

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2008

Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520,

Dear Secretary of State Rice,

We write regarding the upcoming Legislative Assembly and Presidential elections that will take place in El Salvador on January 18th and March 15th, 2009, respectively. We admire the progress toward democracy that El Salvador has made since the 1992 Peace Accords were signed. We are proud of the important role the United States has played in working with the Salvadoran government and others to ensure that key aspects of those Accords were implemented and political participation was broadened. We believe the U.S. can help ensure that the 2009 elections are free and fair, and conducted under the best possible conditions.

According to reporting in the region, these elections will be hotly contested and polls suggest that the opposition FMLN party is highly competitive, which means that this election might lead to changes in long-established patterns of political control. In this context, it is important that concerns and perceptions about the possibility of electoral fraud, highly polarized campaigning and possible political-related violence be addressed.

We are pleased that the Salvadoran government has requested the assistance of an Organization of American States (OAS) electoral monitoring mission to help assure the transparency of the process. Further, we support the public comments made this past March by U.S. Ambassador Charles L. Glazer, when he said: "We will, of course, follow elections in El Salvador with great interest. There are too many political, economic and family connections between our two countries not to do so. What you won't see, however, is the U.S. taking sides in these elections. We will respect the Salvadoran people's sovereign right to choose their next leaders. But we do support several abiding principles that guide us at home and abroad. We support elections that are free, fair, transparent and peaceful."

In the spirit and context of Ambassador Glazer's remarks, we respectfully request the State Department to encourage and aid the Salvadoran government to:

- Establish well-defined mechanisms to re-assure the Salvadoran electorate and prevent fraud in the polling places on Election Day, including the participation of domestic and international observation of the electoral process during the run-up to the election(s), at the polls, and in the post-election vote count in order to ensure transparency and assure the Salvadoran citizenry of the fairness of the results.
- Urge the political parties to control deceptive or misleading advertising that aims to influence voters' decisions based on fear and misinformation, let alone the possible incitement of violence.

- Carry out a comprehensive investigation of acts of political violence in the current period, the weeks leading up to the election(s), on Election Day, and during the post-election transition period. It is critical that such cases be brought to justice in order to guarantee an atmosphere of democracy and safety that allows all parties, including the opposition, to participate in the political process without fears of reprisal.

As you know, given El Salvador's polarized history, it is important to ensure transparency in the electoral process, in order to head off voter concerns about dishonesty, fraud, or manipulation. Several concerns have already been raised that could undermine the perception of transparency. The formal start of the election period was moved up in what some analysts saw as an attempt to avoid re-districting in this election. The electoral registry appears to include at least 200,000 more names than the latest census indicates are eligible to vote, raising concerns about the trustworthiness of the registry. Several ballot security measures were eliminated by legislation approved by a divided national assembly, then re-instated by an administrative decision of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal after pressure from domestic and international actors. All these issues have heightened concerns about the election process, and underscore the need for both domestic and international observation that can help re-assure voters that the process is fair and impartial.

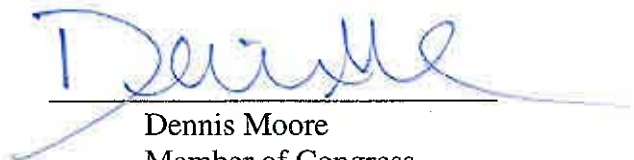
While political campaigning by definition highlights sharp differences in often harsh language, it is important for the U.S. to encourage all political parties in El Salvador to avoid the most polarizing discourse because of the very real potential for political violence. There have already been several killings over the past few months of local level opposition political activists. Without a thorough investigation, no one can determine the motivations for these murders. But in the current political climate, they are being interpreted as politically motivated. This perception is troubling and steps need to be taken to defuse tensions and thwart impunity by thorough and impartial investigations of these crimes.

Madame Secretary, the United States has always been a strong supporter of electoral democracy in El Salvador. We strongly urge you and the State Department to undertake the recommendations noted above in support of a free, fair and transparent electoral process in the Salvadoran 2009 elections. We look forward to receiving your response and working with you in the months leading up to these critical elections.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Dennis Moore
Member of Congress

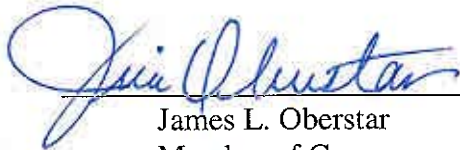


Donald M. Payne
Member of Congress

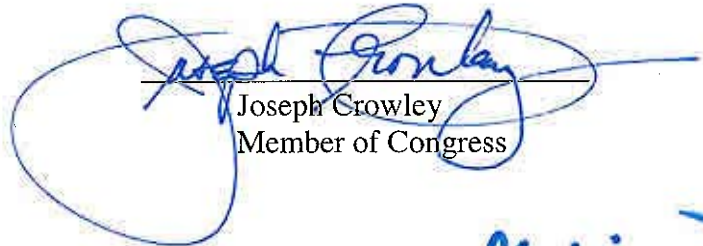


Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

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James L. Oberstar
Member of Congress



Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress



Jim McDermott
Member of Congress



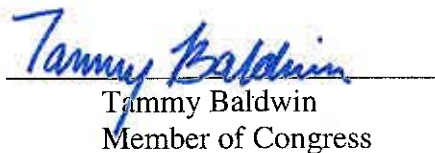
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress




Sam Farr
Member of Congress



Maurice D. Hinchey
Member of Congress



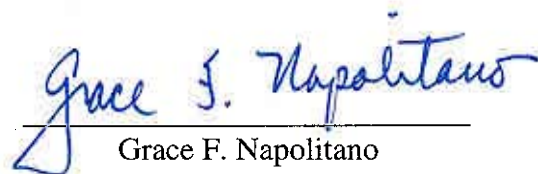
Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress



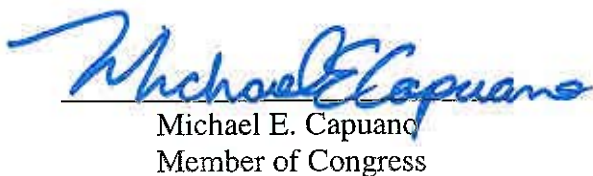
Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



Robert Wexler
Member of Congress



Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress



Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress



Barney Frank
Member of Congress

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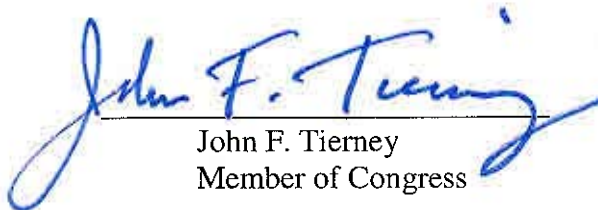
Hilda L. Solis
Member of Congress



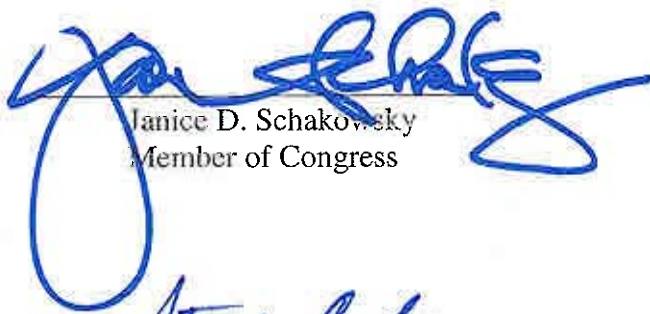
Bob Filner
Member of Congress



James P. Moran
Member of Congress



John F. Tierney
Member of Congress



Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson-Lee
Member of Congress



Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress



Christopher P. Carney
Member of Congress



Melissa L. Bean
Member of Congress



Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress

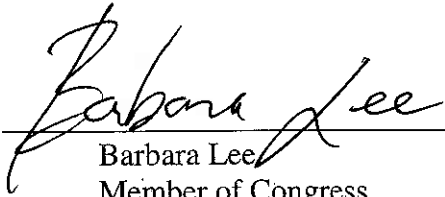
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Rush D. Holt
Member of Congress



Steven R. Rothman
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Betty Sutton
Member of Congress



Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress



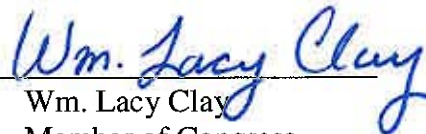
Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



Gabrielle Giffords
Member of Congress



Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress



Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress



Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

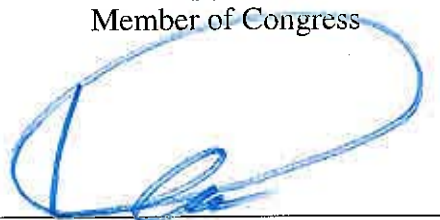
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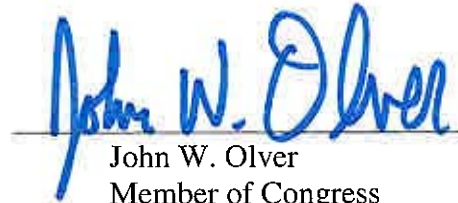
Lois Capps
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



David Wu
Member of Congress



John W. Olver
Member of Congress



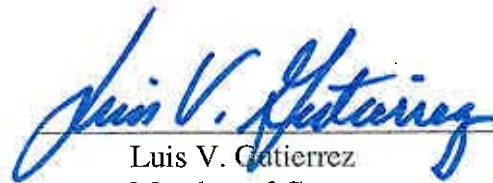
Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress



Doris O. Matsui
Member of Congress



Russ Carnahan
Member of Congress



Luis V. Gatiérrez
Member of Congress

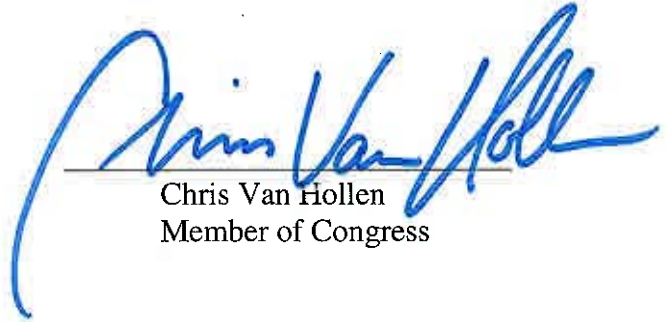
cc: Thomas A. Shannon, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs
David J. Kramer, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
Charles L. Glazer, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador

(see next page)

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Donna F. Edwards
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen
Member of Congress