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A group of Hondurans led by a Jesuit priest pleaded with U.S. lawmakers May 17 to stop military aid to the Central American nation and to allow the country's citizens living under a particular immigration status in the U.S. to remain here until conditions improve in their native country.

"We need you to support them so that they continue living in the United States because their return to our country is dangerous," said Jesuit Fr. Ismael Moreno, who traveled with a group of five Hondurans to 10 cities in the United States.

They spoke to groups and organizations hoping to garner support for some 57,000 Hondurans benefiting from the Temporary Protection Status program, which the Trump administration said would end in 2020, but also for a bill named after one of Moreno's friends, a human rights activist killed in 2016 in Honduras.

Just outside the U.S. Capitol, Georgia Congressman Henry "Hank" Johnson joined Moreno, popularly known as Fr. Melo, to speak about the Berta Caceres Act, which would cut U.S. military aid to the present government of Honduras led by President Juan Orlando Hernandez.

Estimates put U.S. aid to Honduras targeted for "security" at between $18 million to $22 million in 2015. Many of those gathered have for years questioned whether the U.S. should be giving money to Hernandez and his administration.

Though the constitution in Honduras limited its president to serve a one-time, six-year term, Hernandez sought and snatched a second term late last year and began that second term under a cloud of illegitimacy and calls for his resignation that have never stopped. His critics, who include Father Moreno, have been threatened, jailed or attacked. Hondurans who oppose Hernandez say U.S. taxpayers are paying for their oppression.

Johnson, a Democrat, said he introduced his bill, named after a slain human rights leader, to stand united with "our brothers and sisters in Honduras who are being oppressed."

"Their human rights are being denied and trampled upon by a corrupt government that is sponsored by our own government," he said.

Human rights "don't mean a thing to this current government in Honduras," Johnson said. The bill has about 70 co-sponsors and "we will one day get it passed," he said.

U.S. policies in Honduras, the congressman said, are driving people to migrate north, where Americans are saying they are part of the country's problems, "but we should stop and think a little more deeply about what we're doing and what is happening south of our borders as we're making it untenable for people to continue to live (in Honduras)."

When people are oppressed, they move away from home, Johnson said.

"If we change our policies, we will create a safer and more peaceful environment, but it can't be for the select few, it has to be for all of us," he said.

Jose Artiga, executive director of the SHARE Foundation, said the delegation also was calling for an investigation into the killing and imprisonment of those who protested the November 2017 election that kept Hernandez in power.

"We are asking for the freedom of those political prisoners," he said.

Neery Carillo, the sister of Caceres, the woman after whom the bill is named, also was present to talk about her sister, her work and legacy.

"My family and I continue living with a heavy heart after three years, two months and 15 days" since she was killed, she said. "My youngest sister, Bertita, was brutally assassinated."

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Caceres, who spoke in favor of the environment, human rights and the rights of the indigenous, was shot dead in her home in March 2016. She had been protesting the building of a dam near an indigenous community. In March, the executive of a hydroelectric company was arrested for playing a part in planning her killing.

Her sister said Caceres' death can help bring about the quest for justice she so desired but she also blamed the U.S. government for getting in the way of that by "actively ignoring the [Honduran] government's extensive corruption."

"Berta's death cannot be in vain," Carillo said. "It's not all about Bertita. It's about Hondurans, all Central Americans."

The U.S. must do better to help Central Americans, she said, and they would stop fleeing their countries if it weren't for the violence and corruption the U.S. government helped to create.

Moreno called for the U.S. to stop supporting "an illegal and illegitimate" president, and help instead to restore democracy.

"We have faith in the struggle of this moment. We have faith in the struggle of the future, and we have faith in the future of an authentic brotherhood between the people of Honduras and the United States," he said. "Let us support one another, let's build a bridge now, not build a wall, but a bridge toward justice and peace between Honduras and the United States."