

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 2, 2019

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo  
Secretary  
United States Department of State  
2201 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to express our profound concern regarding ongoing violations of the basic human rights of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian communities, as well as other sectors of civil society in Brazil. Both the words and actions of the administration of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro indicate a strong desire to systematically weaken key protections for collective and individual rights. This is regrettably catalyzing a broader environment of violence and impunity, resulting in attacks, killings, and land invasions.

Indigenous land rights in Brazil are under imminent threat, with President Bolsonaro promising “there won’t be one square centimeter of land designated for indigenous reservations” under his administration<sup>[1]</sup>, in violation of indigenous rights enshrined in Brazil’s constitution. Mr. Bolsonaro’s first executive order<sup>[2]</sup> stripped the power to delineate and title indigenous territories from Brazil’s indigenous agency FUNAI and transferred it to the Agriculture Ministry, an institution that has historically been antagonistic toward indigenous land rights. FUNAI’s mandate was also transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the newly formed Ministry of Family, Women, and Human Rights, in a move that Brazil’s indigenous leadership considers detrimental to their rights.<sup>[3]</sup> Such measures that debilitate indigenous land rights are a direct challenge to the protection of the Amazon rainforest where 98% of Brazil’s native territories are located. The creation of federally protected indigenous territories represents the best form of forest protection, as observation and scientific study have proven.<sup>[4]</sup> Deforestation in Brazil is on the rise, posing a clear and present threat to global climate stability.<sup>[5]</sup>

Since Mr. Bolsonaro’s election, illegal and violent invasions of indigenous territories have intensified. At least eight demarcated indigenous territories – the Arara of Pará state, Araribóia and Awa in Maranhão, Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau and Karipuna in Rondônia – have registered the theft of wood, the felling of forests to open grasslands, and the opening of roads and establishment of lots for illegal squatting. Additionally, the Aracruz indigenous territory of the Tupiniquim people in Espírito Santo has been under attack and an indigenous school and health clinic of the Pankararu people Caldeirão’s village, in Pernambuco, has been firebombed and destroyed.<sup>[6]</sup>

Indigenous leaders and community members are similarly facing increased threats, attacks, and killings, as miners, loggers, and land invaders violate the law with impunity.<sup>[7]</sup> Brazil is already the deadliest country for activists and defenders of the land and environment. According to the NGO Global Witness, in 2017 alone there were 57 murders of indigenous leaders, community

activists and environmentalists.[8] These grim statistics are guaranteed to rise under a president espousing virulently anti-indigenous and violent rhetoric.

In addition to the ongoing attacks on the rights to indigenous peoples, Afro-Brazilian communities also face serious threats.[9] In particular, we are concerned about the Bolsonaro government's threatening policies and public position towards *Quilombola* Afro-Brazilian communities. Leaders of the National Articulation of Rural Black Quilombola Communities (CONAQ) have decried the slow process by which the government titles the lands of *quilombo*[10] peoples (rural settlements founded by people of African origin). They have sought to alert the public regarding a dramatic decrease in the land titling budget from over 20-million Brazilian reais to 3-million Brazilian reais.[11] In addition, quilombo activists have been the target of assassinations that typically remain in impunity.[12]

Human rights protection for indigenous peoples, Afro-Brazilians, and all other sectors of civil society must be at the forefront of the United States' relationship with Brazil. For this reason, we ask that you provide answers to the following questions by May 31, 2019:

- What is your plan to monitor the Brazilian government's actions with respect to the aforementioned land rights disputes?
- Will you commit to communicate with Members of Congress regularly regarding this important issue?
- How will you communicate to the Brazilian authorities that they must take swift action to protect human rights in their country?
- What are your plans to ensure that the land rights of indigenous peoples and Afro-Brazilians are protected under Bolsonaro's leadership?
- Will you make a strong, public statement addressing the Brazilian administration's failure to investigate human rights violations, and its negative impact on bilateral relations and cooperation between our two governments?

Diplomats at the U.S. embassy in Brazil, including the U.S. ambassador and human rights officer, should voice support for threatened activists, including environmentalists, indigenous representatives, and Afro-Brazilians, and should express concerns about human rights defenders' protections to the relevant agencies of the Brazilian government. They should also call for swift action in the investigation and prosecution of emblematic cases of political violence like that of Marielle Franco's assassination.

We respectfully request that your office provide us with a substantive report back on the concerns raised in this letter.

Sincerely,



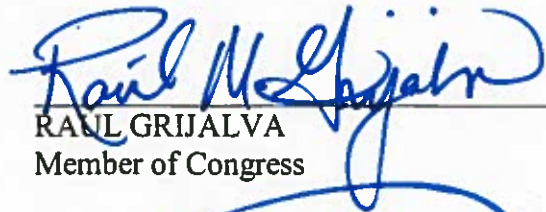
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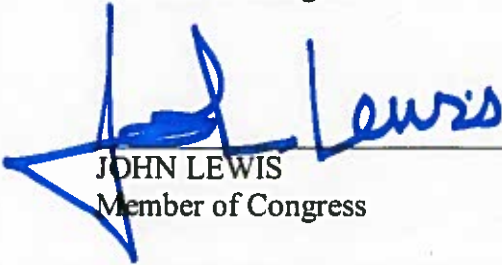
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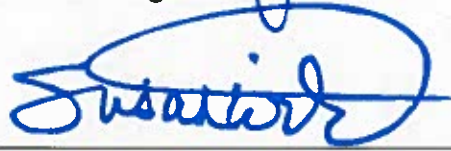
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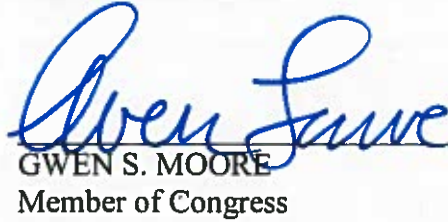
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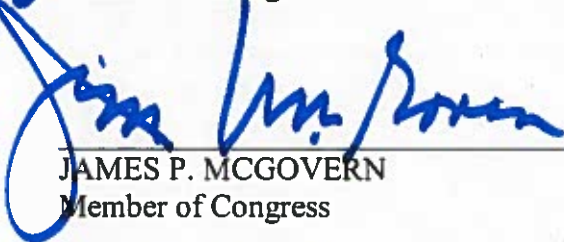
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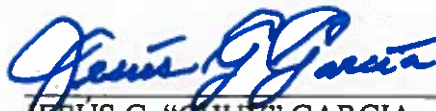
*Jim Langevin*

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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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JESÚS G. "CHUY" GARCIA  
Member of Congress



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JOSE E. SERRANO  
Member of Congress



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RUBEN GALLEGO  
Member of Congress

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[1] Boadle, Anthony. "Emboldened by Bolsonaro, armed invaders encroach on Brazil's tribal lands" *Reuters*, 3 March 2019 [Online](#)

[2] Londoño, Ernesto. "Jair Bolsonaro, on Day 1, Undermines Indigenous Brazilians' Rights" *The New York Times*, 2 Jan. 2019 [Online](#)

[3] Phillips, Dom. "Bolsonaro to abolish human rights ministry in favour of family values" *The Guardian*, 10 December, 2018 [Online](#)

[4] "Indigenous communities best for conservation: New study" *Center for International Forestry Research*, 15 Jul. 2015 [Online](#)

[5] "Amazon rainforest deforestation 'worst in 10 years', says Brazil" *BBC*, 24 November, 2018 [Online](#)

[6] "Indigenous Blood, Not a Single Drop More National Campaign" statement by APIB, Jan. 2019 [Online](#)

[7] Cowie, Sam. "Jair Bolsonaro Praised the Genocide of Indigenous People. Now He's Emboldening Attackers of Brazil's Amazonian Communities." *The Intercept*, 16 February, 2019 [Online](#)

[8] "Deadliest year on record for land and environmental defenders, as agribusiness is shown to be the industry most linked to killings" *Global Witness*, 24 July, 2018 [Online](#)

[9] Roberts, Nigel. "Brazil's New Racist President Has Anti-Black Agenda" *Newsone*. 29 October, 2018 [Online](#)

[10] A quilombo is a Brazilian hinterland settlement founded by people of African origin including the quilombolas, or maroons and others sometimes called Carabali. [Online](#)

[11] Borges, Lizely. "Organizations denounce racism and Quilombola rights violations to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission" *Terra e Direitos*, 13 February, 2019 [Online](#)

[12] Watts, Jonathan. "Murdered land activist adds to rising death toll in Brazil's Amazon" *The Guardian*, 17 April, 2018 [Online](#)