

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 16, 2022

Dear President Biden,

We support your administration's important efforts to counter corruption nationally and internationally, including your decision to establish countering corruption as a core United States national security interest and your issuance of the "United States Strategy on Countering Corruption" ("The Strategy").¹

We strongly agree that corruption can rob citizens of equal access to vital public services such as healthcare, public safety and education; degrade the business environment and exacerbate inequality; contribute to human rights violations and drive migration. As The Strategy notes, corruption is a "fundamental threat to the rule of law, corruption hollows out institutions, corrodes public trust, and fuels popular cynicism toward effective, accountable governance."

We look forward to monitoring the progress of The Strategy, including the promulgation of critical new regulations and the implementation of new policies. We note with particular interest the December announcement by the Treasury Department, in the lead up to the Summit for Democracy, of a new rule to better identify who is behind all-cash real estate transactions and to see if those purchases are being used to shelter illegal profits.²

This issue has become particularly relevant as our nation's close ally, Colombia, holds the second round of the country's presidential election on June 19. One of the two candidates in the run-off election, Rodolfo Hernandez, is facing two judicial processes related to allegations of corruption during his time as mayor of Bucaramanga. The next court hearing date is July 21, 2022 meaning that, by the time the legal process moves forward, Colombian voters will have cast their ballots without knowing the outcome of these legal proceedings.

We understand that the first charge relates to Hernandez hiring a consultant in 2016 and 2017, to help with a large garbage collection tender for the city of Bucaramanga, while the second charge pertains to the attempted awarding of the garbage collection contract itself to a private company, Vitalogic. We understand that while the contract process was taking place, the Hernandez family purchased a number of homes in South Florida whose total value surpasses \$1 million. These facts, at a minimum, raise serious questions about Hernandez's commitment to anti-corruption.

These allegations bring to mind revelations that then-Ecuadorian presidential candidate Guillermo Lasso owned 144 properties in Broward and Miami Dade counties in Florida. After his election, The Pandora Papers revealed that President Lasso had been hiding assets and avoiding taxes in US jurisdictions for years.³ The legal case regarding Rodolfo Hernández has the potential to be another example of U.S. jurisdictions being used for tax evasion purposes or to hide funds from illicit sources.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/United-States-Strategy-on-Countering-Corruption.pdf>

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/real-estate/biden-targets-cash-homes-deals-anti-corruption-drive-rcna7709>

³ <https://www.newsweek.com/its-time-end-ugly-us-legacy-stop-tax-evasion-home-abroad-opinion-1641450>

Accordingly, we respectfully urge your administration to urgently look into this matter and consider having relevant U.S. agencies, including the Department of Justice and the Department of the Treasury, engage in a prompt investigation of these matters, to ensure that the American and Colombian peoples are duly informed regarding any potential illegal or corrupt actions involving Mr. Hernandez or any of his close family members.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



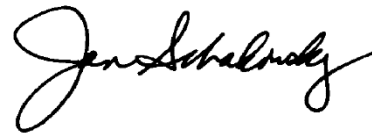
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
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David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

CC: Attorney General Merrick Garland
Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen
Secretary of State Antony Blinken