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August 2, 2012

The Honorable Roberta Jacobson
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

I am writing to express my concern regarding Ecuador's upcoming renewal of its trade preference status with the United States under the Andean Trade Preference Act (ATPA) and the ongoing human rights abuses that are occurring in country, including violations against the rule of law and the freedom of speech.

Although I am a firm supporter of free trade and the ATPA, this agreement's effectiveness relies on full cooperation from every participating member state. Ecuador has failed to meet ATPA eligibility criteria in the areas of due process of law, foreign investment protection, and intellectual property rights. Under the rule of Rafael Correa, U.S. investors and companies are facing deteriorating business conditions and the threat of expropriations by the regime. Therefore, Ecuador should not be included in the upcoming extension of the Act until all of these problems are resolved.

In addition to declining business conditions, Correa has continued his assault against the media and his efforts to assert complete control of the judiciary in Ecuador. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, several broadcast stations have been recently closed and they are "concerned these closures reflect an effort to control the flow of information, suppress dissent, and expand pro-government media."

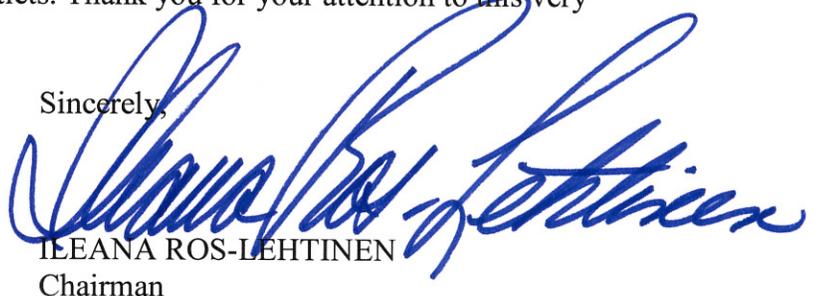
I am troubled that the American Bar Association-Rule of Law Initiative (ABA-ROLI), an organization that receives U.S. taxpayer funding, sponsors programs to aid and legitimize the politically biased Ecuadorian judiciary, which may support Rafael Correa's efforts to undermine and control the judicial system. Last month, I expressed my concern that the ABA-ROLI hosted an event in Washington, DC, without objection from the U.S. Embassy in Quito, which gave the Ecuadorian Judicial Council a platform to promote their political propaganda. Our priority should be to condemn Correa's use of the judicial system to attack the independent media and shine a light on the injustices being committed under this regime.

Earlier this year, Correa continued to abuse the judicial system by filing a suit against two journalists asking for \$10 million in damages because the journalists reported news that was critical of the Correa regime. Also this year, Ecuador's corrupt court system upheld a criminal libel judgment against Ecuador's largest newspaper, *El Universo*, for \$42 million in a move to once again reward Correa's efforts to silence his opposition. U.S. taxpayer dollars should not be spent so that a tyrant leader can violate human rights and manipulate the judicial system for his own political ambitions.

In recent years, Ecuador has strengthened its bilateral relationships with dangerous rogue regimes and leaders, particularly Iran's Ahmadinejad. Ecuador has signed numerous joint agreements with the Iranian regime, including a \$30 million joint mining venture, and has welcomed an increased presence of Iranian "diplomatic" missions. This alliance illustrates Correa's willingness to undermine the security interests of the U.S. in favor of close ties with radical regimes across the globe. Correa has further strained the U.S.-Ecuador relationship by threatening to bar USAID from operating in the country.

While I remain a strong supporter of free trade, Ecuador's refusal to live up to its commitments under the ATPA should not be rewarded by receiving an extension of the Act. The United States must condemn Correa's continual efforts to silence the free press, intimidate the media, and shut down opposing media outlets. Thank you for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



LEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Chairman

CC: The Honorable William R. Brownfield,
Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

The Honorable Miriam E. Sapiro,
Deputy U.S. Trade Representative