

Dear Honorable:

President Barack Obama
President Enrique Peña Nieto
President Laura Chinchilla
President Otto Pérez Molina
President Porfirio Lobo
President Mauricio Funes
President Daniel Ortega
President Ricardo Martinelli
Attorney General & Minister of Foreign Affairs Wilfred Elrington

April 30, 2013

We, the undersigned civil society organizations from throughout the region, are writing to you on the eve of your meetings in Mexico and at the Summit of the Central American Integration System (SICA) in Costa Rica. We welcome the opportunity for our nations to discuss cooperation on critical cross-border issues and urge our States to address our concerns about the dire human rights crisis in Mesoamerica.

Our organizations have documented an alarming increase in violence and human rights violations. While we recognize that transnational crime and drug trafficking play a role in this violence, we call on our governments to acknowledge that failed security policies that have militarized citizen security have only exacerbated the problem, and are directly contributing to increased human suffering in the region.

It is time to refocus regional dialogue and resource investment to address the root causes of violence, understanding that for many citizens and communities, drug trafficking is not the principal cause of insecurity. Harmful “development” policies have similarly caused increased conflict and abuses, while forced migration and criminalization of migrants and human rights activists continues to divide families. Most importantly, the region’s challenges must be addressed without violating fundamental rights and human dignity.

We offer further analysis and recommendations of the key issues that require urgent attention:

1. Militarization of the drug war has caused increased violence and has failed to provide citizen security.

Human rights abuses against our families and communities are, in many cases, directly attributable to failed and counterproductive security policies that have militarized our societies in the name of the “war on drugs.” The deployment of our countries’ armed forces to combat organized crime and drug-trafficking, and the increasing militarization of police units, endanger already weak civilian institutions and leads to increased human rights violations.

- In Mexico, drug-related violence and the militarized response has killed an estimated 80,000 men, women, and children in the past six years. More than 26,000 have been disappeared, and countless numbers have been wounded and traumatized. With little civilian control over security forces, massive deployments across the country have contributed to increases in forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture and attacks on human rights defenders. Meanwhile, prohibited narcotics continue to flow into the U.S. market virtually unabated.
- In Guatemala, rates of violence are dangerously reaching levels only seen during the internal armed conflict, and rampant impunity for these crimes continues. As the nation only begins to address past atrocities committed by the armed forces against the civilian population, controversial “security” policies have placed the military back onto the streets. This has placed the peace process in jeopardy, and with it, the fragile democracy built on the 1996 Peace Accords. The Guatemalan army’s massacre of six indigenous protesters in October 2012 is tragic evidence of these misguided policies.

- Perhaps the starkest example of a breakdown of democratic institutions today is Honduras. Since the coup d'état that forced the elected president into exile in 2009, the rule of law has disintegrated while violence and impunity have soared. We are witnessing a resurgence of death squad tactics with targeted killings of land rights advocates, journalists, LGBT activists, lawyers, women's rights advocates and political activists. Both military and police are allegedly involved in abuses and killings but are almost never brought to justice.
- Even the host country, Costa Rica, which has no army and a constitutional mandate for peace, finds itself drawn into a mounting military effort to confront drug trafficking that compromises its independence and tranquility.
- The U.S. government's domestic and regional policies that promote militarization to address organized crime directly affect the human rights situation in Mesoamerica, resulting in a dramatic surge in violent crime, often reportedly perpetrated by security forces themselves. The narrow focus of these policies have proven ineffective in addressing other, often related human security issues, such as sex and labor trafficking and femicides, which have increased at an alarming rate throughout the region. Meanwhile, the lack of effective gun control in the U.S. has led to the massive and nearly unrestricted transfer of arms to criminal networks throughout the region.

2. The imposition of large-scale extractive projects on marginalized communities does not constitute “development.”

The violence we face today has its roots in the poverty, injustice and inequality of our societies. National and bilateral investment policies enshrined in Free Trade Agreements exacerbate these problems. Large-scale “development” projects are imposed on the region's most vulnerable populations with little or no regard for their lives or livelihoods. This results in forced displacement, especially of indigenous, peasant, and Afro-descendant communities; bloody conflicts over resources; environmental destruction and impoverishment. Governments and businesses routinely violate communities' right to consultation. Communities across the region that oppose large-scale transnational projects have suffered repression at the hands of government security forces, and we have documented systemic patterns of threats, criminalization, and attacks against land rights activists.

3. Violations of migrant rights continue while policies disregard the root causes of migration. The harmful consequences of U.S. regional security policies such as the “war on drugs” and the imposition of mega-development projects have displaced hundreds of thousands of people from their land and communities and limited local economic opportunity. Many are left with few options other than to migrate to the United States in search of safety and economic opportunity. Meanwhile, the United States has criminalized and detained immigrants in ever-greater numbers within its own borders. Any humane and sensible immigration reform must consider the impact of policies that force persons to migrate.

To meet these regional challenges, we must first and foremost make the protection of fundamental human rights – economic and social, civil and political – a focal point of this SICA gathering and future regional dialogues. We ask our governments to:

- a. Take executive action in the United States to stop the flow of assault weapons and other firearms across the U.S.-Mexico border.
- b. Recognize and protect human rights defenders, with specific attention to the contributions of women, indigenous and Afro descendant defenders, and acknowledgement of the risks they face.
- c. Propose a new model for security cooperation that provides alternatives to the ongoing war on drugs, such as regulation rather than prohibition, strong regional anti-money laundering efforts, and withdrawal of the armed forces from domestic law enforcement. We call on the U.S. government to

end military aid and instead channel scarce public resources into strengthening the institutionalization of the rule of law in our countries.

- d. Promote development through democratic dialogue, not repression, with respect for human and environmental rights, and with prior consultation of affected communities as mandated in ILO Convention 169.
- e. Address the root causes of migration and stop the criminalization and deportation of migrants; investigate and prosecute crimes against migrants as they travel through Mexico, as well as human rights violations at the border and within the United States.

We hope to see these concerns reflected in the final statement of the SICA conference and in ongoing bilateral conversations about security, investment, development, and immigration reform.

Organizations Signed:

International & US-Based

Alianza de Organizaciones Guatemaltecas de Houston (ADOGUAH)
Alliance for Global Justice
America's Program of the Center for International Policy
American Friends Service Committee
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
Bay Area Latin America Solidarity Coalition (BALASC)
CASA de Maryland
Chiapas Support Committee
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America (CRLN)
Comite Chirij' Juyub'
Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)
Dominican Sisters - Grand Rapids
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Friendship Office of the Americas
Global Fund for Women
Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC)
Impunity Watch
JASS (Just Associates)
Lakes Area Group Organizing Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (LAGOS)
Latin America Solidarity Committee-Milwaukee
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
Marin Task Force on the Americas (MITF)
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)
Nicaragua Center for Community Action (NICCA)
Other Worlds
Quixote Center
Red Por la Paz y Desarrollo de Guatemala (RPDG)
Rights Action
School of the Americas Watch
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Institute Justice Team
Sociedad Independiente Ix
St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America

Regional

Alianza de Mujeres Indígenas de Centroamérica y México
Alianza Feminista Centroamericana contra la cultura patriarcal
Articulación Feminista Mercosur A.F.M
Asociación HablaGuate
Campaña contra las Bases Militares Extranjeras en América Latina
Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CLADEM)
Confluencia Feminista Mesoamericana Las Petateras
Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres
Prophetic Voice Commission - Sisters of Mercy of Latin America and the Caribbean
Red Latinoamericana contra represas y por los ríos (REDLAR)
Urgent Action Fund of Latin America

Colombia

Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas (Colombia)
Observatorio Género Democracia y Derechos Humanos (Colombia)

Costa Rica

Agenda Política
Asociación Red de Mujeres Nicaragüenses en Costa Rica
Centro de Amigos para la Paz
Centro Feminista de Información Acción (CEFEMINA)
Colectiva Irreversibles
Colectivo Las Hijas de la Negrita
Comuna de la Luna Llena
Feministas en Resistencia
Juventud del Partido Acción Ciudadana
La Liga Internacional de Mujeres pro Paz y Libertada
Mujeres Mesoamericanas en Resistencia por una Vida Digna, Costa Rica

El Salvador

Asociación Cooperativa del Grupo Independiente Pro-Rehabilitación Integral (ACOGIPRI)
La Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local

Guatemala

Alianza Política Sector de Mujeres y Colectivo Artesana
Asociación de Trabajadoras del Hogar a Domicilio y de Maquila (ATRAHDOM)
Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de las Víctimas de la Violencia en las Verapaces, Maya Achì (ADIVIMA)
Asociación para el Estudio y Promoción de la Seguridad en Democracia (SEDEM)
Asociación Sororidad Activa
Centro de Análisis Forense y Ciencias Aplicadas (CAFCA)
Equipo de Estudios Comunitarios y Acción Psicosocial (ECAP)
Fundación Guillermo Toriello
Instituto de Estudios Comparados en Ciencias Penales (ICCPG)
Mundo sin guerras y sin violencia y más vida
Tierra Viva Guatemala
Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos - Guatemala (UDEFEQUA)
Unión Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas (UNAMG)

Honduras

Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM)

Centro de Estudios de la Mujer-Honduras (CEM-H)
Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH)
Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguan (COPA)
Insurrectas autónomas
Misericordia Tejedora de Sueños
Mosquitia Asla Takanka -Unidades de la Mosquitia
National Women Human Rights Defenders Network in Honduras
Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras (OFRANEH)
Organización Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz Visitación Padilla

Mexico

Alternativas Pacíficas (ALPAZ)
Aluna (Acompañamiento Psicosocial)
Atzin Desarrollo comunitario A.C.
Campaña ¡¡¡Si no están ellas... No estamos todas!!! Triqui
Centro De Apoyo Al Trabajador, A.C.
Grupo De Mujeres De San Cristóbal Las Casas, A. C
Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres de Chihuahua
Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan
Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez
Centro de Derechos Humanos Paso del Norte, A.C
Centro Diocesano para los Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios, A.C.
Centro para los Derechos de la Mujer Nääxwiin, A.C.
Centro Regional de Derechos Humanos "Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño" A. C.
CIMAC, Comunicación e Información de la Mujer, .A.C.
Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos, A.C.
Coalición Regional contra el Tráfico de Mujeres y Niñas en América Latina y el Caribe (Catwlac)
Colectivo Feminista de Xalapa, AC
Colectivo Obreras Insumisasto Tlaktole Calaki Mo Yolo A.C.
Colectivo Raíz De Aguascalientes
Comité Cerezo
Comité de Defensa Integral de Derechos Humanos Gobixha A.C.
Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos !Hasta Encontrarlos!
Comisión de Solidaridad y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, A. C.
Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad
Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y La Equidad Oaxaca A.C.
Defensoras Populares, A.C.
Fuerzas Unidas por Nuestros Desaparecidos en México
Grupo De Mujeres De San Cristóbal Las Casas, A. C
Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (H.I.J.O.S.)
Instituto Guerrerense de Derechos Humanos A.C
Instituto Mexicano para el Desarrollo Comunitario (IMDEC, A.C)
Kinal Antzentik Guerrero A.C.
Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center (Center Prodh)
Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano
Mujeres Barzonistas
Mujeres Indígenas por Ciarena
Mujeres por México en Chihuahua, A.C.
Mujeres Unidas: Olympia De Gouges, A.C.
Mujeres Mesoamericanas en Resistencia por una Vida Digna, México

Mujeres, Lucha y Derechos para Todas A.C
National Women Human Rights Defenders Network in Mexico
Organización del Pueblo indígena Me'phaa (OPIM)
ProDESC
Red Mesa de Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez
Red Todos los Derechos para Todos y Todas
Salud Integral para la Mujer, A.C.
Servicios Humanitarios en Salud sexual y Reproductiva, AC
Servicios Socioeducativos y Psicológicos de Oaxaca
Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz, A.C. (SERAPAZ)
Si Hay Mujeres en Durango, A.C.
Tamaulipas Diversidad Vihda Trans A.C
Yotlakat Non Siwatl A. C.

Nicaragua

Grupo Venancia
Instituto de Liderazgo de las Segovias
Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres
Red de la No Violencia contra las Mujeres
Red de Mujeres de Matagalpa

Panama

Coordinadora de organizaciones para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer (CODIM)
FUNDAGÉNERO
Mujeres Mesoamericanas en Resistencia por una Vida Digna, Panamá

Others

Acción Ecológica (Ecuador)
COOPERACCIÓN (Spain)
Cotidiano Mujer (Uruguay)