

February 6, 2013

Reports Received by CCR of Human Rights Violations in Honduras in November and December 2012

Since the June 2009 coup d'état in Honduras, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) and its international partners have received and compiled an alarming number of reports of human rights violations. This summary of human rights violations in November and December 2012 follows monthly reports CCR has compiled since December 2011. As was the case in CCR's previous summaries, it is clear that Honduran state actors, namely the Honduran National Police and the Honduran military were directly involved in some of the abuses listed below. This list is not comprehensive, as numerous human rights violations go undocumented, unreported or uncollected.

In November, an unidentified DOS official revealed to the press that the U.S. was withholding up to \$50 million in counter-narcotics and security funding to Honduras due to concerns over human rights abuses. This news was reported by the Associated Press as part of a news story on the involvement of Honduran soldiers in the May 26, 2012 murder of 15-year-old Ebed Yanes.¹ The soldiers had been trained, vetted and equipped by the U.S. government.² Though the withholding of funds seemed to signal a step in the right direction, it was revealed later in November that the U.S. unfortunately had resumed sharing radar intelligence with Honduras.³ Even more discouragingly, U.S. then-Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough, travelling to Honduras as part of a high-level U.S. delegation, reaffirmed U.S. support for Honduras, stating that "at no other time in recent memory has our engagement been so robust."⁴ Plainly, support of security forces complicit in human rights abuses in Honduras continues, despite mounting evidence of continued police and military misconduct.

On November 15, CCR and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) submitted evidence to the International Criminal Court (ICC) regarding the "dire and worsening state of affairs in Honduras," including expert testimony, reports of crimes against humanity committed in the last year, and evidence showing there has been no accountability so far for the crimes in Honduras since the 2009 coup.⁵

Also on November 15, a letter raising serious concerns regarding violence against opposition leaders was sent by sixteen human rights organizations, including CCR, to top State Department (DOS) and U.S.

¹ "US withholding funds, demanding answers after Honduran teen killed by US vetted unit," *Associated Press*, November 14, 2012, available at: <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/11/14/us-withholding-funds-demanding-answers-after-honduran-teen-killed-by-us-vetted>

² *Id.*

³ "US envoy pledges continued support to Honduras," *Associated Press*, November 28, 2012, available at: <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/us-envoy-pledges-continued-support-honduras>

⁴ "Deputy National Security Advisor Denis R. McDonough Press Statement after Meeting with President Lobo," *Embassy of the United States*, November 28, 2012, available at: <http://honduras.usembassy.gov/sp-112812-eng.html>

⁵ "Impunity in Honduras for Crimes Against Humanity Between 28 June 2009 and 31 October 2012," *CCR/FIDH*, November 15, 2012, available at: <http://ccrjustice.org/files/Honduras%20ICC%20Filing.pdf>

embassy officials. The letter strongly condemned the violence and intimidation used against opposition party members in the period leading up to the November 18 primary elections and called on the State Department to publicly acknowledge and denounce the ongoing pattern of repression of Honduran opposition political candidates and members of social movements. It also noted the human rights conditions placed on funding of the Honduran police and military per the foreign operations appropriations bill and stressed that measures to protect and investigate abuses against candidates, journalists and activists are absolutely imperative in order to comply with this mandate. Moreover, the letter urged that U.S. assistance associated with this requirement should be suspended if the Honduran government does not effectively comply.

On December 2, the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) Observatory of Violence released a report finding that at least 149 people have been killed by the police during the last twenty-three months.⁶

On December 13, relatives of those who have died at the hands of Honduran military personnel held a press conference at the headquarters of the Committee of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH).⁷ The families of victims and COFADEH staff denounced the ongoing impunity in specific cases that involved Honduran soldiers, as well as the May 2012 shootings involving U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agents in Ahuas. Of the cases, COFADEH Director Bertha Oliva said, “we have no other option other than publicizing them. We know that here in Honduras, it is going to be very difficult to get justice and we're not willing to keep silent and go along with the whitewashing that the Public Prosecutors Office is engaged in.”

Incidents with Police and/or Military Involvement:

- November 1 [*warrantless search and seizure, threats, intimidation*]: A group of police and investigators searched the home of Abelardo Suazo, teachers union leader and Liberation and Re-foundation Party (LIBRE) mayoral candidate, without a warrant. Suazo denounced the raid as a continuation of persecution of teachers by Minister of Education Marlon Escoto and decried the endangerment of the lives of his family and friends.⁸
- November 2 [*assassinations*]: Three farmers connected to the land rights movement - Orlando Campos, Reynaldo Rivera Paz and José Omar Paz - were killed in a drive-by shooting as they

⁶ “Honduran police accused of murdering scores,” *Fox News Latino*, December 3, 2012, available at:

<http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/12/03/honduran-police-accused-murdering-scores/>

⁷ “Relatives of victims of military operations demand justice,” *Friendship Office of the Americas*, December 15, 2012, available at: <http://www.friendshipamericas.org/relatives-victims-military-operations-demand-justice>

⁸ “Denuncian a ministro de Educación de desatar una feroz persecución contra dirigentes magisteriales,”

Defensores en Línea, November 2, 2012, available at:

http://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?view=article&catid=54%3Aden&id=2305%3Adenuncian-a-ministro-de-educacion-de-desatar-una-feroz-persecucion-contra-dirigentes-magisteriales&format=pdf&option=com_content&Itemid=171

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waited for a bus in Tocoa. The following day, police officer Marvin Noe García Santos was arrested for the murders.⁹

- November 2 [*attempted assassination*]: Maria Luisa Borjas, a LIBRE candidate for mayor of Tegucigalpa, reported that masked armed policemen had followed and accosted her friend's daughter, who drives a car similar to Borjas' car. She asserted that the police intended to assassinate her but aborted the mission when they realized they had stopped the wrong car. Borjas was dismissed in 2003 from her job as head of Internal Affairs of the Honduran Police after declaring that a purge of the police forces was leaving corrupt officials in place while removing staff who were investigating police involvement in social cleansing killings, including that of the current national chief of police, Juan Carlos Bonilla.¹⁰
- November 2 [*warrantless arrests, detentions*]: In the middle of the night, fifteen members of the National Police arrested three environmentalists in Comunidad de la Tejera, Río Blanco. The environmentalists - Felipe Gómez, Gerardo Sánchez and Domingo Sánchez - stated that the police neither presented arrest orders nor explained where they were going to detain them. They were later granted provisional release. The Honduran Council of Popular and Indigenous Civic Organizations (COPINH) condemned the action as an attempt to intimidate those organizing against hydroelectric and mining projects.¹¹
- November 30 [*detentions*]: Five leaders of the Unified Peasant Movement of Aguán (MUCA) - President of MUCA Orlando Romero, Celio Rodríguez, José García, Alejandro Sorto and Iván Dubon - were detained for more than two hours by police and members of the National Directorate of Criminal Investigation (DNIC) in San Pedro Sula.¹²
- December 1 [*warrantless arrest, detention*]: Military forces acting as part of the Xatruch III operation detained campesino Santos Maldonado while he was riding a bus on the Sonaguera Trujillo route. Maldonado, a resident of the Remolinos community and a member of the

⁹ "Un agente de Policía, principal sospechoso de triple crimen en Colón," *El Heraldo*, November 5, 2012 available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/Un-agente-de-Policia-principal-sospechoso-de-triple-crimen-en-Colon>. See also: "Is the World Bank Funding Death Squads in Honduras?" *Rights Action*, November 8, 2012, available at: <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/honduras-archives-46/3958-is-the-world-bank-funding-death-squads-in-honduras>

¹⁰ "Ex comisionada Maria Luisa Borjas denuncia que la quieren asesinar y pide cita con Lobo," *El Proceso*, November 6, 2012, available at:

<http://www.proceso.hn/2012/11/06/Term%C3%B3metro/Ex.comisionada.Mar/59787.html>

¹¹ "Por los intereses oligarcas, detienen ilegalmente en Río Blanco a tres compañeros Lencas del COPINH," Honduran Council of Popular and Indigenous Civic Organizations (COPINH), November 2, 2012, available at <http://www.copinh.org/article/por-los-intereses-oligarcas-detienen-ilegalmente-e/>

¹² "Bajo Aguán: Policía detiene y criminaliza a cinco dirigentes campesinos del MUCA," Movimiento Unificado Campesino del Aguan (MUCA), December 3, 2012, available at: <http://viacampesina.org/es/index.php/temas-principales-mainmenu-27/derechos-humanos-mainmenu-40/1556-bajo-aguan-policia-detiene-y-criminaliza-a-cinco-dirigentes-campesinos-del-muca>

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Gregorio Chavez cooperative, was taken off the bus at a military checkpoint, arrested and charged with land theft.¹³

- December 2 [*detention*]: Three members of MUCA were detained at a police checkpoint near the community of Los Pinos in La Ceiba. Celio Rodríguez, Henry Perez and Daniel Munguía were handcuffed, taken to the police station and released after two hours. Rodríguez had been previously detained just days before (see above).¹⁴

Incidents in which Level of Police and/or Military Involvement is Unknown:

- November 3 [*assassination*]: Edgardo Adalid Motiño Flores, a LIBRE candidate for mayor of Yoro, was shot several times at close range outside of the LIBRE headquarters after participating in a rally. Having sustained gunshot wounds to the head and chest, he died shortly after arriving at the hospital.¹⁵
- November 8 [*assassination, injury, repression of press*]: Journalism student Ángel Edgardo López Fiallos was pursued, shot four times in the head and killed by two gunmen on motorcycles in Tegucigalpa. Gerardo Enrique Centeno Mejía was also injured in the attack.¹⁶
- November 9 [*kidnapping, assassination*]: José Cecilio Pérez Martínez, president of the El Despertar cooperative and member of the Authentic Peasant Protest Movement of Aguán (MARCA), was kidnapped by three armed men in Tocoa. Pérez was found dead the following day inside of the car in which he was kidnapped; his body showed signs of torture and multiple bullet wounds.¹⁷
- November 10 [*attempted assassination*]: Yoni Rivas, a MUCA leader and candidate for Congress, was ambushed along with fellow MUCA leader Vitalino Álvarez by unknown attackers armed with machine guns near La Confianza. Though the attackers reportedly discharged two rounds of ammunition, Rivas and Álvarez escaped unhurt.¹⁸

¹³ "Bajo Aguán: detienen a campesino por la lucha a la tierra en el," *La Vía Campesina*, December 3, 2012, available at: <http://viacampesina.org/es/index.php/temas-principales-mainmenu-27/derechos-humanos-mainmenu-40/1552-bajo-aguan-detienen-a-campesino-por-la-lucha-a-la-tierra-en-el>

¹⁴ "Ola de persecución continua tres campesinos del MUCA detenidos en la Ceiba," *La Vía Campesina*, December 3, 2012, available at: <http://viacampesina.org/es/index.php/temas-principales-mainmenu-27/derechos-humanos-mainmenu-40/1555-ola-de-persecucion-continua-tres-campesinos-del-muca-detenidos-en-la-ceiba>

¹⁵ "Matan precandidato a alcalde por el MRP del Partido Libre," *La Tribuna*, November 4, 2012, available at: <http://www.latribuna.hn/2012/11/04/matan-precandidato-a-alcalde-por-el-mrp-del-partido-libre/>

¹⁶ "Matan a estudiante de periodismo en el centro de Tegucigalpa," *El Heraldo*, November 8, 2012, available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/Matan-a-estudiante-de-periodismo-en-el-centro-de-Tegucigalpa>

¹⁷ "Campesinos condenan muerte de presidente de cooperativa," *La Tribuna*, November 11, 2012, available at: <http://www.latribuna.hn/2012/11/11/campesinos-condenan-muerte-de-presidente-de-cooperativa/>; See also:

"Un paso más en el genocidio del Aguán," *Otramerica*, November 13, 2012, available at:

<http://otramerica.com/radar/un-paso-mas-genocidio-aguan-honduras-asesinan-lider-marca/2600>; See also:

"Ejecutan a presidente de cooperativa campesina," *Tiempo*, November 10, 2012, available at:

<http://www.tiempo.hn/portada/item/745-ejecutan-a-presidente-de-cooperativa-campesina>

¹⁸ "Cumplen familiares de desaparecidos en Honduras 30 años exigiendo justicia," *Radio Habana Cuba*, November 30, 2012, available at: <http://www.radiohc.cu/noticias/internacionales/25798-cumplen-familiares-de-desaparecidos-en-honduras-30-anos-exigiendo-justicia.html>; See also: "Murders of Teenagers and Opposition Party Members Underscore Impunity in Honduras and the Failure of U.S. 'Vetting,'" *Upside Down World*,

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- November 13 [*harassment*]: Representatives of the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) went to the headquarters of the Honduran Council of Popular and Indigenous Civic Organizations (COPINH) in Intibucá and ordered three community radio stations operating there to reduce the strength of their broadcasts and switch to another frequency. The CONATEL representatives threatened to confiscate the stations' equipment and a substantial fine.
- November 21 [*assassination*]: Trinidad Girón Valladares, a 68-year-old shopkeeper, was shot and killed in the Zonal Belén market in the city of Comayagüela. She is the mother of David Díaz of the Venas Abiertas Collective, an opposition group that has taken part in demonstrations denouncing the lack of justice for victims of political violence.¹⁹
- November 25 [*assassination*]: Adelmo Leiva, member of MARCA El Despertar cooperative, was shot and killed by unidentified men on motorcycles at a bus terminal in Trujillo.²⁰
- November 27 [*death threats*]: Environmental journalist Juana "Lolita" Dolores Valenzuela reported receiving multiple death threats via email. She attributed the threats to her coverage of and opposition to open-pit mining projects in Honduras.²¹
- November 29 [*assassination*]: Wesler Santos Avila, a 26-year-old member of the Campesino Recuperation Movement of Aguan (MOCRA), was shot and killed while riding his motorcycle in the town of La Confianza. Santos was associated with several other campesino organizations as well.²²
- December 7 [*assassination*]: Eduardo Alejandro Coello Chávez, the 32-year-old son of the former ambassador to the Organization of American States Dr. Carlos Sosa Coello, was found dead with several bullet wounds in his head.²³
- December 24 [*intimidation, threats*]: According to MUCA and el Consejo Indígena Santa María los Laureles, landowner Jose David Morales, who has previously threatened to kill members of

November 19, 2012, available at: <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/news-briefs-archives-68/3977-murders-of-teenagers-and-opposition-party-members-underscore-impunity-in-honduras-and-the-failure-of-us-vetting>; See also: "Honduras, Bajo Aguán, another farmer leader assassinated," *La Vía Campesina*, November 24, 2012, available at: <http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/human-rights-mainmenu-40/1344-honduras-bajo-aguan-another-farmer-leader-asesinated>

¹⁹ "A disparos asesinan a comerciante en el zonal Belen," *El Heraldo*, November 21, 2012, available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/A-disparos-asesinan-a-comerciante-en-el-zonal-Belen>; See also: "Ultiman dueña de bodega en el Mercado Zonal Belen," *Tiempo*, November 21, 2012, available at: <http://www.tiempo.hn/sucesos/item/1688-ultiman-due%C3%B1a-de-bodega-en-el-mercado-zonal-bel%C3%A9n>

²⁰ "Asesinan a campesino en terminal de buses," *La Prensa*, November 25, 2012, available at: <http://www.laprensa.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/Asesinan-a-campesino-en-terminal-de-buses#.UMjAU-hfe8>

²¹ "Periodista ambientalista amenazada de muerte," *Revistazo*, November 28, 2012, available at: <http://www.revistazo.biz/web2/index.php/seguridad/item/449-periodista-ambientalista-amenazada-de-muerte>; See also: "Amenazan de muerte a periodista Dolores (Lolita) Valenzuela," *Hondudiario*, November 27, 2012, available at: <http://www.hondudiario.com/content/amenazan-de-muerte-periodista-dolores-lolita-valenzuela>

²² "Asesinan a otro dirigente campesino en Honduras," *Tribuna*, November 30, 2012, available at: <http://www.tribunadelabaha.com.mx/noticiasdepuertovallarta/index.cfm?op=por2&recordID=53608&seccion=Global&tit=Asesinan%20a%20otro%20dirigente%20campesino%20en%20Honduras>

²³ "Ultiman a hijo del exembajador de Honduras ante la OEA," *Tiempo*, December 7, 2012, available at: <http://tiempo.hn/portada/item/3000-ultiman-a-hijo-del-exembajador-de-honduras-ante-la-oea>

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this community, sent five contracted gunmen to occupied land in La Paz. The gunmen were present for over two hours.²⁴

²⁴ “Denuncian presencia de sicarios en La Paz,” *El Heraldo*, December 30, 2012, available at: <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/Denuncian-presencia-de-sicarios-en-La-Paz>