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An Open Letter to the U.S. Congress:
Increasing Aid to Honduras is
Prudent and Opportune, if Properly
Focused and Accountable
A Honduran Civil Society Perspective



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Honduras is at a pivotal moment as a country — a moment where transparency and justice are gaining ground against entrenched poverty, violence, and corruption. At the same time, much work remains to be done. The authors of this paper, three leading organizations from Honduran civil society, have a solid record of effective advocacy for change. We can attest to a growing momentum in the effort to reform the Honduran government and the country's systems of injustice and lack of opportunity. Yet, the challenge remains substantial, and success is by no means certain. The U.S. government is considering tripling aid to Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. We heartily support that proposal and stand ready to help improve it.

Regarding the proposed plan to increase aid to Honduras, we believe it is **prudent** and **opportune**, as long as the **proper focus** and **accountability measures** are put in place.

Prudent: Honduras was the home country of the highest number of unaccompanied children (UACs) who traveled to the U.S. border in FY 2014, resulting in significant stress for U.S. Border Patrol and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The violence and need spurring this migration are well documented (Honduras had the highest homicide rate in the world from 2010-2012, with El Salvador and Guatemala also in the top five). **The use of U.S. aid as a preventative measure to combat these “push factors” is a prudent investment to deter future costs to the U.S.** Violence, criminal impunity, and corruption — compounded with poverty and lack of opportunity — expose the U.S. to drug trafficking and instability. As evidenced by the 2014 immigration surge, the violence and need in Honduras can lead to direct costs to the U.S.; it's prudent to invest now to prevent higher costs down the road.

Opportune: Honduras is at an historic moment. President Juan Orlando Hernández and other Honduran officials have demonstrated political will to seriously combat violence and corruption. Measures to curb homicides and drug trafficking are gaining traction; the homicide rate has dropped by 17.5 points (20 percent) in two years and, for the first time, the government is extraditing drug traffickers to the U.S. to face charges, with seven extraditions so far. Additionally, at the request of the Honduran government, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights will establish an office in Honduras to monitor reports of human rights violations and compliance by the government in respecting human rights. Examples of momentum in the fight against corruption include: (1) an innovative anti-corruption agreement between the Honduran government, Transparency International, and the Association for a More Just Society (one of the authors of this paper) and (2) accelerated efforts to investigate, prosecute, and arrest corrupt individuals — including members of the president's own National Party. President Hernández is seeking a public image as a corruption fighter and pursues opportunities to burnish that image. But, while the situation of violence and corruption are improving, the future is by no means secure and Honduran civil society organizations understand that improvement can only occur through unrelenting pressure coupled with constant monitoring. This is an opportune time to press the president to further address corruption and to build proper transparency and accountability into the proposed aid plan.

Properly Focused: The pending proposal must address the systemic and institutional problems that confront Hondurans — problems that contribute to immigration and drug-trafficking issues for the U.S. For example, the aid should be used to reform the police and justice systems, invest in public education, health care, violence prevention for youth, and economic development (particularly job creation). This approach is crucial for the U.S. as it seeks to reduce costs of immigration and stabilize its nearby neighbor Honduras.

The factors contributing to violence, corruption, and poverty in Honduras are not particularly easy to address, but the good news is that many Honduran civil society organizations are committed to the task. We invite the U.S. Congress to help us shore up this progress with properly focused funding, drawing from the knowledge of experienced Hondurans. The unfortunate reality is that past foreign aid to Honduras hasn't always focused on root issues, and its effectiveness has often

been less than impressive. Focusing on root issues also means recognizing that while drug trafficking exacerbates Honduras' problems, it should not be seen as the root of them.

The U.S. will benefit by collaborating with civil society in the design and implementation of aid to Honduras. In addition, civil society organizations have local knowledge and years of experience on certain issues that make them particularly suitable for implementing projects funded by the proposed aid.

Accountability: Accountability and cooperation with Honduran civil society are crucial for success. To assure the most effective use of aid dollars, the authors of this paper are convinced that the U.S. government must work with Honduran civil society to:

- 1) Establish mutually agreed upon benchmarks and indicators of progress; both the U.S. government and Honduran civil society agents who have experience pursuing effective change in their country should recommend reasonable and specific goals suited to the particular challenges in the country.
- 2) Enlist civil society as independent and invested monitors in the use of the funding; civil society organizations have a stake in Honduran progress and the independence to do reporting.
- 3) Incorporate transparency in the distribution of aid; transparency will ensure funds are spent efficiently.
- 4) Enlist civil society in the implementation of some projects; civil society organizations have knowledge and experience that make them a more appropriate choice than the Honduran government for some projects (e.g. violence prevention with youth)

Money won't lead to real results unless it is properly applied. By coordinating with Honduran civil society, proper strategy and accountability measures can be established to protect the aid from misuse and fortify its impact.

Whether the aid is being administered by the Honduran government, private sector, or civil society, it is crucial that proper accountability measures be incorporated and that recipients be held responsible by independent third parties. This will help ensure that the aid is not only properly targeted, but that the programs it supports are properly executed as well. A lack of accountability will severely undermine U.S. aid to Honduras.

Specifically, when it comes to aid provided to the Honduran government, we stand ready to partner with the U.S. to assure an efficient use of its investment. The authors of this paper are well recognized for our efforts to both expose government misconduct and work with officials to address it. As civil society, we demand and work toward an open, honest, and effective government for our country, and we believe we share that goal with the U.S. Congress.

In summary, recent strides toward justice and transparency in our country give us hope. However, the systems and conditions that lead to violence, corruption, and poverty in Honduras have grown firm roots. Civil society's work to uproot these systems and conditions has yielded exciting results, but these gains are still fragile. The stakes are high when it comes to success in these efforts. For this reason, we — as members of Honduran civil society — ask that U.S. lawmakers understand the importance of seizing this moment. Not only does it stand to yield fruitful results, but it is a symbolic gesture to Honduras that the U.S. recognizes the strides that civil society is making to reform the country and that the U.S. will stand with the brave citizens of Honduras in their pursuit of this goal.

See the sidebars on pages 10 and 11 of this paper for:

- [Examples of the types of indicators that could be considered](#)
- [Measures the Honduran government could take to demonstrate a commitment to reform before the funding is approved](#)

The authors of this paper are leading coalitions of Honduran civil society organizations with extensive experience in fighting violence, corruption, and poverty in Honduras. More about each organization can be found at the end of this document.

THE PROPOSED INCREASED AID INVESTMENT IN HONDURAS — CONTEXT AND CONSIDERATIONS

THE PROPOSAL

On January 29, 2015, U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden, Jr., announced that the administration is seeking a billion dollars in assistance to Central America, particularly the Northern Triangle countries (Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador), as part of the 2016 budget appropriation. That request would triple foreign aid budget assistance compared to 2014. The proposed aid comes in the wake of last year's large influx (51,705) of unaccompanied children (UACs) that migrated from the Northern Triangle to the U.S. In an op-ed for *The New York Times*, Mr. Biden noted that six million young Central Americans are to enter the labor force in the next decade and that "if opportunity isn't there for them, the entire Western Hemisphere will feel the consequences."ⁱ In Vice President Biden's words, the U.S. was reminded last summer, "when thousands of unaccompanied children showed up on our southwestern border," that "the security and prosperity of Central America are inextricably linked with our own."ⁱⁱ

THE PROPOSED INCREASE IN SPENDING FOR HONDURAS IS PRUDENT

Honduras is particularly afflicted by the challenges Mr. Biden cited in his op-ed — afflictions that force many of Honduras' most vulnerable citizens (including children) to risk their lives on the dangerous journey north. More UACs came from Honduras than any other country last summer. Thirty-five percent of the children from the Northern Triangle were from Honduras (18,244 Honduran children).ⁱⁱⁱ There are a variety of factors that lead to increased immigration from Honduras, but among the leading "push factors" are **violence, corruption, and poverty**. By taking action against these root problems, the U.S. can most effectively and efficiently address concerns about immigration and security for the long term.

Migration from Honduras must first be considered in the context of the country's high levels of violence. From 2010-2012, Honduras had the highest murder rate in the world, topping at 86.5 per 100,000 in 2011 (compared to Mexico's 21.5 and the U.S.'s 4.7).^{iv} The direct cost of violence on Honduras was calculated to be 19.2 percent of its 2013 GDP.^v A lack of opportunity and resources lead to desperation and local crime, exacerbated by Honduras' unfortunate position as a major transit hub for drug trafficking to the U.S.

Corruption further contributes to instability and violence in Honduras, which ranks poorly (126 out of 175 countries) on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.^{vi} Drug cartels thrive in an environment where authorities and institutions are weak and unable to combat trafficking operations. The U.S. estimated in 2013 that 87 percent of all South American cocaine smuggling flights bound for the U.S. first landed in Honduras.^{vii} Poorly funded and/or corrupt police, investigators, and courts have dismal records for successfully prosecuting serious criminal offenders, including murderers. An Alliance for Peace and Justice (APJ) investigation concluded that, nationwide, only four percent of homicides resulted in convictions, with even worse results (1 percent) in the three major cities.^{viii}

Poverty, poor education, unemployment, and inadequate health conditions give young people little hope to counter the fear they have for personal safety. Two-thirds of Hondurans live in poverty, with two-fifths living in extreme poverty.^{ix} About a quarter of Hondurans drop out of school after elementary school, and only 25 percent

finish high school.^x ^{xi} These conditions are not recent developments, but they do contribute to the current environment of violence and corruption.

As Mr. Biden noted in his op-ed, “The cost of investing now in a secure and prosperous Central America is modest compared with the costs of letting violence and poverty fester.”^{xii} By reducing the push factors that cause children to leave their homes in Honduras, the U.S. will not only be improving Honduran lives; it will also be making a prudent financial investment decision for U.S. taxpayers.

THE PROPOSED INCREASE IN SPENDING FOR HONDURAS IS OPPORTUNE

Understandably, some have reacted to the proposed spending increase with caution, concerned that, as in the past, the funding would not be used effectively. At a budget hearing on February 24, 2015, Sen. Patrick J. Leahy, (D-Vt.), ranking member of the Senate Appropriations foreign operations subcommittee and usually an advocate for Central America, noted that “we’ve spent billions of dollars there over two decades and we’ve seen conditions get worse.”^{xiii}

So why increase U.S. aid now? Recent positive developments in fighting violence and corruption in Honduras demonstrate convincingly that progress is being made. And there is evidence that the Honduran president and other government leaders are willing to actively support that momentum.

When Mr. Biden announced the FY 2016 aid proposal, he recalled meetings he and President Obama had with regional leaders last year where they stressed that financial support would only work if Central America “took ownership of the problem.”^{xiv} Mr. Biden then listed an anti-corruption agreement between Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, Transparency International, and the Association for a More Just Society (AJS) as an example of such ownership. President Hernández’s desire to project a public image as a corruption fighter provides an opportune moment. Now is the time to invest in programs against corruption and to establish foreign aid designed to ensure transparency and efficiency.

Below we’ve outlined some examples of positive momentum against violence and corruption in Honduras. However, recent gains don’t guarantee future victory. If the U.S. would like to capitalize on an opportune moment to help Honduras break free of the grip of violence, corruption, and poverty, it should work with Honduran civil society to advance the progress taking place. If the U.S. fails to capitalize on this opportune moment, the momentum may fade, and the window of opportunity will close. Alternatively, if the U.S. does increase aid for FY 2016, it will be wisely making the most of an opportunity to advance progress in Honduras.

Here are significant examples of recent steps in the right direction, some of which have involved cooperation between the Honduran government and the authors of this paper:

COMBATING VIOLENCE AND DRUG TRAFFICKING:

- 7 extraditions and 2 more major arrests of organized crime leaders in Honduras:
 - Starting in 2014, Honduras extradited drug traffickers to the U.S. for the first time. Seven extraditions have occurred so far, including three leaders of the powerful Valles drug trafficking group, which also had more than 70 properties seized by the Honduran government.^{xv}
 - The arrests of Javier Eriberto Rivera Maradiaga (aka “Javier Cachiro”) and Jose Miguel “Chepe” Handal Perez — both powerful, alleged drug traffickers — are particularly significant given the high-level connections both men have in Honduras’ business and political circles.^{xvi} Handal Perez even ran for congress on the

ticket of one of Honduras' major political parties in 2013, despite being indicted by a Florida court for drug trafficking two years earlier.^{xvii}

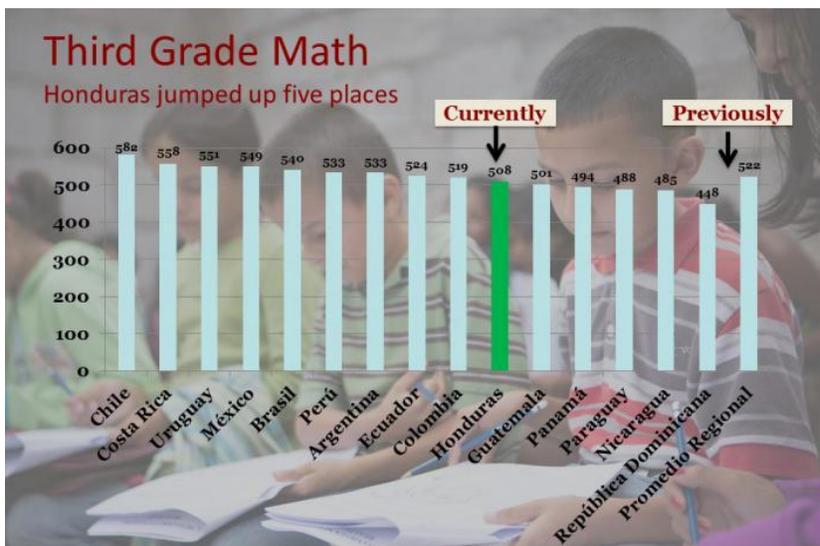
- Honduras' homicide rate has dropped by more than 20 percent (17.5 points) in just two years.^{xviii} While Honduras' homicide rate is still far too high, we believe that the situation can improve and are working diligently toward that goal. For example, we have seen encouraging drops in homicides in a number of the highly violent neighborhoods where AJS operates innovative anti-impunity programs. One community that was averaging 3.5 homicides per month has gone seven months with only one homicide, a truly remarkable improvement.

COMBATING CORRUPTION AND IMPUNITY

- An historic and unprecedented **agreement between the Honduran government, AJS, and Transparency International** requires broadscale data disclosure by the government. This sets the table for unprecedented transparency in areas vulnerable to corruption: in purchasing and hiring related to government programs in education, health, the national police, infrastructure projects, and fiscal management. While the agreement is still in its early stages of implementation, it has been welcomed and encouraged by several heads of key government agencies who express an interest in seeing true reform.
- The **arrests and prosecutions of prominent officials** mark positive movement in Honduran politics. Before 2013, no government official at the level of minister had ever been tried for corruption. Currently, one ex-minister (Mario Zelaya Rojas) and two vice ministers as well as a number of mayors are on trial on corruption charges.
 - The case of Mario Zelaya Rojas, the ex-director of the social security institute, is particularly noteworthy. Zelaya was arrested for abusing his position by stealing millions of public dollars. The previous vice ministers of labor and health have also been arrested in related cases.
 - Separate cases involve the mayor of the city of Yoro, Arnaldo Urbina Soto, and the mayor of the city of Choloma, Leopoldo Crivelli. Soto was arrested for money laundering and illegal arms possession. Crivelli is being investigated for abuse of authority and illicit enrichment.
 - Zelaya, the two ex-vice ministers, and Urbina Soto are all members of the Honduran president's National Party. Their investigations and arrests are an encouraging signal that corrupt officials may no longer count on refuge behind party lines.

- **Education reforms:**

- Continuing reforms in education have had remarkable results. Honduran children used to attend school on average 125 days each year, far below the statutorily required 200 days; in both 2013 and 2014, students received more than 200 days of class for the second year in a row.^{xix} At the same time, the number of absent teachers (who were still collecting paychecks)



dropped from 26 percent to less than 1 percent. These reforms significantly impact education quality — for example, math proficiency test scores rose dramatically, from 37 percent to 57 percent, in just three years. These improvements have helped Honduras jump ahead five places in third-grade math scores for Latin American countries, according to a study from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) released in December 2014.^{xx*}

- **Health reforms:**
 - The Honduran government spends about \$40 million annually on medications for Honduran citizens; about a third was being lost to corruption and waste, as exposed after a series of investigations by Transformemos Honduras (TH), another of this paper’s authors.^{xxi} TH worked with the Honduran government to reform the health system and prosecute 13 officials, including a former Minister of Health. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has been hired to coordinate purchasing, resulting in greatly reducing the money lost to corruption.*
- **Property titling reforms:**
 - AJS and the Honduran government have been working together to root out corruption among government officials entrusted with the important task of real property titling. A week after the discovery of money laundering operations in a regional titling office, the government’s Property Institute and AJS signed a reform commitment. Three Property Institute employees are in jail after the government found 466 criminal acts of corruption.
- **Opening of new office for United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**
 - The new office will open in Honduras’ capital in 2015, after being requested by the Honduran president during a visit from U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in January 2015.^{xxii} The office will be one of only five of its kind in the Americas (the second in Central America).^{xxiii} The office will monitor reports of human rights violations and compliance by the Honduran government in respecting human rights. It will work closely with the Honduran government’s National Commissioner for Human Rights and civil society.^{xxiv}

The above examples demonstrate that Honduras is realizing momentum in the right direction in a number of areas, and this is a highly opportune moment to:

- **Invest U.S. taxpayer dollars efficiently.** Taking proactive measures in Honduras can save the U.S. money by preventing situations like last year’s crisis of unaccompanied child emigration, and a properly targeted and structured aid increase may provide greater returns from U.S. aid invested in past years.
- **Keep up momentum in combatting corruption and violence.** The momentum in these areas is fragile, and the aid plan could provide important support for making continued progress.
- **Use strategic benchmarks.** Establishing strategic benchmarks for reducing corruption and violence is an important step; it allows for the Honduran government and civil society to create and maintain a proper focus, take appropriate actions, and measure results.

* The advances in education and health were initiated by investigations by AJS and Transformemos Honduras. In both cases, the two organizations documented and published multiple instances of corruption and misconduct by government officials and then helped the government work on solutions to the problems.

THE PROPOSED INCREASED SPENDING MUST BE PROPERLY FOCUSED

The focus of the funding must be properly placed. An analysis by the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) concluded that the initial proposal is geared toward “strengthening public security institutions” like police and courts, as well as addressing “the root causes underlying the violence and lack of opportunity driving migration.”^{xxv} This is in contrast to past major U.S. aid packages for Latin America, “which directed the vast majority of assistance to military and police forces, and prioritized drug interdiction.”^{xxvi} According to WOLA’s analysis, at least 80 percent of the proposed aid is for civilian institutions, civil society, and economic development.^{xxvii}

It is commendable that the proposed aid is looking to address the root causes rather than merely responding to their consequences. Violence and corruption are the threads that weave together so many of the daily challenges that Hondurans face, and by structuring the aid plan to address these key issues, the U.S. government will have the best opportunity for lasting results. This is why AJS has spent more than a decade targeting these areas — with APJ and TH joining the work through their formation in more recent years. Through these years of work, we have gained experience, knowledge, and new ideas about how to more effectively combat corruption and violence in Honduras. We recognize the importance of working in partnership with others; we have formed alliances with other NGOs and worked together with both the U.S. and Honduran governments to achieve results.

Critical to any success in addressing Honduras’ systemic challenges will be the U.S. working in cooperation with civil society groups as well as with the Honduran government and the private sector. It is inadvisable to rely too heavily on the Honduran government and the private sector in devising how the funds will be used. Some elements of the private sector will see the increased U.S. aid as merely a new opportunity for a “money grab.” Without proper due diligence, U.S. aid to the private sector could actually increase inequity, undermine local businesses, and lead to injustice for workers. Regarding the Honduran government, there is a critical need to address infrastructure and shore up the criminal justice system and public services — especially for poor Hondurans — but, again, due diligence will be crucial. Civil society can be an invaluable resource when it comes to doing proper due diligence and designing the use of the U.S. assistance — as well as holding all recipients accountable, as discussed in the section below on accountability measures.

Honduran NGOs are also equipped with the knowledge and experience that make them a more appropriate choice than the government for some projects. For example, while the government has made progress that’s helped reduce violence in Honduras, it isn’t an expert in preventative measures; some members of civil society are. Many civil society organizations also have valuable expertise on a local level, and it’s advisable to work with these existing organizations for the sake of effectiveness. Similarly, since the vast majority of Hondurans are members of Catholic or Protestant churches, local churches can also prove to be valuable partners.[‡] When it comes to planning and assessing the use of U.S. aid, community-level actors can be crucial allies. It’s important that U.S. aid be focused on helping the country of Honduras rather than just the government of Honduras.

[†] While drug trafficking exacerbates Honduras’ problems, it shouldn’t be seen as the root of them. Violence, corruption, and poverty existed before drug trafficking became so rampant, and focusing simply on trafficking is misguided.

[‡] Among the members of the Alliance for Peace and Justice and Transformemos Honduras are Catholic and Evangelical groups that could be helpful in engaging local church congregations.

Past U.S. aid to Honduras has at times focused on the wrong issues, failing to address the root problems that afflict Honduras. The aid has not had the impact it could have had. To achieve lasting change in Honduras, U.S. aid must be in the form of programs built to address root issues.

Below are a few of the issues that the proposed aid package correctly focuses on and examples of how the package aligns with the work of the authors of this paper:

VIOLENCE

Since one of the major immigration push factors is violence, part of the FY 2016 aid proposal properly promotes model police programs in targeted communities to “provide police training, facilitate community engagement, and prioritize crimes” for special attention.^{xxviii} AJS has 10 years of experience itself working with communities and the police to investigate homicides in some of the most violent neighborhoods of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula. The results of this work are striking; crime rates drop in areas where people (police, victims and witnesses) can trust each other in reporting, investigating, and prosecuting major offenses and where there is access to sufficient resources to support proper investigations. With a conviction rate of about 95 percent in the cases where it assists, AJS has seen dramatic drops in homicides in the communities where it works. For example, there have been no murders between September 2014 and March 2015 in the very violent portion of San Pedro Sula where the AJS team has begun working. AJS’s on-the-ground experience also serves to complement its high-level policy work with the national government. AJS’s experience informs studies done by the Alliance for Peace and Justice (APJ), another author of this paper, on issues such as criminal investigations and the judicial process. APJ then uses these studies — combined with citizen organizing and media campaigns — to place healthy pressure on the Honduran government to improve its policies and approaches.

CORRUPTION

The FY 2016 aid proposal would “increase the role and impact of civil society on governance” so that it can “serve as watchdogs and advocate around public policy issues.” It also seeks to support “a competent civil workforce that provides executive branch continuity and services to citizens” in an efficient and corruption-free manner.^{xxix} AJS can also attest to the importance of this approach, especially when it comes to fighting corruption and ineffectiveness in the government — particularly because of our work monitoring the government under its agreement with Transparency International. The importance of providing public accountability in order to achieve effective government reforms is also obvious from the work that AJS, APJ and TH have accomplished in reforming the Property Institute, the public health system, and the public education system.

POVERTY

The proposal directly seeks to improve the lives of young people who might be otherwise compelled to seek a better life elsewhere, using “at-risk youth” programs geared toward better “life skills, job training and recreation activities.”^{xxx} AJS and other members of APJ (including the Catholic and Evangelical churches, World Vision, and others) have a great deal of experience in this area and can attest to its importance in keeping youth away from crime. AJS is particularly experienced with using a targeted approach to effectively help at-risk youth in Tegucigalpa. Members of our organizations have also seen the dramatic impact of effective job creation and job training programs. Job programs open up opportunities for youth and are an effective crime prevention measure.

THE PROPOSED INCREASED SPENDING MUST INCORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES

Accountability and transparency are crucial to the success of the proposed aid package. All projects funded by the U.S. assistance — regardless of whether they are administered by the Honduran government, the private sector,

or civil society — should be monitored for transparency and accountability.

In order for U.S. aid to be effective in Honduras, it is necessary to engage local partners to help develop and monitor indicators of success. It is crucial that measurement indicators not be simply imposed on Honduras by the U.S. Rather, the indicators should be established in agreement with experienced, local actors.

Having the Honduran government agree to abide by an accountability system is also important. Beyond tracking performance and avoiding corruption, this is an opportunity to affect the institutional behavior of the Honduran government and bring transparency to government programs and policies that are troublingly secretive. Transparency and accountability measures can also be used in the protection of human rights.

In the sidebar on this page are some examples of the types of indicators that could be considered.

Approaches like these would help the Honduran government and funding recipients to specifically understand the results the U.S. Congress anticipates from the new level of spending. The list is more illustrative than complete; our organizations stand ready to assist in developing it further, either as part of this year's appropriations consideration of the proposed aid or, after that is completed, before the plan is first implemented in October of 2016.

HOW WE MIGHT HELP: COLLABORATION, CONTROLS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Since an aid package by itself is of little value without effective partners, the U.S.

EXAMPLES OF THE TYPES OF INDICATORS THAT COULD BE CONSIDERED:

Justice and Security

Justice and Security Statistics

- Homicide rate and extortion rate
- Percentage of impunity for homicides and percentage of cases which reach each stage in investigative and legal process
- Percentage of the population that trusts the security and justice institutions
- Number of drug traffickers, officials, and powerful businesspeople extradited or tried in Honduras for drug trafficking, organized crime, or corruption

Sector Reform Statistics

- Percentage of officials who have undergone integrity tests
- Number of police officers, detectives, prosecutors, and judges (by population) approaching the Latin America average
- Quality of police investigations, prosecutorial cases, and judicial rulings — using a sample of cases reviewed by international experts

Corruption and Transparency

- Improvements in Transparency International index rating of transparency in government purchasing and hiring procedures
- Number of government officials and business leaders who are successfully prosecuted for corruption
- Percentage of corruption complaints filed with the Attorney General which progress to each stage in process
- Value of properties seized by government in corruption cases

Poverty

- Economic indicators
 - Employment rates
 - Number of small businesses started and ease of starting or expanding small businesses
- Access to quality public education
 - Percentage of enrollment and graduation rates in primary, middle, and secondary school
 - Teacher/student performance on standardized tests
 - Number of class days and hours of class
- Access to quality public health
 - Vaccination rates
 - Infant and maternal mortality rates
 - Availability of medicines and average wait to appointments and surgeries
- High-risk youth
 - Percentage of youth who neither work nor attend school
 - Number of high-risk children involved in youth programs
- Access to clean water and sanitary latrines

government should make the availability of the proposed funds contingent on the recipients' performance in carrying out their work.

Over the last two years, AJS and APJ have worked on indices and benchmarking systems for the security sector (the police, attorney general, and courts). That work has recently expanded to four additional areas under the Transparency International/Honduran government anti-corruption agreement. Indeed, AJS and APJ have developed a reputation for this type of work, and during a recent meeting at the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa, embassy staff encouraged us to help develop standards by which the efficacy of the new aid proposal might be measured in Honduras. Our organizations stand ready to assist in that regard, and we are qualified to do so, as evidenced by the successes we have already had in dealing with the Honduran government.

In the sidebar on this page are some ideas on further measures the Honduran government could take to demonstrate a commitment to reform before the funding is approved.

The authors of this paper are organizations that work toward better government services for poor and vulnerable Hondurans, using the credibility of our work to bolster demands for change from our government. We work to expose government malfeasance, but we also work with government officials to address problems that have been identified. For example, in March, the Honduran government publicly signed an agreement with AJS to cooperate in reforming the government Property Institute. The next week, AJS published an investigation that challenged 5,000 flawed land titles the institute had issued to Honduran citizens.^{xxxii} The government was irate about the publication of the investigation and used the recent agreement to pressure AJS to change its report. AJS refused to capitulate; the report stands as it was originally published.

Similarly, AJS has recently published other investigations uncovering government misconduct. It exposed how the government allowed \$1 million in HIV/AIDS medications to expire and how the head of a government agency helped the current vice president hide \$13.5 million in suspicious and mismanaged spending during his time as mayor of the capital city.^{xxxiii}

SIGNS OF GOOD FAITH FROM THE HONDURAN GOVERNMENT ON THE ISSUES OF TRANSPARENCY AND SECURITY (IN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS, BEFORE THE VOTE OF THE U.S. CONGRESS)

- Removal and prosecution of few emblematic high-level actors in the police, attorney general's office, and the judicial branch — involved in drug trafficking and organized crime
- Honduran state secrets law — Set boundaries around it according to international best practices, with participation from civil society
- The "Security Tax"
 - Regarding future use of revenue:
 - What will the revenue be invested in? Create and put into practice a strategic plan for the next three years — with the participation of civil society — to prioritize sectors, issues, and methods that best achieve peace and justice.
 - How can its use be more transparent? Define strategies that include civil society to make the entire process in how the funds are invested transparent.
 - Regarding past use of revenue:
 - Place online all of the documents that should be public according to international best practices — with the supervision of civil society.
- Military Police: Create and put into practice a strategy for the next three years — with the participation of civil society — that describes how the military police will be chosen, how they will be trained and supervised, their roles and limits, and how their role will change so that the civilian police force can be strengthened.

Beyond simply uncovering misconduct, we also support the government to do the right thing, while remaining financially and politically independent. Our approach — working with the government in making progress while being outspoken critics against failures — has also worked in the fight against violence and impunity. APJ raised the alarm about Honduras’ high rates of criminal impunity and the problematic role of military police, but it also collaborated with the government to reduce the homicide rate and helped publicly acknowledge the success that resulted.

Between our three organizations, we represent a broad spectrum of Honduras’ civil society, and we hold all politicians and officials accountable regardless of position or political party. We commit to using the same discipline and objectivity when examining the proposed increase in U.S. aid funding for Honduras.

Despite the challenging nature of fighting corruption, violence, and poverty, highly experienced and courageous Hondurans have come forward to help transform the country. They have years of knowledge and experience that could be deepened with carefully administered U.S. foreign aid. This approach would both ensure better results and demonstrate support for an active and free Honduran civil society.

CONCLUSION

President Obama stressed the importance of civil society during the April 2015 Summit of the Americas:

“We believe that strong, successful countries require strong and vibrant civil societies. We know that throughout our history, human progress has been propelled not just by famous leaders, not just by states, but by ordinary men and women who believe that change is possible; by citizens who are willing to stand up against incredible odds and great danger not only to protect their own rights, but to extend rights to others.”

Immediately after this general address, Obama met a group of 11 leaders from civil society in the Americas, including Carlos Hernández of AJS/APJ/TH, who was the only leader from Honduras in the group. At the conclusion of the meeting, President Obama commended Mr. Hernández regarding the efforts of AJS’s anti-corruption agreement with the Honduran government and expressed appreciation for his recommendation that there be proper effectiveness measures incorporated into the proposed U.S. aid.

As President Obama said in his speech, the courses of nations are shaped by citizens who stand up in the face of adversity for the sake of justice. As leaders of Honduran civil society, we are both compelled and eager to stand for a just and peaceful Honduras — while fully acknowledging the personal risk and effort that entails. We stand up because we believe in this fight, and we believe it can be won.

Approved by the Boards of Directors of the Association for a More Just Society, the Alliance for Peace and Justice, and Transformemos Honduras

Tegucigalpa, Honduras

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

 <p>The Association for a More Just Society (AJS) is a Christian organization that has more than 17 years of experience working on issues of violence, corruption, and government reform in Honduras. AJS is Transparency International’s Honduran chapter.</p>	 <p>The Alliance for Peace and Justice (APJ) is a diverse coalition of Honduras’ most influential NGOs and sectors of civil society and is focused on reforming the Honduran security and justice systems. APJ has more than 24 member organizations.</p> <p>Sample of members of APJ and TH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association for a More Just Society (AJS) • Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (ASONOG) • CARITAS — Catholic church • Civil Society Group — more than 100 community organization members* • Compassion International** • The Evangelical Fraternity of Honduras (CEH) — Evangelical church • Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for the Development of Honduras (FOPRIDEH) — association of more than 80 member NGOs • National Autonomous University of Honduras* — Honduras’ largest university with more than 80,000 students • World Vision Honduras <p>* Member of only APJ ** Member of only TH</p>	 <p>Transformemos Honduras (TH) is a coalition of more than 15 civil society groups working toward government reform, with a focus on cleaning up corruption in the education and health systems.</p>
<p>Between our three organizations, we represent a broad spectrum of Honduras’ civil society, and we hold all politicians and officials accountable regardless of position or political party.</p>		

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