

Rights Action
August 8, 2011

CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER STEVEN HARPER TO VISIT HONDURAS, FRIDAY, AUGUST 12, 2011

Rights Action commentary, August 8, 2011

- The rhetoric will be: Praising Honduras' so-called return to democracy and respect for human rights
- The reality is: Harper is going to Honduras to promote the expansion of Canadian business and investment interests, despite the fundamental lack of democracy, despite on-going State repression and human rights violations

Rights Action asks Canadians to join us in demanding the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry into Canada's post-military coup investment and business interests in Honduras, given that it is these economic interests that led the Canadian government, along with the United States, to effectively support the military coup and the repressive post-coup regime.

We also ask for a public apology from the government of Canada to the Honduran people for the direct and indirect Canadian support of the June 2009 military coup and the State repression that has been on-going since that time.

"CANADA IS BECOMING MORE GRINGO THAN THE GRINGOS"

It is with dismay that Rights Action has seen Canada's business and investment interests in Honduras grow since the June 28, 2009 military coup that Canada and the United States (virtually alone in the western hemisphere) supported, directly and indirectly. As a Garifuna woman said, during a recent march in protest against harmful Canadian tourism investments along Honduras' north coast that are resulting in rights violations and forced displacements of Indigenous-Garifuna communities, "Canada is becoming more gringo than the gringos."

After the June 28, 2009 coup, the illegal, post-coup regime staged the November 2009 "elections" (fraudulent, with widespread repression the day of the elections) and the January 2010 installation of the current regime headed by Pepe Lobo.

What the coup actually achieved was the re-concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the Honduran oligarchy, known as *golpistas* (coup perpetrators), who have proven more than willing to accommodate Canadian investment and business interests.

The visit of Prime Minister Harper to Honduras will be the first by a foreign leader since Honduras was re-admitted into the Organization of American States (OAS), in a controversial decision in June of this year (given the on-going repression and the fundamental lack of democracy) and follows upon the May 2011 'Honduras is Open for Business' conference organized by the country's economic elites in an effort to attract foreign investments.

Harper's visit makes a clear and dismal statement about Canada's real interests in Honduras that have nothing to do with the promotion and defense of human rights and democracy. As documented by national and international human rights groups, since the coup, systemic

repression and other human rights violations have returned to their highest levels in Honduras' recent history.

Harper will use his visit to promote Canada's economic interests in the country – mining, *maquiladora* sweatshops, tourism, 'privatized' model cities and a Honduran-Canada "Free" Trade Agreement (FTA), that would further entrench Canadian investment and business interests.

Here, a summary of a few Canadian business and investment enterprises that are directly and indirectly causing human rights violations (including killings and forced evictions of communities) and environmental harms, that Rights Action and other groups have documented; about which we have demanded answers from the Canadian government and private business, to no avail.

MINING:

Honduras' post-coup regime Congress (the same one that illegally "ratified" the coup itself) will soon approve a new Mining Law that will again give the green light for mining companies, the majority being Canadian that have over 30% of Honduran territory already concessioned to them. Arguably, these concessions are illegal, as many were granted with no public knowledge, participation or approval. There is widespread opposition in Honduras to the new, pro-mining industry law, when no justice has been done, and no remedy and compensation provided to people and communities that suffered great harms, throughout the 2000s, caused by Goldcorp Inc's open-pit, cyanide leaching "San Martin" mine in the Siria Valley. Dozens of ex-mineworkers, and many more community members and children suffer on-going health problems (skin rashes, miscarriages, deaths, developmental and eye problems, etc). Well documented also are water depletion and contamination; forced evictions; cracked houses; etc.

TOURISM:

Indigenous-Garifuna communities along Honduras' north coast are suffering repression (including killings, beatings, fire-bombings and forced illegal land 'sales') as part of a slow but steady ethnocide of Garifuna communities due to the on-slaught of the international tourist industry heavily invested in by Canadian individuals and companies, including the Canadian "Porn King" Randy Jorgensen, Life Vision Canada, MacKenzie Investments (including Barrick Gold, TD Canada Trust), etc.

MAQUILADORA SWEAT-SHOP INDUSTRY:

Over 100 poor women have gotten sick working in Canadian-owned Gildan t-shirt sweatshops; Gildan refuses to negotiate with the workers or compensate them for work related injuries and health costs. Gildan has been described as "one of the biggest exploiters and violators of human rights in the country."

CANADIAN MILITARY SUPPORT

As if the human rights violations and health and environmental harms being caused by Canadian business and investment interests in Honduras were not enough, Rights Action is further dismayed to learn the Canadian government is sending 150 Canadian soldiers to Honduras to participate in military training sessions. As the Honduran people suffer the highest levels of State repression in recent decades, committed with complete impunity by the army, police and privatized security forces, Canada's contribution to the reinforcement of Honduras' armed forces is the last thing that is needed.

SAY NO TO "FREE" TRADE AGREEMENTS & ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION, AT THE EXPENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS, JUSTICE & DEMOCRACY

Thus, Rights Action asks Canadians to join us in demanding the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry into Canada's post-military coup investment and business interests in Honduras, given that it is these interests that led the Canadian government, along with the United States, to effectively support the military coup and the repressive post-coup regime. And, we ask for a public apology from the government of Canada to the Honduran people for the direct and indirect Canadian support of the June 2009 military coup and the State repression that has been on-going since that time.

Thank-you.

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ON REQUEST:

We can provide background information about the human rights violations and health and environmental harms being caused by Canadian business and investment interests in Honduras.

WHAT TO DO:

Write a letter to your MP and/or send a copy of this information, demanding that Canada NOT pursue so-called "free" trade deals, at the expense of human rights and justice, the environment and democracy.

CONTACT YOUR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT:

<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>

EMERGENCY RELIEF FUNDS:

To support community organizations in Honduras working for human rights and justice, for community-controlled development and real democracy, make tax-deductible 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>

DONATIONS OF STOCK: info@rightsaction.org

MORE INFORMATION:

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