Honduras in the last few days. Facts are in dispute. Yet, there has been no apparent attempt by the U.S to discern the truth about the status of democratic and constitutional order in this Central American country, before making summary conclusions and issuing condemnations based on incomplete information.

However, Mr. President, the constitutional crisis in Honduras did not commence on Sunday, June 28th but, at least, three months earlier, when Mr. Zelaya issued his Executive Decree on March 23rd of this year calling for a referendum to extend his presidential term to be held before July. Despite the clear limitations established in Article 5, Article 374, and other articles of the Honduran constitution concerning the presidential term and parameters for a referendum, the United States appeared to unconditionally embrace Mr. Zelaya's plans. The

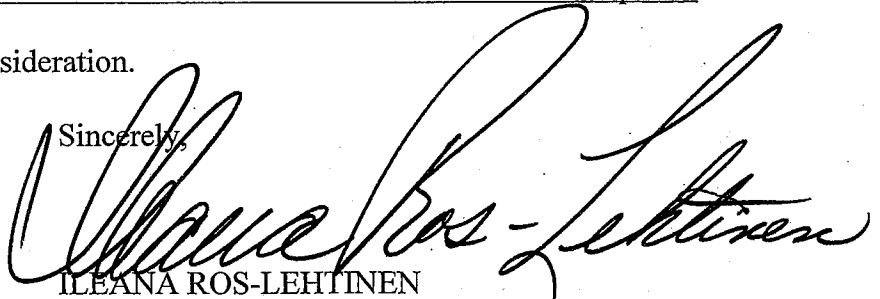
Honduran Supreme Court, the Administrative courts, the Attorney General, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Electoral Tribunal, and the National Congress all declared the referendum to be illegal. Additional legislative action was taken by the Honduran National Congress on June 23rd to prevent Mr. Zelaya's violations of Honduran rule of law and constitutional precepts. The U.S. failed to take effective steps, bilaterally or through the Organization of American States, to support these legitimate efforts by the other co-equal branches of Honduras' democratic government to enforce Honduran law. On Friday, June 26th, Mr. Zelaya issued another decree ordering government employees to participate in the "Public Opinion Poll to convene a National Constitutional Assembly," which would have reportedly triggered Article 239 of the Honduran constitution requiring he be relieved of his duties and office. The U.S. failed to respond. This marked a serious failure in U.S. diplomacy and democracy advocacy. As such, many would argue, that the U.S. is complicit in the escalation of the constitutional crisis in Honduras.

At the OAS and the UN General Assembly this week, the U.S. accepted resolution texts drafted by Mr. Zelaya and his immediate advisors and agreed to proposals put forth by the leaders of Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia—all for the sake of consensus. Joining the "race to the bottom" or serving as an echo chamber is not helpful to our political, economic, or security interests in the region.

Looking forward, it is my hope, Mr. President, that your Administration will not have the U.S. response hinge on unconfirmed reports and accusations by sources with a vested interest in ensuring a particular outcome that may, or may not, be in the interest of the United States. Instead, we must work together to advance core U.S. principles and achieve the stated goal of consolidating and strengthening the rule of law and democratic institutions in our Hemisphere.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ileana Ros-Lehtinen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large loops and flourishes.

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Ranking Member