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HONDURAS MUST END
CORRUPTION AND IMPUNITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. MCGOVERN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGOVERN. Mr. Speaker, in September I visited Honduras as part of a delegation organized by the Washington Office on Latin America. Last month I spoke about the violence and extreme poverty that force families and young people to flee the country. Today I want to focus on another urgent issue, namely, how to confront the pervasive corruption in Honduras.

We heard about the problem of corruption everywhere, from the U.N., the President of Honduras, and the U.S. Ambassador, to community leaders and NGOs with expertise in justice and human rights. Everyone wanted to talk about the seemingly intractable problem of endemic corruption in Honduras.

The roots of corruption in Honduras are deep and longstanding. They encompass state actors, criminal networks, and powerful political and economic interests. But after a scandal revealed that government officials had stolen more than \$350 million from the country's Social Security fund, which provides public health services as well as old age pensions, and that some of the money had gone to the electoral campaign of the President's political party, there has been a huge public outcry, demanding action to end widespread corruption.

Tens of thousands of Hondurans have marched in the streets over the past months, calling for an international independent commission to investigate corruption and impunity, based on the model of the CICIG in Guatemala, but tailored to Honduran reality. This unprecedented movement is led by young people, organized on social media, and called the Indignados.

Our delegation met with some of these young leaders. They are thoughtful, politically diverse, and united in their desire to see their country rid of corruption. They now face threats for what they are doing, and I hope that the Honduran Government is doing all it can to ensure their safety and their freedom of association and not turning a blind eye to the threats targeting them and their families.

When we met with President Hernandez, he argued that he had taken significant steps to go after corruption. I take the President seriously, and I look forward to seeing concrete results from the actions he has already announced. I also met with NGOs, including the Association of Judges for Democracy, that work on judicial, legal, and transparency issues, who unanimously felt much more must be done.

At the height of the protest movement, President Hernandez called for a national dialogue on how to address the problem of corruption, asking the

United Nations and the Organization of American States to help facilitate the process and develop a consensus of what needed to be done.

So I was disappointed to learn that the dialogue process was not as inclusive as it could have been. The U.N. was sidelined, while the OAS carried out a quick series of discussions before developing a proposal for the President. Many were concerned not only that the OAS hadn't consulted widely enough, but that its actions fell short of the thoughtful and impartial mediation needed to generate confidence in any forthcoming proposal.

On September 28, the OAS presented its proposal to President Hernandez. After studying this proposal, I have concluded that it is woefully inadequate to addressing corruption and impunity, and reforming the weak judicial institutions of Honduras. This is not just my opinion.

Last week, on October 28, a broad coalition of Honduran civil society, the Coalition Against Impunity, issued a statement declaring that the mission proposed by the OAS and the government is, itself, an obstacle to creating a genuine independent commission that can truly tackle the rampant corruption and impunity in Honduras.

Earlier, on October 4, the Indignados issued a similar critique, pointing out the weaknesses of the OAS proposal to independently investigate crimes of corruption and ensure their prosecution.

It is clear from my discussions in Honduras and recent statements by Honduran civil society that any such commission must be wholly independent from the government politically and financially, that it must have the mandate and staffing to carry out investigations of crimes of corruption and impunity and the freedom to pursue those investigations wherever the evidence warrants. It must also have the mandate and ability to work independently with state prosecutors and investigators to bring such crimes to justice.

Honduras does not need one more round of judicial studies and technical assistance or a board of international mentors, as proposed by the OAS. Such a limited proposal not only lacks the broad support and confidence of Honduran civil society, but it also falls far short of what is required to break the culture of impunity in Honduras.

I hope the OAS proposal can be modified and strengthened and its mandate expanded to establish an effective and truly independent mechanism that can fully investigate corruption and have a role in prosecutions or an alternative advanced that can meet these requirements. I hope that a new proposal includes close cooperation with the U.N.

I further believe that U.S. and international aid needs to be carefully calibrated to link assistance to progress on human rights and ending corruption, including a truly independent commission with the full power of investiga-

tion into corruption and impunity and the ability to be part of the prosecution of those charged with such crimes.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from West Virginia (Mr. MOONEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MOONEY of West Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share a growing concern in our country, which is that one of our founding principles, our freedom of religion, is being taken away.

I have here a beautiful picture of the Constitutional Convention, the signing of the Constitution at Independence Hall in Philadelphia on September 17, 1787. The very First Amendment to that Constitution, the very first one, our Founding Fathers solidified our citizens' right to freedom of religion.

The amendment says: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

Despite this freedom being explicitly laid out in our Constitution, we have seen Federal, State, and local governments continue to violate our founding principles.

One of the most notorious violations of religious liberty was recently re-highlighted by His Eminence Pope Francis. The Little Sisters of the Poor have been fighting an ongoing battle against ObamaCare's contraception mandate. These Catholic nuns are forced under ObamaCare to provide contraception to their employees, even though their faith tells them that this is morally wrong.

It is outrageous and offensive to force these nuns to violate their religious liberties to comply with the will of the President and his allies. These are Catholic nuns trying to take care of poor people, and the government is getting in their way and imposing on their religious values.

Another example is Kelvin Cochran, a resident of the city of Atlanta. Chief Cochran was appointed by President Obama in 2009 as the U.S. Fire Administrator for the United States Fire Administration before returning to become the fire chief of Atlanta. He came under attack for his Christian beliefs.

Chief Cochran is also a deacon at Elizabeth Baptist Church, where he leads a men's Bible study. His faith inspired him to write the book called "Who Told You That You Were Naked?", a book that explains and examines the state of man since the fall of Adam.

In his book, Chief Cochran briefly discusses the clear biblical teaching that sex is reserved for marriage between a man and a woman. Kelvin had 30 years of distinguished service, including under the Obama administration, when he was fired for sharing his faith.