

US Senate proposes law to sanction repressive, drug-trafficking President of Honduras

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/us-senate-proposes-law-to-sanction-repressive-drug-trafficking-president-of-honduras>

- **Below:** Article by Nina Lakhani, The Guardian

‘Juan Orlando Hernandez is our narco-trafficking son of a bitch’

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt is reported to have said that "Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch", referring to the ruthless military dictator of Nicaragua the US government was propping up.



One can imagine US and Canadian leaders saying: ‘Juan Orlando Hernandez is a narco-trafficking son of a bitch, but he is our narco-trafficking son of a bitch’, referring to the military-backed dictator of Honduras, in power since (pretty much) the 2009 US and Canadian-backed coup.

Starting to stop doing the wrong thing

“With the [Honduras Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Act](#), the US government is starting to stop doing the wrong thing, providing full military, economic and political support for this brutal, corrupt regime since the 2009 US and Canadian backed military coup. Will politicians in Canada follow suit, and start the process of ending full Canadian support for the regime?” (Grahame Russell, Rights Action)

'Deeply alarming corruption': US bill would sanction Honduran president

Group of Democratic senators introducing legislation that would suspend certain US assistance

By [Nina Lakhani](#), 23 Feb 2021

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/23/us-democratic-senators-honduras-sanction-president-bill>

A group of influential Democratic senators are introducing legislation which would sanction the president of Honduras – [an alleged drug trafficker and key US ally](#) – and cut off financial aid and ammunition sales to the country's security forces which are implicated in widespread human rights abuses and criminal activities.

The [Honduras Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Act](#), co-sponsored by Senators Jeff Merkley, Bernie Sanders, Patrick Leahy, Ed Markey, Elizabeth Warren, Dick Durbin, Sheldon Whitehouse and Chris Van Hollen, would suspend certain US assistance to the Central American country until corruption and human rights violations are no longer systemic, and the perpetrators of these crimes start facing justice.

Joe Biden has vowed to tackle the root causes of migration from Central America's northern triangle – [Honduras](#), Guatemala and El Salvador – the most violent region in the world outside an official war zone, which accounts for most migrants and refugees seeking safety and economic opportunities in the US.

2009 US and Canadian-backed military coup

This bill makes clear that tackling migration from Honduras will be impossible if the US continues to prop up the president, Juan Orlando Hernández, and the security forces. It lays bare the violence and abuses perpetrated since the 2009 military-backed coup, as a result of widespread collusion between government officials, state and private security forces, organized crime and business leaders.

It also catalogues the systematic use of force against civilians, a clampdown on the freedom of speech and protest, and targeted attacks such as arbitrary arrests, assassinations, forced disappearances and fabricated criminal charges against human rights and environmental defenders, political opponents and journalists.

In the past year alone, at least 34,000 citizens have been detained for violating curfew and lockdown restrictions including nurse [Kelya Martinez, who earlier this month was killed in police custody](#).

“The United States cannot remain silent in the face of deeply alarming corruption and human rights abuses being committed at the highest levels of the Honduran government,” said Merkley, who serves on the Senate foreign relations committee. “A failure to hold President Hernández, national officials and the police and military accountable for these crimes will fuel widespread poverty and violence and force more families to flee their communities in search of safety.”

This is the first time the Senate has proposed legislation which could genuinely threaten the post-coup regime, which has used drug money, [stolen public funds](#) and fraud to maintain its grip on power with few consequences from the international community.

Hernández, who has been identified as a co-conspirator in three major drug trafficking and corruption cases brought by New York prosecutors, would be investigated under the Kingpin Act to determine whether he is a designated narcotics trafficker – a criminal status given to drug bosses like [Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán](#).

Hernández has repeatedly denied any links to drug trafficking including prior knowledge about his younger brother’s cocaine and arms deals for which he was [convicted in New York last year](#).

The bill also details Hernández’s role in the demise of the rule of law in the country: as a congressman, he supported the 2009 coup, and later created the militarized police force which is implicated in extrajudicial killings, oversaw a purge of the judiciary and pushed through unconstitutional reforms in order to stay in power and shield corrupt officials from prosecution.

Hernández, who has so far enjoyed a close relationship with key military and political leaders, would have his US visa revoked and assets frozen as part of the proposed sanctions.

The bill would also ban the export of munitions including teargas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, water cannons, handcuffs, stun guns, Tasers and semi-automatic firearms until the security forces manage 12 months without committing human rights violations. Financial assistance including equipment and training would also be suspended, though waivers in the national interest would remain possible. The US would also vote against multilateral development bank loans to the security forces.

“This legislation is designed to send a clear message to Biden that it will be impossible to tackle the root causes of migration without getting rid of Hernández and withdrawing support from the security forces which have a long track record of corruption, organised crime and repression,” said Dana Frank, professor of history at the University of California and author of *The Long Honduran Night: Resistance, Terror, and the United States in the Aftermath of the Coup*.

In order for the restrictions to be lifted, Honduran authorities would need to demonstrate that it had pursued all legal avenues to prosecute those who ordered, carried out and covered up high-profile crimes including the assassination of indigenous environmentalist [Berta Cáceres](#), the killing of more than 100 [campesinos](#) in the Bajo Aguán, the [extrajudicial killings](#) of anti-election fraud protesters, and the forced disappearance of [Afro-indigenous Garifuna land defenders](#).

Act now / Get involved

By Dana Frank

Senator Jeff Merkley, of Oregon, has just introduced a bill, the Honduras Human rights and Anti-Corruption Act of 2021, in the US Senate. It calls for 1) a suspension of US security aid to Honduras (using the same language as the Berta Cáceres Act from the House); 2) a prohibition on specified munitions sales, including tear gas, pepper spray, tasers, etc., to Honduran security forces; 3) sanctions on President Juan Orlando Hernández; 4) \$2 million to support the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights; and 5) negotiation of a new MACCIH through the United Nations (in contrast to the previous MACCIH through the Organization of American States).

It has lots of other great language, too, naming specific emblematic cases, corrupt officials, etc. It is framed as suspending certain US assistance for the Government of Honduras, i.e. holding the US government, not just the Honduran government, responsible.

This is the Senate bill we've been pushing for, for almost five years, plus lots more. Many actors had a hand in writing this one, so some parts are not necessarily what we all would have written or entirely agree with. But there's no question that it's a great thing, challenging Biden and his loyalists, and striking a great blow at JOH and his allies. It's ferocious about the Honduran security forces and their role in repression.

Believe it or not, Senators Leahy (VT), Durbin (IL), Markey (MA), Sanders (VT), Warren (MA), Whitehouse (RI), and Van Hollen (D-MD) are all initial co-sponsors. Others are in the wings if they get enough constituent pressure—which can now be unleashed.

There are no Republicans, but Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) is a possibility.

This bill is the product of everyone's labors for years and years now. Congratulations, and feel the power! Special thanks to the folks in Oregon--Lucy Edwards, Jim Phillips, and Jack Herbert--whose endless advocacy shook this loose.

More information

- Honduras Solidarity Network: www.hondurassolidarity.org
- Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective: www.solidaritycollective.org
- Friendship Office of the Americas: <https://friendshipamericas.org>
- School of Americas Watch: www.soaw.org

E-mail Jenny Atlee (jennya@friendshipamericas.org) to add your organization's endorsement of the Honduras Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Act of 2021.

Background

“Shithole countries: US, Canada & international community help produce forced migrancy from Honduras & Guatemala”

US government promises pathway to citizenship for 11 million people, but will the US & Canada continue to treat Honduras and Guatemala like “shithole countries”, creating ever more forced migrants and refugees?

By Grahame Russell, Rights Action, February 9, 2021

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/us-government-promises-pathway-to-citizenship-for-11-million-people>

- **Honduran president, a Trump [Obama, Trudeau, Harper] ally, implicated in drug trafficking, tries to win over Biden** - by [Kevin Sieff](#), Feb. 12, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/honduras-president-narcotrafficking-hernandez/2021/02/11/1fa96044-5f8c-11eb-ac8f-4ae05557196e_story.html
- **US supports Honduran government that forces many to migrate as it protects drug trafficking** - by Tim Steller, Tucson Star, Sep. 12, 2020, https://tucson.com/news/local/star-investigation-us-supports-honduran-government-that-forces-many-to-migrate-as-it-protects-drug/article_cbfacb4c-dc94-50e8-a80f-82f307574662.html
- **U.S. Justice Department Indicts Honduran Former National Police Chief on Cocaine Trafficking Charges** - <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/former-chief-honduran-national-police-charged-drug-trafficking-and-weapons-offenses>
- **Key witness arrested in drug case against brother of Honduran president** - by [David Adams & Jeff Ernst](#), 14 Feb. 2020, <https://www.univision.com/univision-news/latin-america/key-witness-arrested-in-drug-case-against-brother-of-the-honduran-president>
- **Witness directly involves president of Honduras in use of drug money for campaigns** - by Jeff Ernst, 8 Oct. 2019, <https://www.univision.com/univision-news/latin-america/witness-directly-involves-the-president-of-honduras-in-the-use-of-drug-money-for-his-campaigns>

Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.)

To support land, human rights and environmental defender groups in Honduras and Guatemala, make check to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations: <http://rightsaction.org/donate/>

Donations of securities in Canada and the U.S.? Write to: info@rightsaction.org

Please share this information widely
Subscribe to Email Newsblasts: www.rightsaction.org
FB: www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org
TW: @RightsAction
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/rightsaction/>
YT: <https://www.youtube.com/user/rightsaction>