

Rights Action
November 4, 2010

BELOW:

- Letter from 30 Members of the US Congress to Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State
- News article, El Salvador: “Hondurans denounce return of death squads”
- News article, Honduras: “Honduran Unions and Resistance Protest New Wage Laws”

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<http://visitor.constantcontact.com/d.jsp?m=1103480765269>

More information: Annie Bird (annie@rightsaction.org) & Grahame Russell (info@rightsaction.org, Rights Action co-directors)

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DELEGATION TO HONDURAS
Nov 27 – Dec 4, 2010

Please join our 9th delegation to Honduras. For information and an application, contact Jenny Atlee, Friendship Office of the Americas: jennya@friendshipamericas.org

Dear Friends,

Your presence is urgently needed in Honduras. Over a year after the coup in Honduras, heavy repression continues to destroy lives, families and trample human rights. Levels of impunity, militarization and para-militarization create what partners describe as a state of war against the people.

This week, despite testimony and calls from Honduran human rights organizations, many of you, and 30 members of Congress to suspend U.S. police and military aid to Honduras -- U.S. State Department officials traveled to Honduras, announcing plans to intensify the militarization of Honduras through the Merida Initiative.

Your presence is needed in Honduras to bear witness to the human rights crisis, the efforts of the non-violent resistance movement to transform their society and the deadly impact of U.S. policy.

In defiance of a ruthless campaign of state terror, the broad based, non-violent resistance movement continues to grow; sustaining pressure on a government considered to be illegitimate and charting a course towards a Constituent Assembly as a way to address profound structural inequalities and re-found the country. Ten journalists have been killed this year for attempting to tell this story.

As the United States intensifies its military machinery in Honduras, help us to intensify our solidarity with those whose lives and bodies bear the brunt of “golpes,” political persecution, militarization and maintain the dream of a society transformed.

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LETTER FROM 30 MEMBERS OF CONGRESS
October 19, 2010

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We are encouraged to see that the U.S. government has acknowledged the gravity of the political and human rights situation in Honduras. The August 4, 2010, trip by senior State Department official Maria Otero to review the state of human rights and democratic governance under Honduran President Porfirio Lobo demonstrates a new assertiveness by the Obama Administration to observe and protect political and human rights in that country. We believe U.S. assistance, particularly military and police aid, should be suspended until the government of Porfirio Lobo distances itself from individuals involved in the June 28, 2009, military coup d'etat and adequately addresses the ongoing human and political rights violations.

We have received credible reports from Honduran human rights organizations that abuses continue with near impunity. Members of the

human rights community, journalists and activists continue to be attacked and intimidated. The Honduran Committee of the Families of the Detained and Disappeared (COFADEH), a highly esteemed human rights organization, reports assassinations, arbitrary arrests, beatings and death threats targeting political activists and the human rights workers who attempt to protect them. COFADEH described August as a "black" month for human rights and has documented a disturbing number of incidents that have taken place in recent weeks.

Since the beginning of August 2010, at least six individuals identified with the opposition movement against the Lobo Administration have been murdered, including several rural activists, a teacher union leader and a journalist. Several journalists known for their criticism of the coup d'etat have been arbitrarily detained or suffered physical attacks. An opposition radio station - Radio Uno of San Pedro Sula - was forced off the air and its transmission cables were cut; police fired tear gas and a water cannon at demonstrators outside the radio station. The Honduran authorities have failed to investigate and prosecute dozens of other murders and violent attacks against pro-democratic political activists since the June 28, 2009, coup d'etat. The victims and their families have been left vulnerable with no access to justice. There is serious concern that the rule of law is directly threatened by members of the Honduran police and armed forces.

On the weekend of September 17, 2010, a leader in the Social Security labor union, Juana Bustillo, was assassinated while riding in a car with the union's president Hector Escoto, who was hospitalized. Earlier in September, four peasants were murdered in the Aguan region - home to a land conflict where landless peasants are attempting to secure plots to build homes. In the first incident, three people were killed, allegedly by private security guards of Miguel Facussé Barjóm -- one of Honduras' largest landowners. In the second incident, Francisco Miranda, a leader among landless peasants, was shot several times by unknown men while running errands on his bicycle. The newspaper La Tribuna, owned by Facussé's nephew, reported that the killing was part of a dispute internal to the landless peasants' organization.

On many occasions, Honduran authorities have summarily dismissed the attacks against political activists, human rights defenders and journalists as a symptom of criminality linked to drug trafficking and organized crime. Crime

is a problem; however, since the June 28, 2009, coup, there has been a distinct pattern of political violence that merits a strong U.S. response.

It is our expectation that the Obama Administration will advance justice by urging the Lobo Administration to vigorously investigate and prosecute threats and attacks against activists and journalists, and to suspend any members of the police or military credibly alleged to be involved in such crimes while investigations take place. In addition, the State Department should urge the Lobo Administration to recognize the undeniable political character of many of the attacks against activists and journalists. A strong democracy provides security to those who participate peacefully in political process; lack of security demonstrates deficiencies in Honduran democracy. Tragically, since the August 4, 2010, visit of Undersecretary of State Maria Otero, Honduras has not advanced human rights or political freedoms. Until the government of Honduras makes sustained progress in improving its deplorable human rights record, we believe it is inappropriate to provide direct assistance to Honduran authorities, particularly to the police or military.

We also urge the Obama Administration to refrain from supporting the immediate re-entry of Honduras in the Organization of American States. The Obama Administration does a great disservice to democracy and human rights across the Western Hemisphere by making an exception for Honduras, while the Lobo Administration continues to include perpetrators of the June 28, 2009, coup d'etat and fails to prosecute politically motivated crimes.

Sincerely,

Congressman Sam Farr

Also signed by the following Representatives:

Jesse Jackson Jr.

Danny Davis

Lynne Woolsey

Jan Schakowsky

Bobby Rush

Fortney "Pete" Stark

James Oberstar

Dennis Kucinich

Michael Capuano

Tammy Baldwin
Donald Payne
Barbara Lee
John Oliver
Mike Honda
Linda Sanchez
James McGovern
Donna Edwards
Sheila Jackson Lee
John Garamendi
Keith Ellison
Wm. Lacy Clay
Jose Serrano
Bob Filner
Laura Richardson
Elijah Cummings
Mike Quigley
Luis Gutierrez

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HONDURANS DENOUNCE RETURN OF DEATH SQUADS

San Salvador, Oct 28 (Prensa Latina) Death squads have reappeared in Honduras since the June 28, 2009 military coup, and they are targeting teachers, human rights activist Berta Oliva charged in El Salvador.

Paramilitary groups like CAM (Comando Álvarez Martínez) are behind the selective murders of Honduran opposition activists, and teachers are their main victims, Oliva said, quoted by Co Latino newspaper.

Human rights violations, persecution and selective assassinations are everyday occurrences, showing that the military coup "continues," she said. Ten teachers have been murdered this year for their clear opposition to the current government, a continuation of the coup regime, said Oliva, general coordinator of the Committee of Relatives of Missing Detainees in Honduras.

Oliva made her comments at the 7th Herbert Anaya Sanabria International Human Rights Congress in the Salvadoran capital.

Fifty-six human rights activists have been threatened by different armed groups, she said, urging the Organization of American States to urge the United States not to support the Honduran military while human rights violations continue.

Honduran rural leaders who attended the human rights congress, said a campaign of persecution was being carried out against them to deprive them of their rights to the land.

Matías Valle Cárdenas, vice president of the United Campesino Movement of Aguán, in the department of Colon, said 16 of his comrades had been murdered in the last 6 months.

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HONDURAN UNIONS AND RESISTANCE PROTEST NEW WAGE LAWS TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TIE UP TEGUCIGALPA

Posted: 04 Nov 2010 12:14 PM PDT

On November 3, thousands of teachers, students and other supporters of the teachers tied up traffic for hours in Tegucigalpa in the first mobilization against new actions by the Lobo regime targeting organized workers and educators. The students shut down the center of the capital for four hours with a march to the national congress building. Teachers from other parts of the country had begun arriving in Tegucigalpa and joined the ranks of the Tegucigalpa teachers' unions marching from the national university to the presidential palace. This will likely be only the first of many actions as teachers and other workers' organizations, joined by the resistance movement, respond to the latest attacks on labor by the regime of Pepe Lobo.

In the last days of October the Lobo government launched a new offensive against the Honduran unions and working people. The Congress approved repeal of statutes governing wages for some sectors of organized labor. At the same time Lobo issued an executive order setting the increase for the minimum wages as low as 3 percent a year and creating different wage scales for different regions, industries and categories of workers.

The special articles which Lobo repealed (including Article 49 of the Teachers' Law) guaranteed annual wage increases indexed by set percentages to the yearly increases in the minimum wage. These articles applied to teachers, government workers, public health employees, and public education professionals. The regime wants to eliminate the regular increases and the percentages and force the affected unions to accept whatever increases the government says are affordable each year. This is aimed especially at the teachers, whose militant and organized struggles over many years won for them many benefits and a somewhat higher wage index than other professions. The teachers movement – with more than 60,000 members in six different unions -- is also among the largest organized forces in the resistance movement, which sprung up to oppose last summer's coup d'état and has continued to reject Lobo's government and call for a constitutional assembly.

The teachers anticipated the Lobo government's latest assault on labor, and began mobilizing in mid-October in preparation. Teachers held a four-month strike over the summer, ended with an agreement with the government Aug. 30. But the government has since violated that agreement, stoking the teachers' current wave of resistance.

According to that agreement the Ministry of Education was to pay back wages owed to some 5,500 teachers, but by October it had only paid about 1,500 of them. The regime was also supposed to repay 4 billion lempira (200 million dollars) taken from the teachers' benefit and pension institute, but still has not done so.

The violations of the August agreement are just the latest maneuvers in an ongoing campaign of intimidation, retaliation and violent repression against teachers since the military coup in June 2009. A dozen teachers have been murdered in overtly political assassinations since the coup and many teachers have been beaten or detained. Some union leaders still face charges from their strike earlier this year.

The current strike includes about 65,000 teachers organized in five unions belonging to the FOMH (Federation of Teaching Organizations of Honduras). Their demands include that the government fulfill the earlier agreement, fire the Minister of Education, comply with the entire Teachers' Law and end the repression.

Now the teachers are being joined by other unions and organizations in response to the minimum wage crises.

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Americas with a poverty rate of 60%. The minimum amount of monthly income necessary to meet the most basic needs (the “basic basket”) is more than 8 thousand lempira (\$430). A 3% increase in the minimum wage is an increase of 165 Lempira (\$8.70) a month. Under the Lobo regime’s program, workers in the special enterprise zones and industries will receive the lowest increase for a total monthly salary of about 3, 894.60 lempiras (\$210). This is \$100 less a month than the minimum salary of the other sectors. The highest increase included in the new decree is 7 percent.

The trade union confederations and other urban and rural workers’ groups were demanding a 15% increase in the minimum wage. Meanwhile union leaders and social justice organization noted that even the minimum wage increase of nearly 60% decreed by President Manuel Zelaya in January 2009 was not enough to pull the poorest workers out of subsistence. The wage increase ordered by President Zelaya in 2009 was never fully applied due to the intransigence of the business class and the coup.

Honduran law required that the minimum wage increase be implemented in January 2010, and the law mandated any delays in implementation must be compensated with back pay. . But Lobo did not act to raise the wage until last week, and then ordered back pay only from June 2010 rather than from January. Of course, given the regimes’ record with the teachers and the power and impunity of the oligarchy, it is far from certain that any back pay will be paid out.

But not everyone is suffering. In October, high-ranking functionaries of the Lobo regime (the Council of Ministers) did receive a salary increase of 10,000 lempira a month (\$540). Their monthly total salary is now almost \$5000 a month - about 25 times the minimum salary.

November 4, 2010 – Victoria Cervantes, La Voz de los de Abajo
For more information see: www.resistencia.net, www.honduraslaboral.org

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Update from the

HONDURAS ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT (HAP)

HAP is looking for applicants. For information:
honduras@friendshipamericas.org

Sunday, October 24, 2010

Hi everyone, Here is an update sent today from Honduras Accompaniment Project (HAP) volunteer Lucy Edwards from Ashland, Oregon. Lucy worked with Witness For Peace in Nicaragua in the late 1980s, including some work in Honduras at that time, and is also a journalist, radio producer, and emergency response coordinator in Oregon. Lucy and Pamela Edwards, her Minister and colleague, responded to a short-term emergency accompaniment request through HAP in May of this year to accompany Padre Melo, who many of you know of, a human rights defender and leader with Radio Progreso and ERIC (Reflection, Research and Communication Team) in El Progreso, Yoro, Honduras. Lucy is back in Honduras volunteering with HAP for a few weeks right now, and we are very glad to have her. Please take a minute to read Lucy's update.

The Honduras Accompaniment Project will be accepting applications for human rights accompaniment training offered in the Bay area of California in January 2011 (in collaboration with NISGUA) and in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia, Canada for June 2011 (in coordination with Breaking the Silence). Please stay tuned for more info very soon.

In solidarity,

Caitlin
honduras@friendshipamericas.org
Honduras Accompaniment Project
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Honduras e-news from Lucy
Date: Sun, 24 Oct 2010 16:31:51 -0700 (PDT)
From: Lucy Edwards <westerndesk@yahoo.com>

TEGUCIGALPA Oct 24, 2010

Dear Friends,

We have been traveling since Wednesday (10/20), which always makes it a bit confusing to write--after so many experiences. This letter begins with what I should have written you last week...

I left Ashland on Monday, Oct. 18. I am here with the Honduran Accompaniment Project. It is a small team presently (Caitlin in Honduras, Jenny in Washington, DC and me, visiting), and the project is working on supporting the introduction of perhaps 4 to 6 trained volunteers who can commit 3 months or more to accompaniment work. I am not an expert on Honduras. Jim and I were here in the 1980s and I have made three trips in recent months. We have amazingly knowledgeable friends here, but my letter and analysis is personal and does not represent any particular organization.

*Why Accompaniment? *

International accompaniment provides independent first-hand information to communities outside of Honduras (that's you) and potentially serves as a dissuasive presence in that military or police or others might rethink repressive action or human rights abuses if there are international witnesses. Bad press, so to speak.

*Why do Hondurans need accompaniment? *

1. Coup d'etat

In June of 2009, the Honduran military went to the President's house at 4 a.m. and took him by gunpoint (in his pajamas) to the airport, in classic coup d'etat form. Who was behind the coup? There are unknown elements here, but for sure a small number of very wealthy Hondurans who control most of the resources in the country. There is more to this, and it appears the origins of the coup began during President GW Bush's second term, with ties to that administration. It seems fruitful to explore this, since the United States has a rich history of supporting or implementing nearly every coup d'etat in Latin America in 100 years.

2. Election/Selection

After the coup, a de-facto government was established, headed by a member of Zelaya's own political party (Liberal) and that government set up elections and Porfirio Lobo Soza, a member of the Conservative Party was selected in that process and took office in January, 2010. I hesitate to use the word

elected, because one must question the legitimacy of an election that was set up by a de-facto government that participated in the coup.

3. Human Rights and the people

Honduran civil society was severely disrupted by the interruption of democracy in Honduras and a large nonviolent resistance movement to the coup d'etat took to the streets demanding the return of their president and their democracy. The resistance also began to organize and leaders emerged. Two things happened. Police and security forces in some cases tried to control demonstrations and in other cases just attacked demonstrators, using tear gas and firing weapons into civilian crowds. The other thing that happened was that unknown assailants linked to police, military or paramilitary (the latter likely linked to powerful business interests in the country) began targeting and killing leaders, teachers, journalists, young adult children of leaders, other family members of leaders... you get the idea. These "desconocidos" (unknown attackers) murdered six journalist in March of this year and threatened Jesuit Priest Padre Melo. In May, Pam (Shepherd, Ashland UCC minister) and I were invited to accompany Padre Melo for two weeks and, frankly, we fell in love with the spirit, humor and prophetic voice of this adorable priest.

LGBT update

Human rights groups document that the largest number of nonviolent resistors who have been murdered since the coup have been members of the Lesbian-Gay-Bi and Trans community. It is not yet okay to be of diverse sexuality in Honduras or most of Latin America, and so that community is most vulnerable on many levels. The second most targeted group is teachers. A few weeks ago in Ashland we celebrated in our first Gay Pride parade. Last week in Tegucigalpa, the Honduras Accompaniment Project accompanied a silent vigil youth march organized locally to call attention to violent human rights abuses against young people. The theme included tolerance of sexual diversity and straight and LGBT youth marched together, a big step here. Organizer Gerardo Lopez Hernández, 33, was instrumental in putting together the march and is in the forefront of defending human right of sexually diverse individuals. He is at tremendous risk for his work here. Please keep him in your thoughts and best intentions. We are very fond of him, and very afraid for him. You can see news and photos of the youth march at: <http://arsncanada.blogspot.com/2010/10/international-youth-day-vigil-protest.htm>

Artists in Resistance

Wednesday and Thursday Caitlin and I accompanied several folk-protest musicians to El Progreso and San Pedro Sula in the north of Honduras. Oct 21 is Armed Forces Day here, and the artists renamed and celebrated Artists in Resistance Day. They did this because on September 15, Independence Day here, police attacked a public concert of the group Café Guancasco in downtown San Pedro Sula. One man was killed by a very strong chemical mix of tear gas thrown into the crowd. People, including the musicians fled with children in their arms. Police beat up several people, smashed instruments and destroyed expensive rented sound equipment. So the artists planned this concert for Oct. 21, to show they would not be silenced. And they asked for our accompaniment. The concert was on the campus of the National University in San Pedro Sula. In addition to the music of several Central American groups, a theater group did an amazing fire dance on stilts in the evening, and in burning-man fashion ignited a huge papier-maché gorrilla dressed in camouflaged fatigues carrying weapons of the armed forces that carried out the coup.

Other

We're back now, in a rented rambling two-storey house up a steep hill in Tegucigalpa, the capital. Caitlin Power Hancey is the accompaniment project staff member in Honduras. She is 30, from Canada, with wavy red hair that cannot help but be noticed here. She has been doing accompaniment work for the past few years in Guatemala. Jenny Atlee is staff member in the States. She and her husband Tom Loudon were part of the Witness for Peace international team in Nicaragua in the 1980s, with Jim and me. Tom and Jenny founded the accompaniment project first under the auspices of the Quixote Center, and now under the Friendship Office of the Americas. Tom is presently on loan from the Friendship Office to an independent international Truth Commission formed by human rights defenders here in parallel to the official government's truth commission. At this point abuses and killings have been committed with impunity, and so the presence of the independent commission can help bring the world's attention to Honduras.

Please keep Honduras, the accompaniment project and those who need accompaniment in your thoughts.

Sincerely, Lucy

The HAP is looking for applicants. For information:
honduras@friendshipamericas.org

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HOW TO SUPPORT HONDURAS' PRO-DEMOCRACY, ANTI-MILITARY COUP REGIME MOVEMENT

TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS for community based groups in the pro-democracy movement, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

CANADA: 552 - 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: <http://rightsaction.org/contributions.htm>

STOCK DONATIONS, contact: info@rightsaction.org

SPEAKERS: Contact Rights Action to plan educational presentations in your community, school, place of worship, home, about the tireless and courageous Honduras pro-democracy movement.

EDUCATIONAL DELEGATIONS TO CENTRAL AMERICA: Form your own group and/ or join one of our educational delegation-seminars to learn firsthand about community development, human rights and environmental struggles.

JOIN RIGHTS ACTION's LISTSERV:

<http://visitor.constantcontact.com/d.jsp?m=1103480765269>

More information: Annie Bird (annie@rightsaction.org) & Grahame Russell (info@rightsaction.org, Rights Action co-directors)