

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 22, 2008

President Elias Antonio Saca
Casa Presidencial
San Salvador, El Salvador

Dear President Saca:

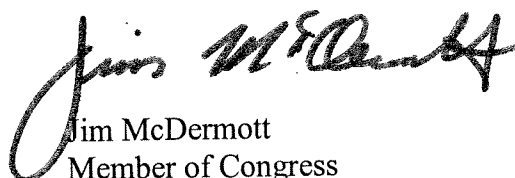
I write to express concern about democratic rights and civil liberties in El Salvador. I am particularly alarmed by the apparent repression carried out by the National Civilian Police against non-violent protestors in Suchitoto on July 2, 2007, and the subsequent application of the Special Law Against Acts of Terrorism against 13 of those arrested. Although I am pleased to learn that the 13 arrested are released, it is disheartening to learn they were jailed for so long. Peaceful assembly and political dissent should never be equated with terrorism.

Though the accused individuals were arrested as a result of their participation in a protest against the privatization of water, they were charged as terrorists under a provision of the new anti-terrorism law, which relates to intent to cause harm to senior public officials. I am concerned that application of terrorism laws in this manner will severely erode Salvadoran citizens' right to peaceably assemble and voice their opinions in their effort toward impacting positive change.

My concern is heightened by the fact that the United States' State Department is training members of the civilian police at the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in El Salvador. I am growing more uncomfortable with my government's endorsement and training of a police force that is complicit in the silencing of dissent.

I ask that you work to promote respect for civil liberties and defense of basic human rights.

Sincerely,



Jim McDermott
Member of Congress