June 30, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to request that your department aggressively work to help secure the immediate release of imprisoned Mexican labor lawyer Susana Prieto Terrazas. Ms. Prieto was arrested and detained by the State of Tamaulipas on June 8, 2020 on trumped-up charges for “mutiny, threats and coercion.”

We agree with U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer who has labeled the arrest a “bad indicator” of the Mexican government’s compliance with new labor standards. We urge you to raise the issue of Ms. Prieto’s arrest at the highest levels with your counterparts in Mexico, including in the lead up to and at the reported upcoming White House summit between Donald Trump and the President of Mexico, and ask that you to demand Ms. Prieto’s immediate release. Continuation of Ms. Prieto’s case sends the wrong message to workers and activists that authorities in Mexico at all levels of government will not protect workers’ rights from threats and violations.

Ms. Prieto has a long history of advocating for the labor rights of workers in factories near the U.S.-Mexico border. In her work, Ms. Prieto has demanded higher wages for workers in Mexican factories and defended workers protesting for proper health and safety measures to protect against COVID-19 in reopened facilities. Ms. Prieto’s work has been important, as the deadly virus has killed dozens of workers. Activists like Ms. Prieto are fighting to implement recently improved Mexican labor laws by seeking to register a new independent union to replace a company-connected protection contract agreement, which is a core protection guaranteed by the renegotiated North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Mexico’s law.

While it was encouraging to see the Mexican Ministry of Labor and the National Commission for Human Rights call for due process in Ms. Prieto’s trial, it is a tragic commentary for labor reform in Mexico that judicial proceedings on this matter are even occurring given Ms. Prieto is being detained because she sought to organize independent unions and help Mexican workers defend their rights. Moreover, her life is at risk while awaiting a final resolution to her case.

2 Ways and Means Committee Hearing on the 2020 Trade Policy Agenda, Wednesday, June 17, 2020
because Mexican jails, like those in the United States, are hotbeds for COVID-19 transmission. This is made worse since Ms. Prieto was punitively denied bail.

We sincerely hope that all levels of the Mexican government respect labor rights, the freedom to organize independent unions, and independent bargaining powers enshrined in Mexican law and the renegotiated NAFTA. However, we question this commitment considering Ms. Prieto’s arrest, the subsequent treatment she has endured.

As we approach the July 1 entry into force for the renegotiated NAFTA, the arrest of Ms. Prieto sends the wrong signal that the renegotiated NAFTA is not on track to deliver the improved Mexican labor conditions and thus diminished incentives for U.S. job outsourcing promised by this administration. We urge you to raise these issues with your counterparts as soon as possible, especially in advance of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s reported visit to the United States.

Sincerely,

_____________________________
Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress

Letter also signed by following:

Rep. Don Beyer
Rep. Suzanne Bonamici
Rep. Brendan F. Boyle
Rep. André Carson
Rep. Judy Chu
Rep. David N. Cicilline
Rep. Steve Cohen
Rep. Danny K. Davis
Rep. Peter A. DeFazio
Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro
Rep. Ted Deutch
Rep. Debbie Dingell
Rep. Veronica Escobar
Rep. Adriano Espaillat
Rep. Jesús G. “Chuy” García
Rep. Jimmy Gomez
Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva
Rep. Brian Higgins
Rep. Marcy Kaptur
Rep. Ro Khanna
Rep. Dan Kildee
Rep. John Larson
Rep. Barbara Lee
Rep. Andy Levin
Rep. Zoe Lofgren
Rep. Alan Lowenthal
Rep. Stephen F. Lynch
Rep. Grace Meng
Rep. Gwen Moore
Rep. Donald Norcross
Rep. Eleanor H. Norton
Rep. Ilhan Omar
Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr.
Rep. Mark Pocan
Rep. Ayanna Pressley
Rep. David Pressley
Rep. Jamie Raskin
Rep. Bobby L. Rush
Rep. Tim Ryan
Rep. Linda Sánchez
Rep. John P. Sarbanes
Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon
Rep. Jan Schakowsky
Rep. José E. Serrano
Rep. Terri A. Sewell
Rep. Albio Sires
Rep. Darren Soto
Rep. Thomas R. Suozzi
Rep. Mike Thompson
Rep. Rashida Tlaib
Rep. David Trone
Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez
Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman
Rep. Peter Welch
Rep. Susan Wild