

***Condemn Killings of Salvadoran Police Officers
Reduce Tensions in El Salvador***

July 20, 2006

Dear Colleague,

We hope that you will join us in sending the attached letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice expressing our concern about the recent tragic events in El Salvador.

On July 5, 2006, a demonstration protesting increases in bus fares ended in the deaths of two police officers, with several more wounded. We condemn these attacks on police officers, and support a thorough and impartial investigation to identify, arrest, and prosecute those involved in the shootings. We urge Secretary Rice to seek to reduce the tension in El Salvador, calling on all parties to refrain from making politically charged accusations and attempting to seek political advantage from these events. We further ask the Secretary to review the events leading up to and on July 5 and assess the level of professionalism and respect for human rights of the Salvadoran police and its special units, like the anti-riot police.

If you would like to sign onto this letter, please contact Cindy Buhl with Rep. McGovern (5-6101) or Paul Oostburg (Democratic Staff, HIRC, 5-5416). **The deadline for signing onto this letter is COB, Friday, July 28th.**

Sincerely,

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Tom Lantos
Member of Congress

Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rice,

We write to express deep concern about events that took place in El Salvador on July 5, 2006. On that day, anti-riot police took up positions before a march which was organized to protest increases in bus fares, as part of a larger ongoing demonstration about the cost of living in the country. During a confrontation between protestors and riot police, many shots were fired at police officers in what appears to have been an ambush

by at least one gunman. Two officers were killed, and ten other law enforcement personnel were injured. The police then responded with a major show of force, entering the nearby National University, searching homes and organizational offices in the neighborhood, and making a number of arrests. Although the shooting of the police is inexcusable, some government officials, protest leaders, opposition politicians, and diplomats have made intemperate and provocative remarks, which have further ignited passions and could lead to more violence.

Before the events of this month, tensions in El Salvador were already high. Protests have flared intermittently over the last year as the dialogue between protestors and the government seems not to have resolved their differences. As a result, clashes between protestors and the police have been frequent, and the Ombudsman for Human Rights in El Salvador has found that the police have used excessive force in a number of cases. The July 5 incident represents a further escalation in the confrontation between the government and dissident segments of Salvadoran society, and we fear a slow and painful downward spiral in a country which has not recuperated fully from a bloody civil war.

We believe the State Department should seek to reduce the tension in El Salvador through condemning the attacks on police officers and calling on all parties to refrain from making politically charged accusations and attempting to seek political advantage from these tragic events. All parties, if they have not already done so, should also immediately and categorically renounce violence. Finally, our country, through the United Nations, has made in previous years a substantial investment in the establishment, training, and outfitting of the National Civilian Police. We request that you review carefully the actions of the National Civilian Police over the last year to ensure that the force has been professional, community-oriented, and observant of internationally recognized human rights and that it and any of its specialized units, such as the anti-riot police, have utilized appropriate force when confronting protesters and otherwise fulfilling their law enforcement duties.

We are committed to a peaceful and prosperous El Salvador and would like to contribute to the resolution of brooding tensions before they worsen.

Sincerely,

Members of Congress

cc: Thomas Shannon, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs
Anne Patterson, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement
Barry F. Lowenkron, Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
The Honorable Rene Leon, Ambassador to the United States from El Salvador