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The Honorable John Kerry  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

Over the past decade, we have witnessed a dramatic escalation of violence against environmental justice activists, with the effects intensified amongst indigenous communities. In many countries, they are harassed, attacked and even murdered. The tragic and senseless murder of Berta Cáceres, a highly influential Honduran indigenous and environmental rights leader, is a stark call to action to strengthen our efforts to address the heightened threats posed to environmental justice defenders. I urge you to take all necessary action to work with national governments and the international community to properly monitor threats, violence and murders of such activists and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

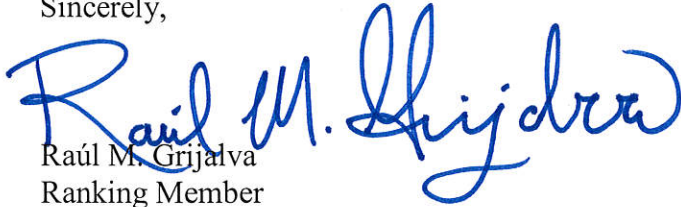
On Thursday, Berta Cáceres was slain in her hometown of La Esperanza, Intibucá. She would have been 46 today. Authorities, *La Prensa* of Honduras reports, say she was killed during a robbery, but her mother said that Cáceres was killed "because of her struggle." The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ordered that she receive police protection, but no police were present when she was murdered. Cáceres was honored and celebrated for her human rights work in Honduras to stop one of the world's largest dam builders from pursuing the Agua Zarca Dam, which would have cut off the ethnic Lenca people from water, food and medicine and violated their right to sustainably manage and live off their land. Despite threats made against her life, Cáceres defended indigenous and environmental rights with indomitable courage and grit.

Cáceres' death is a reminder of the great personal risks human rights and environmental justice activists take to defend their communities from exploitation and industrialization. According to a report by Global Witness, on average, two people are killed every week defending their land, forests and waterways. At least 116 environmentalists were killed in 2014. More than 75 percent of the deaths occurred in Central and South America. Most people died resisting oil and mineral extraction, land grabs by agribusiness, logging and other mega-development projects. Tragically, the perpetrators of these crimes are rarely held accountable.

Those who risk their lives to defend human rights, indigenous rights and the environment deserve our admiration, respect and support. They understand better than anyone that it has never been more important to protect the environment, and it has never been more deadly. Indeed, as companies go in search of new land to exploit, people are increasingly paying the ultimate price for standing in their way.

Every aggression against human rights, indigenous rights and environmental justice activist is an attack on our most fundamental freedoms. As a global leader on the protection of human rights and the environment, the United States must take a consistent and public stance supporting those threatened with violence and strongly encourage the investigation and prosecution of those perpetrating these crimes, including state agents. The stakes are high. Now is the time for responsible and sustained leadership on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva  
Ranking Member  
House Natural Resources Committee

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