



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Human Rights and Corruption in Honduras

Wednesday, December 11, 2019
2:00 – 4:00 PM
2255 Rayburn House Office Building

Excerpts of Remarks by Rep. Christopher H. Smith

I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us at today's hearing.

The Republic of Honduras is a country with a long history, securing independence from Spain in 1821, becoming an independent Republic in 1838, and having the status of a founding member of the United Nations in 1945.

Yet it is also a country plagued by political corruption.

Today's hearing will address in particular the issue of corruption, and specifically the role played by MACCIH – the acronym in Spanish for

the Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras.

Honduras is an ally we want to see succeed, and there is a bipartisan interest in helping combat corruption in not only Honduras, but in countries around the world, so as to allow the citizens of these countries to flourish in freedom.

Part of how the United States does this is via a sanctions regime which targets corruption – just yesterday, for example, Secretary Pompeo formally designated two former Paraguayan officials for their involvement in significant corruption, and the Global Magnitsky Act, which both Chairman McGovern and I introduced in the House two Congresses ago, provides a mechanism for sanctioning corrupt government officials.

It is important, however, that corruption is targeted in an even-handed manner, that we are not seen as choosing targets based on political affiliation with either the left or the right. If today we are focusing on Honduras, and the actions of members of the administration of Juan Orlando Hernandez – including up to the highest levels – then tomorrow we might be focusing on Nicaragua, and the wide-ranging abuses of the Ortega regime.

Where international organizations are involved – such as the OAS, which entered into an agreement with President Hernandez for the establishment of MACCIH – it is especially important that sovereignty be respected, meaning both national sovereignty as well as the sovereignty of the people.

It is also important, for the maintaining of bipartisan support for global anti-corruption efforts, that corruption be pursued in a just and even-handed manner, targeting corruption of the political left as well as the political right, and letting the facts lead where they may.

MACCIH thus far has managed to avoid some of the perceived biases which have plagued certain other anti-corruption commissions, and thus has maintained support. I would like to hear from our witnesses if they share this perception, and if so, what lessons has MACCIH learned and applied in that regard. Is MACCIH perceived, for example, as less of an intrusive outside organization, but one which lends support to indigenous efforts and institutions? Does it help prosecutors build cases, and thus help Honduras build institutional capacity? Are there checks on its powers, and is it accountable?

These are all important questions to answer as the issue of renewal of MACCIH's mandate comes up. I look forward to your testimony. Thank you.