

HONDURAS SOLIDARITY NETWORK

SUMMARY OF LOBO REGIME VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS SINCE MID-MARCH ESCALATION

Over the last few weeks, attacks against peaceful demonstrators and human rights defenders have intensified throughout Honduras. Under the regime of Porfirio Lobo, who assumed power following undemocratic elections in late 2009, the targeted violent attacks against political opponents and human rights advocates that began after the June 28, 2009 coup d'état has continued unabated. Since mid-March the magnitude of police repression has reached an intensity similar to the months immediately following the coup with brutal attacks against protesting teachers, health workers and students, the non-governmental Honduran human rights Truth Commission and Garifuna leader Miriam Miranda.

The escalation of the repression began when teachers took to the streets to protest attempts to privatize the education system, delays in the payment of their salaries, and underfunding of their pensions all in the context of a broader demand for a return to democracy. Their peaceful demonstrations, which other sectors such as health care workers and students soon joined, have been met with unrestrained assaults and arbitrary arrests by Honduran security forces. Human rights defenders, media workers and other groups have also endured increased attacks. The following is an incomplete list of attacks that have occurred in recent weeks, most of which have received little or no coverage in the international media:

On March 17th, in the cities of Tegucigalpa, Comayagua, and Danlí, police, as well as men in civilian clothing driving cars without license plates, repressed peaceful demonstrations of teachers and members of the National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP). According to a preliminary report, as many as 50 people were detained, wounded, and beaten.

On March 18th, Ilse Velasquez, the 59 year-old teacher, lost conscience on the street after a tear-gas canister fired by riot police struck her forehead. The cloud of toxic smoke that surrounded her severely affected the respiratory system. Moments later, Mrs. Velasquez was hit by a car that caused severe internal bruising. Although Ilse was assisted by other teachers and demonstrators that took her to a nearby hospital, she died in an emergency room.

On March 21st, in Tegucigalpa, police directly aimed tear gas canisters at staff of TV Globo and Channel 36 who were trying to record and report on police actions.

On March 22, in Tegucigalpa, police launched tear gas bombs into the building which houses the offices of the secondary school teachers union, COPEMH, and the non-governmental Truth Commission.

During this period, the following persons suffered harassment and/or death threats

- Blanca Azucena Espinoza, President, Buenos Amigos Cooperative, Aguán
- Dr. Leo Valladares Lanza, former Human Rights Commissioner of Honduras
- Pedro Vicente Elvir, Dagoberto Posadas and Eduardo Argueta Santos, trade unionists
- Kenia Oliva and Karol Cardenas, human rights lawyers, COFADEH
- Trinidad Sánchez, Director, Alternative Commerce Network (Red COMAL)
- Héctor Renán Soto, Director, Civil Society Group.

On March 25, members of the army and riot police surrounded the offices of the Middle School Teachers Union in Tegucigalpa and released tear gas at the building when any of the more than 30 people inside, including teachers, students and journalists, tried to leave.

On March 25, Channel 36 reporter Richar Casula and his cameraman were taken to a hospital in Tegucigalpa by the Honduran Red Cross after riot police shot tear gas directly at them.

On March 25, antiriot police attacked a peaceful demonstration of parents, students and teachers marching towards the center of Tegucigalpa. The police launched tear gas at the demonstrators from the ground and from helicopters.

On March 28th, internationally known leader of the Garifuna community, Miriam Miranda, was attacked by police during a peaceful protest. She was injured and subjected to racial slurs and detained at the police station in Tela. She was only taken to the hospital after international human rights pressure was brought to bear on the government.

On Monday March 28th, staff of the Commission of Truth Office in San Pedro Sula was startled by a loud explosion on the roof that caused damage to the ceiling. Attorney Brenda Mejía, regional Coordinator of the office, had just returned to Honduras after participating in the March 25th, Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) hearings, on the issue of "Criminalization of Social Protest" in Honduras. After her presentation, a Honduran military officer attending the hearing spoke to Brenda in an intimidating manner. The incident was reported to the Prosecutors Office however, there is yet no conclusive determination as to what occurred.

On March 30, in response to a National Civic Strike called by many organizations throughout Honduras to protest the repression and lack of democracy, the police and army carried out the following human rights violations across the country:

- In San Pedro Sula, the security forces violently removed students with tear gas from the Central University of the Sula Valley, resulting in dozen of student detained and two students wounded, including Silvia Ayala and Josue Rodriguez.
- In Santa Cruz de Yojoa, Potrerillos, La Lima y Choloma, Cortés, 43 people were detained and suffered pólice abuse while in custody.
- In Las Flores, Santa Cruz, Commissioner Rubí, ordered a violent attack against a peaceful demonstration resulting in 6 people with bullet wounds including Daisy Sabillón y Manuel Miranda. 17 people were detained including Lidia Arita, Nedi Santos Castillo, Antonio Maradiaga y Glenda Cabrera. The anti-riot pólice used guns and knives to blow the tires on more than 30 vehicles and shot tear gas and bullets at the car owners.
- In Potrerillos, pólice detained and beat five people, including Alejandro Duarte García, Luciano Barrera Monroy, Haydee Márquez del Cid, Junior Mejía Murillo and Gloria Marina Perdomo Rodríguez.
- In Villanueva, lawyers Evaristo Euceda and Iris Bude, were physically and verbally abused by pólice while carrying out human rights work.
- In Tacamiche, La Lima, Cortés, repressive forces sent toxic gases into homes in response to an earlier peaceful road blockade. School director Esmeralda Flores and teachers Fabricio Sevilla and Pedro Valladares were taken into pólice custody.
- In Planes, Tocoa, the pólice and military fired live gunshots at peaceful demonstrators participating in the National Civic Strike resulting in the death of a security guard of a local business. Eleven people were wounded including teachers Waldina Díaz, Elías Erazo Hernández and Eduardo Rivera, Mauro Rosales of the United Movement of Aguan, Olanchito TV reporter David Corea, Juan Antonio Vásquez, President of Bolero, Farmworker Coop members Neptalí Esquivel, Paulino Chávez Rosales, Franklin Hernández, Víctor Euceda, and Daniel Pérez. Eight people were taken into custody.
- In Tegucigalpa, hundreds of tear gas bombs were launched at students at the National Autonomous University, violating the principle of university autonomy normally protected by law. The military detained six students accused of ilegal demonstration, including: Maynor Lizandro Aguilar, Marlon Alexander Rosales Rico, and Douglas Manuel Flores, as well as Oneyri Oneill Moreno Mejía of the Arco Iris Collective and Marlon Nahúm Estrada university taxi dispatcher. Josué Sevilla and Elwin Meza were beaten with billy clubs. All were later released.
- In Las Brisas, Tegucigalpa, pólice took three people off a public bus, including Emerson Stevez Flores, age 15, Víctor Geovanny Flores age 14, y Wilfredo Flores Aguilar, age 33 and detained them for 3 hours at the Barrio La Granja Police Station,

- Near midnight, 6 heavily armed men dressed as civilians attempted to kidnap Edy Guifarro, employee of the True Commission, when the taxi he was riding in stopped in San Jose' Vega neighborhood, Tegucigalpa. The men surrounded the vehicle and beat Guifarro. Guifarro escaped. The men shot at him 6 times. Guifarra has a ruptured ear drum and bruises to the skull.
- At the Offices of the Union of Middle School Teachers, Tegucigalpa, pólice agents planted molotov cocktails in the garbage of the office and then reported this "discovery" in an attempt to discredit the organization.
- In Ajuterique, Comayagua, 500 families who had taken possession of abandoned land seven years ago were violently removed by the pólice and army who destroyed homes, a school and the community church. Five persons were detained including: Betuel Guillen, age19, Edwin Guillen, age18, Osmán Gómez, age19, Pedro Joel Hernández, and Selvin Javier Centeno.
- In Nacaome, Valle, the pólice and army attacked the community sending tear gases into their homes with children inside them. Two month old, Cristopher de Jesús Bonilla García, was taken to a medical center for asphyxiation. Police launched tear gas directly at his parents to try and prevent his them from attending to the baby. Cristopher's father, 17 years old, had to jump a wall, give the baby mouth to mouth breathing assistance and give him to his grandfather who was able to get him to care. The pólice detained Mario de Jesús Saucedo, age 19, and José Raúl Mendoza Posadas age 17, who had been out buying food for his mother. The pólice also detained 74 year old human rights defender, Andrés Abelino Ortiz Ortega .
- In La Flor, Amapala, Valle, pólice agents tried to intimidate the community demanding to know if they were members of the Resistance and if they had participated in the National Civic Strike.

Since Pepe Lobo took power in January 2010, through undemocratic elections that were not recognized by most foreign governments, human rights group have documented 34 political murders, including teachers, peasants, anti-coup resistance groups, union leaders, former government officials, journalists, and members of the LGBT community. Human Rights organizations also report 309 suspicious deaths (participation of state security forces considered highly probable) and 34 murders over land disputes.

Sources:

COFADEH (www.cofadeh.org)

Friendship Office of the Americas (www.friendshipamericas.org)

Center for Constitutional Rights (<http://ccrjustice.org/international-law-and-accountability>)

Rights Action (http://www.rightsaction.org/articles/Honduras_is_burning_033111.html)