

Rights Action
February 15, 2012

Honduras – 300 Prisoners Killed In Jail Fire

BBC report

Over the past few months, there has been a spate of main stream media coverage about how Honduras is now the ‘murder capital’ of the world, a ‘journalist killing’ capital of the world, a ‘LGBT killing’ capital of the world,

While there are complex historical roots to Honduras’ violence and repression, these extreme levels of violence and State repression have increased significantly since the June 2009 military coup. Since that time, Honduras has been rule by an illegitimate, military backed regime.

- Recent New York Times coverage:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/27/opinion/in-honduras-a-mess-helped-by-the-us.html>
- Recent Miami Herald coverage:
<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/01/24/2606175/central-americas-free-fire-zone.html>
- Recent NRP radio report, part 1:
<http://www.npr.org/2012/02/11/146668852/in-honduras-police-accused-of-corruption-killings>, and part 2:
<http://www.npr.org/2012/02/12/146758628/who-rules-in-honduras-a-coups-lasting-impact>

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS: Grahame Russell, info@rightsaction.org, and Annie Bird, annie@rightsaction.org.

WHAT TO DO: see below

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- Follow Rights Action on Facebook:
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HONDURAS PRISON FIRE KILLS HUNDREDS

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-17038259?print=true>

A massive fire has swept through a jail in Honduras, killing at least 300 prisoners, officials say. Many victims were burned or suffocated to death in their cells at the jail in Comayagua, in central Honduras. The officials say at least 300 are confirmed dead, but a further 56 inmates, out of the 853 in the prison, are missing and presumed dead.

An inquiry is under way whether the blaze was caused by rioting or an electrical fault. Relatives of suspected victims later tried to force their way into the prison, desperate for news. Police responded by firing shots into the air and tear gas.

'Hellish' scenes

The fire broke out late on Tuesday night and took more than an hour to be brought under control. Dozens of prisoners died trapped in their cells and were burned beyond recognition. Comayagua firefighters' spokesman Josue Garcia said there were "hellish" scenes at the prison and that desperate inmates had rioted in a bid to escape the flames. "We couldn't get them out because we didn't have the keys and couldn't find the guards who had them," he said.

Lucy Marder, who heads the forensic services in Comayagua, said that 356 people on the prison roster were unaccounted for. The prison was holding more than 800 inmates. "The majority could be dead, though others could have suffered burns, escaped or survived," Ms Marder said.

It was feared many inmates had fled the prison in Comayagua, about 100km (60 miles) north of the capital Tegucigalpa. Amid the confusion, relatives gathered outside the prison to try to get information. "I'm looking for my brother. We don't know what's happened to him and they won't let us in," Arlen Gomez told Honduran radio. Local hospitals are treating dozens of people for burns and other injuries. Some of the injured have been taken to Tegucigalpa for treatment, among them 30 people with severe burns.

Firefighters said they had struggled to enter the prison because shots had been fired. Honduran media reported that there had been a riot in the prison before the fire broke out. Prison service head Daniel Orellana denied this. "We have two hypotheses. One is that a prisoner set fire to a mattress and the other one is that there was a short-circuit in the electrical system," he was quoted as saying by Reuters. Prisons in Honduras, which has the world's highest murder rate, are often seriously overcrowded and hold many gang members.

WHAT TO DO

DEMAND AN END TO 'POLITICS AND BUSINESS AS USUAL'

Please keep on sending copies of this most recent example of brutal death, and your own letters, to Canadian and American politicians and government officials. Since the June 2009 military coup, the American and Canadian governments have most supported and legitimized the post-coup, repressive regime of Honduras. North American companies and investors (including mining, tourism, sweat-shop interests) have increased their business activities in Honduras since the coup. The repression, violence, corruption and impunity that characterize daily life in Honduras are significantly due to the political, economic and military interests of the USA and Canada.

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DONATIONS OF STOCK can be made (anonymously):
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