

Rights Action
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U.S. Soldiers Threaten To Arrest International Human Rights Observers In Honduras: Terror and Fear in the context of the Honduran primary elections

By Karen Spring (spring.kj@gmail.com)
November 13, 2012



July 2012 (By Karen Spring) - A US Forward Operating Base (FOB) or a temporary military outpost outside of Puerto Lempira, La Moskitia, Honduras. Locals and communities have repeatedly reported that US soldiers come and go and are present on the base that housed a large rotating satellite, various military tents and vehicles.

Within one day of arriving in Tegucigalpa, members of the Honduras Solidarity Network human rights delegation were instantly reminded of the strong US military presence and authority in the country. Upon stopping at the Soto Canal Air Base in Comayagua on November 13, 2012 (day one of the delegation), two US military soldiers – one identified as a US Joint Task Force Bravo soldier – came out

accompanied by two Honduran soldiers and threaten to arrest us for taking pictures in the visitor parking lot outside the base.

US soldier Matos with his hand on his gun strapped to his leg wearing a uniform with a US flag on his shoulder walked over to the delegation and aggressively ordered us to stop taking pictures and that we would be arrested if we did not delete them from our cameras.

Within five minutes of our exchange with soldier Matos, US soldier Gonzalez with a leather armband with 'JTF-B US' on his arm and a Honduran soldier asked our contracted driver for his identification, vehicle registration, name and phone number of the transportation company for which he works. There was no identification of the US soldiers' rank on the uniform.

The delegation is concerned about the role of the United States government and military in Honduras. During a delegation in June 2011 at the entrance of Palmerola, a human rights delegation, upon requesting a meeting with an US officer in charge, was told that US soldiers are invited guests by the Honduran government and that Palmerola is not a US military base (1). We are unclear why US soldiers were enforcing Honduran law at the entrance of a Honduran military base despite having Honduran soldiers at their side. For many members of the delegation that have visited Honduras consistently for the last five years, it is the first time they have been confronted in such an aggressive manner by US soldiers.

The US military presence and authority in Honduras has previously been questioned particularly since the participation in the deaths of four indigenous Miskito peoples in La Moskitia on May 11, 2012 in a 'drug interdiction mission'. Despite the role of US personnel and US State Department helicopters in the mission, no US investigation has been conducted to clarify US participation in the mission or why four innocent Hondurans were killed (2).

Indeed, the growing US presence in Honduras is concerning to us. Since the June 28, 2009 military coup in Honduras, the US has increased its presence in Honduras including funding the expansion or construction of two new military bases in Caratasca (in Puerto

Lempira, Gracias a Dios) and Guanaja (Honduran island off the Caribbean coast); the establishment of three Forward Operating Bases in the country; and the reported citing of heavily armed US soldiers accompanying Honduran soldiers in communities in La Moskitia.

(1) Group exchange with Honduran soldier outside the Soto Canal Air Base, Comayagua, Honduras. June 28, 2011. The same statement has also been repeated by various US officials when question about US bases in Honduras.

(2) Bird, Annie and Main, Alex. *Collateral Damage*. Available at: <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/hold-us-government-accountable-may-11-%E2%80%9Ccahuas-massacre%E2%80%9D-honduras>

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST MUCA LEADERS AND LIBRE CANDIDATE:

Terror and fear in the Aguan Valley in the context of the Honduran primary election

By Karen Spring (spring.kj@gmail.com)

November 13, 2012



One of many brutal murders of campesinos in the Aguan Valley. Gregorio Chavez's tortured body was found by buried in Miguel Facusse's African palm Paso Aguan finca on July 4, 2012 after being disappeared five days earlier. No investigation has been conducted.

Two campesino leaders from the Movimiento Unificado Campesinos del Aguan (MUCA) barely escaped a death squad assassination attempt as they returned to their homes on November 10, 2012. Joni Rivas and Vitalino Alvarez were driving close to the turn off point to the MUCA community La Confianza between 7:00 and 7:30 pm when they heard approximately six machine guns discharge two rounds of shots roughly 300 metres from their vehicle.

Joni Rivas is also a congressional candidate in the department of Colon for the LIBRE party, the political arm of the broader social movement, the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (FNRP).

MUCA reports that the vehicle passed their car on the main road and then fired in the air roughly thirty seconds after passing them. Many believe that the unusual vehicle that Rivas and Alvarez were driving at the time may have confused the attackers that had received word of their location. Both leaders turned to see bursts of light produced by the gunshots but are unable to determine the description of their attackers and their vehicle because of the darkness.

Marking the night before the final day of campaigning for all candidates participating in the upcoming primary elections, Rivas and Alvarez were returning from an event in San Pedro Sula where they were promoting food and agricultural products produced by MUCA. The attempt generated fear in the Aguan region and hindered the ability for LIBRE pre-candidate Rivas from actively participating in electoral campaigning the following day. This attempt as well as the strong militarization of the zone, have affected the freedom of movement of pre-candidates like Rivas and their ability to campaign and organize their supporters for the November 18 primaries.

The US has actively participated in the militarization of the region by sending US soldiers including the US Army Rangers to train on the 15th Battalion located in the Aguan Valley. Despite dozens of reports and international complaints in front of the Inter American Commission of human rights abuses by the Honduran military and private security guards of large landowners in the region, the US continues its political and economic support to Honduras and the military. Reports have also indicated that US Border Patrol have participated in highway checkpoints in the region and US Marines were present in the 4th Infantry base located in La Ceiba (1).

The assassination attempt against the MUCA leaders is one of many attempts, threats and violent actions against the campesino movement in the Aguan Valley. Both MUCA leaders reports varies threats against their persons which only add to the countless reports of assassinations, violent evictions, rape and threats against the

campesino movement in the Aguan that has led to over 70 deaths of campesinos.

(1) Bird, Annie. (March 1, 2012). Repression is the negotiating strategy in Honduras. Available at:
<http://upsidedownworld.org/main/news-briefs-archives-68/3487-repression-is-the-negotiating-strategy-in-honduras>

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Annie Bird, annie@rightsaction.org
Grahame Russell, info@rightsaction.org

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