Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We are deeply concerned with the lack of accountability and transparency regarding the role of the Organization of American States (OAS) in last year’s election and political crisis in Bolivia. As the New York Times recently noted, OAS claims of electoral fraud following Bolivia’s October 2019 elections were “seized on” by President Evo Morales’s political opponents “to escalate protests, gather international support, and push Mr. Morales from power with military support weeks later.”

Given that the OAS has been invited to monitor Bolivia’s next elections—scheduled for September 6th and postponed until October 18th—we urge the administration to use its voice at the OAS to advocate for a thorough, independent assessment of the OAS’s statements and reports regarding Bolivia’s 2019 elections.

As you are likely aware, the de facto authorities that seized power following Morales’ forced resignation have promoted a racist, anti-indigenous agenda and deployed the military to violently repress protests, resulting in the killing and injury of many civilians. OAS Secretary General Luís Almagro was quick to recognize the unelected president, Jeanine Añez, and has failed to speak out regarding the deterioration of human rights and persecution of political opponents taking place under her rule.

A study casting doubt on the OAS claims was featured in a June 7 report in the New York Times. It concluded, as previous independent analyses have done, that claims by the OAS of an “inexplicable change” in the trend of the vote count following the October election are based on an apparently flawed statistical analysis. Instead of responding to this and other critiques of OAS claims in a meaningful fashion, OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro has engaged in ad hominem attacks against their authors, as well as an attack on the reporting of the New York Times, suggesting that it is a purveyor of fake news. The OAS has also refused to answer basic questions from researchers, media outlets or from Members of Congress regarding its press statements, the data it used, or how it reached its conclusions.

In February of this year, the government of Mexico, backed by other regional governments, called on the OAS Secretary General to authorize an independent review of the OAS electoral department’s analysis of Bolivia’s 2019 elections as well as an assessment of the human rights violations reportedly caused by erroneous OAS assertions regarding those elections. It is our understanding that they have yet to receive a response.

In light of the fact that the OAS has been invited to monitor Bolivia’s next presidential election, it is particularly concerning that Secretary Almagro and his colleagues continue to avoid answering for statements and actions that may have contributed to the erosion of democracy and human rights in Bolivia. The U.S. Congress appropriates the majority of the OAS’s budget. We therefore have a responsibility to ensure that American taxpayer dollars are used to support
organizations that function transparently and that uphold democratic norms rather than undermine them.

The OAS is poised to make a determination of the freedom, fairness, and integrity of the upcoming elections in Bolivia, even as under the unelected Añez government, various high-profile political opponents—including leading presidential candidate Luis Arce—face dubious charges that include corruption, terrorism, and sedition. Government critics in the media and indigenous and trade union leaders have also been detained and threatened, while military force has been deployed against nonviolent protesters. Despite initially claiming to play merely a caretaker role during the interim period, Añez has repeatedly delayed elections and reversed her position in order to run for president herself.

Given this troubling situation, we urge you to use the diplomatic resources of the State Department to immediately seek a full, independent review of OAS statements and reports regarding Bolivia’s 2019 elections. In addition, our government should work with other OAS members to ensure that corrective measures are taken to ensure that future OAS electoral observation missions perform their functions in an independent, impartial and professional manner.

Sincerely,

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Jan Schakowsky
United States Representative

Henry C. “Hank” Johnson, Jr.
United States Representative

Barbara Lee
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Andy Levin
James P. McGovern
Ilhan Omar
Nydia M. Velázquez
Bobby Rush
Jesús G. "Chuy" Garcia
Rashida Tlaib
Bonnie Watson Coleman
Ayanna Pressley
Joseph P. Kennedy III

Earl Blumenauer
Alan Lowenthal
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Pramila Jayapal
Susan Wild
Mark Pocan
Frederica S. Wilson
Maxine Waters
Jared Huffman
Raúl M. Grijalva
Jamie Raskin
Ro Khanna