

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 2, 2004

Lic. Attorney General Belisario Artiga  
c.c. Mauricio Ramos Falla, Director of the ISSS

Dear Attorney General Artiga:

We write with concern regarding the current situation of the STISSS healthcare workers' union. There appears to be a pattern of illegal firings, police repression and judicial harassment directed against STISSS due to their opposition to government policies.

Credible reports indicate that over 150 healthcare workers have been illegally fired since September of 2002, most of them STISSS activists, and that none of them have been given due process. The union has been outspoken in its support of the FMLN opposition party and in its opposition to the proposed Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the United States. The union believes that CAFTA would lead to the privatization of services, harm their members, and increase poverty in El Salvador.

On April 28, during a protest at the San Salvador Cathedral denouncing the illegal firings of healthcare workers, Ricardo Monge, the Secretary General of the STISSS union, and Javier Ayala, Secretary of Organization, were violently arrested. Riot police went on to attack the remaining participants with rubber bullets and tear gas, eventually injuring 23 people and arresting 34 more. While Monge and Ayala have been released, all of the charges against them have not been dropped.

The repressive police action against peaceful protests and apparent judicial harassment of union leaders for expressing opposition to government policies concern us greatly. It is also our understanding that the Salvadoran government is considering legislation that would make it easier to prosecute people for actions during street protests.

While we are respectful of your jurisdiction and prerogatives as elected officials of the Salvadoran Government, we feel compelled to speak in defense of the human rights of STISSS leaders and membership. The right to organize for collective representation and the right to free speech are recognized in international law and universally accepted by democratic governments. They certainly apply to Salvadoran workers and political organizers.

We feel that violent repression against peaceful protests and judicial persecution of those who exercise their free speech rights have no place in a democratic society. The police and the courts are not instruments to produce political consensus.

We respectfully urge you to affirm respect for free speech by dropping all charges against Monge and Ayala. We also urge Lic. Ramos Falla to affirm respect for the right to organize without fear of retaliation by stopping the illegal firings of union workers and rehiring all fired workers.

We will continue to monitor closely the situation of health care workers in El Salvador and whether the rights to organize and to speak freely will be respected. We sincerely hope for a timely remedy of this situation and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


  
Raúl M. Grijalva

  
Lane Evans

  
Hilda L. Solis

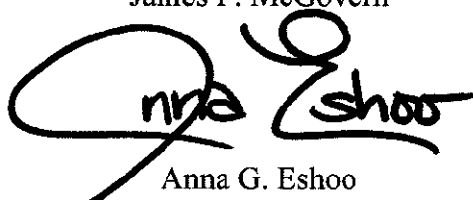
  
Michael H. Michaud

  
Dennis J. Kucinich

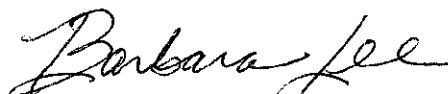
  
Dale E. Kildee

  
James P. McGovern

  
Sherrod Brown

  
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Barney Frank

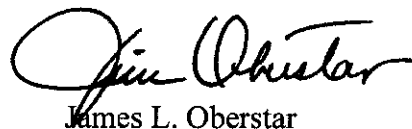
  
Barbara Lee

  
Jim McDermott

  
Tammy Baldwin

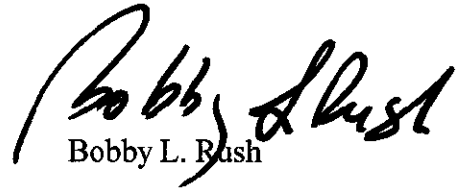
  
Timothy J. Ryan

  
Michael M. Honda

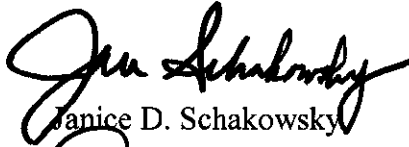
  
James L. Oberstar



Bernard Sanders



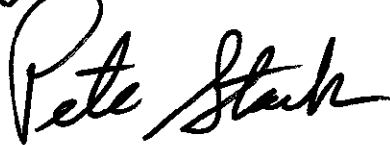
Bobby L. Rush



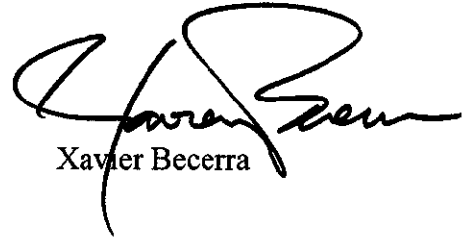
Janice D. Schakowsky



Rosa L. DeLauro



Fortney "Pete" Stark



Xavier Becerra