



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

January 31, 2023

The Honorable
Michael S. Lee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Lee:

Thank you for your December 8, 2022, letter to Secretary Blinken concerning the Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report process.

Corruption costs Central America an estimated \$13 billion annually and undermines democratic governance, economic opportunity, and civilian security. Corruption robs citizens of equal access to vital services, denying the right to quality healthcare, public safety, education, and often contributes to human rights violations and serves as a driver of migration. As a result, corruption, anywhere, but particularly within our own hemisphere, has serious effects on our own country.

Our diplomatic outreach and development activities in the Western Hemisphere address the high-level corruption that has captured much of the political elite in the region as well as the day-to-day corruption that Central Americans face, whether trying to open a business or access critical government services, including access to justice. We recognize that we cannot eradicate all corruption from the region, but we aim to address the corruption that undermines our national security interests and spurs irregular migration. This policy objective requires that the United States take a firm and consistent approach sufficient to remove impediments that discourage investment, hinder job growth, threaten security, undermine basic democratic institutions and processes, and erode Central Americans' hopes for a better future in their own countries.

Democratic backsliding and the erosion of the separation of powers in the countries of Central America is also a problem that threatens the political and economic development of these societies and poses substantial national security

risks for the United States. A move toward authoritarian behavior decreases transparency, accountability, and the ability of these governments to achieve sustainable development. It also invites a greater role for malign actors who prefer authoritarian partners.

The Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report serves as a powerful tool to address such democratic backsliding, improve transparency, and hold foreign persons accountable who have knowingly engaged in acts that undermine democratic processes or institutions. This includes former and current public officials as well as nongovernmental actors allegedly engaging in abuses of the democratic separation of powers, undermining the electoral process, or attacking civil society and the free press.

The procedures we follow to construct the Section 353 Corrupt and Undemocratic Actors Report are consistent with the legislation requiring the Department of State to submit the report to Congress. The process includes a nomination, consultation, and review process that involves the solicitation of nominations from the U.S. embassies in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and interactions with those embassies. These nominations are based on an extensive variety of sources both public and classified, and are thoroughly vetted through a standardized, iterative, submission process that includes an extensive review by the Department and U.S. government interagency partners. The designations are not politically motivated to support or reject any political party.

Where possible, we will continue partnering with government officials who show a dedication to combating corruption and strengthening democratic governance as part of an overall policy of addressing the root causes of irregular migration. Our objective with these designations is to support the people of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua in their efforts to form a democratic, prosperous, and safe region where people can contribute to and benefit from the democratic process, have confidence in public institutions, reduce inequality, and enjoy opportunities to create the futures they desire for themselves and their families.

We hope this information is helpful to you and your staff. Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Naz Durakoglu
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Legislative Affairs