

WRITE AN OP-ED/LETTER TO YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

Template: *Please edit into your own words and make edits as necessary. Some newspaper guidelines will likely want op-eds to be a little longer and letters to be a little shorter.*

At the beginning of this year, Congress committed an unprecedented \$750 million in aid to Central America, with the majority of this funding intended to support the Honduran, Guatemalan and Salvadoran Governments' Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle. The region is in desperate need of increased funding to combat crime, poverty, and underdevelopment. There are many important components in the U.S. Foreign Assistance package, particularly in terms of investment in local development, education, training and employment, and justice sector reform, as well as areas of concern.

I am very worried that Central American Governments' Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity could in the long-run end up harming, rather than helping, Central Americans, particularly in Honduras, and may leave many people worse off than they are now.

Afro-Honduran Garífuna communities stand to be particularly negatively impacted by the Plan. For over 200 years, the Garífuna have lived a peaceful existence on the northern coast of Honduras surviving on subsistence fishing and agriculture. That tranquility is now threatened by the expansion of a mega-tourist project that will cause environmental degradation and displacement to this already marginalized community.

As set forth by the governments of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity promotes large scale infrastructure projects and foreign investment over social inclusion programs. This is particularly troubling in Honduras, where those who oppose infrastructure projects are often targeted for violence, threats and forced displacement, including by the police and State actors. For example, in September 2014, police were used to forcibly evict Honduran Garífuna communities from their homes to make way for the expansion of a mega-tourist resort.

I support the decision of the U.S. to ensure our own foreign assistance is not used to fund these large infrastructure projects. I would also strongly encourage the Obama Administration to use its influence to promote the right of local communities in the three countries to "full, free and prior consent" prior to the design and implementation of projects that will impact their lives and land. I particularly urge the Administration and Congress to take steps to prevent the further disenfranchisement of the Garífuna and similarly vulnerable groups, through programs funded by the U.S. and diplomatic pressure to influence regional Governments and Donors.

While the Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity does have positive components, if it is not implemented for the benefit of the majority, and particularly for marginalized communities and individuals, its potential for positive change will be lost and it could lead to new displacement and migration, including from the Garífuna communities. The Garífuna are a people intimately tied to their ancestral lands and communities. Without them, their unique and rich culture may disappear, which would be a tragedy for us all.

SAMPLE LETTER TO SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN KERRY

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

As a people united in the Catholic faith, we write to make you aware of the grave situation faced by the Garífuna people in Honduras, and call upon you and the Obama Administration to do all within your power to promote and protect the rights of Garífuna communities.

Over the past 20 years, successive governments in Honduras have displaced Garífuna communities from their homes along the Caribbean coast. The Plan of the Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle, and its particular emphasis in Honduras on large-scale infrastructure projects, threatens to exacerbate rather than reverse this disturbing trend. We ask that the United States withhold funds from the Honduran government until the Honduran State takes defined steps to better protect human rights overall, including those of the Garífuna and indigenous populations.

For generations, Garífuna communities have preserved their own cultural norms, organizations, social and cultural institutions, and deep connection to their territory. These communities occupy several miles of pristine beaches, which are now the target of major development projects by private investors working in collaboration with the Honduran Government. The State has repeatedly been implicated in efforts to negate Garífuna land titles and sell their lands to investors in the tourist industry. These tourism projects threaten to dispossess the Garífuna of their ancestral lands and ignore their very real needs as subsistence fishermen and farmers.

The set of conditions placed on U.S. Assistance to the governments of Central America in the recently approved aid package demonstrates a true commitment by the U.S. to combat corruption, protect human rights, and strengthen the rule of law in the Northern Triangle. When evaluating the region's compliance with this set of conditions, we urge the Obama Administration to consider the measures taken by the Honduran Government to create a regulatory framework capable of enforcing Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Declaration of the United Nations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which guarantee the right of local communities to prior consultation over aspects of development plans that may affect them.

While responsibility for the safety and prosperity of their countries ultimately rests with the Central American governments themselves, it is both within the U.S. interest and power to encourage greater respect for human rights in the region, including the development of a targeted response to the Garífuna people's struggle to defend their ancestral territories. If we are to realize our stated commitment to a Central America that is inclusive, democratic and secure, the rights of marginalized and persecuted communities must be defended.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.