

Rights Action  
November 4, 2013  
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## **Pre-Election Persecution Increases In Honduras**

November 3, 2013, By Karen Spring

In the early hours on the morning of October 23, the newly created Honduran Military Police broke down the doors of the residence of Edwin Robelo Espinal, a long-time National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP) activist. Heavily armed Military Police accompanied by a military judge and public prosecutor, with their faces entirely covered by balaclavas, carried out a thorough search of Edwin's house looking for "weapons and a rocket-propelled launcher" (1)



(Upon arriving at Edwin Espinal's house, Military Police blocked the entrance to the shared driveway. Initially, they refused to provide the name of the person in charge and the search warrant. October 23, 2013. Photo by: Karen Spring)



(On the left is Espinal's house where a Resistance flag has been hung since June 2009. Military Police stand outside, as officers inside the house break down over 15 bathroom, bedroom and entrance/exit doors. Every drawer and corner of the house was opened, pulled out and searched. There was significant damage to the house for which the Espinal family is unlikely to be reimbursed for. October 23, 2013. Photo by: Karen Spring)

The search warrant, authorized by a military judge, read: "Robelo [as he is known by his community] belongs to the LIBRE party and is one of the leaders of that area." Along with GPS coordinates of the location of his house, the warrant also noted that: "outside, [the house] has a LIBRE flag."(2)

Since the 2009 military coup, Edwin has been an active member of the Honduran resistance, the FNRP. Since the formation of its political arm – the Liberty and Refoundation Party –, Edwin has been supporting LIBRE organizing efforts along with his community group, "Collective en Resistencia Wendy E. Avila" in the neighbourhood Flor del Campo in Tegucigalpa.



(Edwin Robelo Espinal speaks to journalists suspected of being embedded in the operations of the Military Police as they raided his house. October 23, 2013. Photo by: Karen Spring)

### **The Killing of Edwin's Partner Wendy Avila**

Edwin's partner, Wendy Avila was killed in September 2009, when military and police violently evicted the Honduran resistance who had gathered around the Brazilian embassy to welcome overthrown President Zelaya, back to the country. Edwin was also disappeared for 5 hours and tortured by police officers in Flor del Campo in June 2010 (3).

Most recently and likely directly related to the current persecution against him, Edwin is involved in organizing his community against efforts by National Party activists in the Flor del Campo 'Patronato' (community leadership) to privatize the community soccer field. In 2010, after he was tortured by Honduran police, Edwin was given protective measures from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (4).



(One morning, the Flor del Campo community woke up to find the community soccer field had been blocked off. The 'Wendy E. Avila Collective in Resistance', in Flor del Campo, began organizing against the privatization of the community space by gathering signatures and investigating the fate of the soccer field. October 23, 2013. Photo by: Karen Spring)

### **Not An Isolated Incident: Raids, Death Threats, Killings and Disappearances**

According to a recent Rights Action report, political candidates, their families and campaign leaders of the LIBRE party have suffered a disproportionate number of attacks and killings since May 2012 than all other political parties combined (5).

- Complete Report: <http://www.rightsaction.org/action-content/killings-and-attempted-killings-honduras-may-2012-present-linked-electoral-process>

Not included in the attacks and killings listed in the report are the countless cases of political persecution, death threats and kidnappings of FNRP and LIBRE leaders that continue to occur on almost a weekly basis.

Investigations are rarely conducted and impunity continues to reign in Honduras.

The raid on Espinal's house has not been the only Military Police operation directed against FGRP and LIBRE activists nor is it an isolated example of political violence in the context of the elections.

In the first week the Military Police were on the street (October 14-21, 2013), the residence of Dassaev Aguilar, an ex-correspondent for Telesur was raided for an unknown reason by Military Police (6).

On October 10 at 5:00 am, the Military Police broke in and raided the house of Marco Antonio Rodriguez, the Vice President of the National Child Welfare Worker's Trade Union (SITRAPANI by its Spanish acronym). With a gun pointed at Antonio Rodriguez and his youngest son, the Military Police forced them out of the house, made them lie chest down on the street and handcuffed them while they searched the house. When Antonio Rodriguez asked to see the search warrant, the officers responded: "what search warrant, here we can do whatever we want." (7)



(Military Police. Some are dressed in uniform and some in civilian clothes wearing bulletproof vests, all with their faces completely covered. "Justice without a face" as Honduran journalist, Felix Molina says. Photo by: Karen Spring)

### **Another Killing of a Former Journalist and LIBRE Activist**

In another incident of suspected state involvement, the body of Manuel Murillo Varela, a journalist, a former cameraman for Globo TV and LIBRE activist was found in Tegucigalpa on October 24 (8).

Murillo Varela had suffered years of political persecution for his involvement with the FNRP and the LIBRE party. In 2010, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued protection measures for Murillo Varela after he and his colleague were disappeared and tortured for over 24 hours by police dressed as civilians on February 2, 2010.

Murillo Varela is also well known for his coverage of overthrown President Zelaya's militarized house in the early hours of June 28, 2009 as Hondurans woke up to find that President Zelaya had been overthrown and taken out of the country (9). Since 2010 over 30 journalists have been killed and very few cases have been investigated and brought to trial (10).



(In the early morning of June 28, 2009, Manuel Murillo was one of the first journalists on site to document the overthrow of President Manuel Zelaya. Photographer unknown.)

### **Death Threats Against a LIBRE Congressional Candidate**

On October 30, Beatriz Valle, a LIBRE Congressional candidate in the department of Francisco Morazan and ex-Vice Foreign Minister under Manuel Zelaya's government, announced that she had received death

threats. It is unknown where the death threats originate from but Valle decided, in consultation with human rights organizations, to leave the country (11).

### **Repression And Persecution Of Lenca Indigenous Communities And COPINH Leaders**

Since April 1, 2013, the Lenca communities of Rio Blanco supported by the Council of Indigenous and Popular Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) have maintained a roadblock preventing the construction of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam project. The Rio Blanco region continues to be heavily militarized and security forces are utilizing various tactics to attempt to divide and discourage the communities in resistance including pressing charges against community members, threats, persecution and negotiating projects with groups of community members in an attempt to bribe and to weaken the resistance. Berta Caceres, a COPINH indigenous leader was sent to jail on September 20th, 2013 while two other COPINH leaders, Tomas Garcias and Aureliano Molina are required to sign before a judge on a regular basis. The three COPINH leaders are unable to visit the Rio Blanco area - one of many attempts to weaken the resistance and unity of the Lenca struggle.

### **Further Criminalization of the Campesino Movements in the Aguan Valley**

According to Honduran human rights organization, COFADEH (Committee of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras), a group of 6 individuals in Samaria in La Moskitia region were disappeared by approximately 80 military traveling in helicopters and boats on October 30. Josbin Nahúm Caballero and his family including his wife, Rosa Florinda Alvarenga Lara and their two children, Nesly Rosibel Caballero Alvarenga (2 years-old) along with Javier Castillo (25 years-old) and Justo Castillo (27 year-old) and were disappeared after the military raided Nahúm Caballero's house and shooting him during the operation.

Nahúm Cabellero's mother, Maria Digna Santamaría lives in the campesino community 'La Confianza' and is a member of the United Campesino Movement of the Aguan (MUCA). Digna Santamaria spoke to COFADEH and to the press regarding her son's disappearance and suspected assassination. She denounced that the Commander of the Xatruch Military Operation in the department of Colon, Germán Alfaro Escalante, had directly threatened her son accusing him of being an assassin in an

interview on a local radio in Colon, Honduras (12). Commander Alfaro also mentioned in the interview that the campesino community 'La Confianza' was hiding an assassin named 'Caballero', as part of his repeated effort to criminalize campesino movements and justify the continued militarization of the Valley that has contributed to the killings of over 100 campesinos in the Aguan Valley since 2010(13).



(Operation Xatruch II. Aguan Valley. October 2011. Photo by: Karen Spring)

The human rights situation in Honduras is grave. The creation of new security forces like the Military Police that in less than two weeks of being on the street, have been accused of targeting political opponents of the current Pepe Lobo government.

These raids, like other violations by Honduran police and military, raise serious concern regarding the context of the November 24th General Elections. Suffering a disproportionately higher number of killings and attacks than all other political parties combined, LIBRE political candidates participating in the campaigning process are very vulnerable to political violence.



However, persecution, attacks, disappearances and killings of community-based Resistance activists such as Manuel Murillo Varela, Marco Antonio Rodriguez, Edwin Robelo Espinal and other cases discussed above, are a less visible form of political violence that often escapes the watchful eyes of the 'international community'.

The mood in Honduras is undoubtedly intense as the elections approach in less than 3 weeks.

(Karen Spring has worked with Rights Action since 2009. She is currently living in Honduras. [Spring.kj@gmail.com](mailto:Spring.kj@gmail.com))

### Footnotes:

[1] Quoted directly from the search warrant signed by Executing judge, Santos Alberto Reyes Castillo and Adjunct Secretary, Lesbia Verónica Vallejo Sanchez. The Executing judge was appointed by Claudio Daniel Aguilar Elvir and the fiscal present at the raid was Ricardo Adolfo Nuñez.

[2] Same as above.

[3] "One More Day of Repression in Honduras/Edwin Espinal At Risk" Rights Action. March 18, 2011.

[http://www.rightsaction.org/articles/Edwin\\_Espinal\\_and\\_Honduras\\_repression\\_031811.html](http://www.rightsaction.org/articles/Edwin_Espinal_and_Honduras_repression_031811.html). and "En peligro la ciudadanía hondureña: Jueza sobresee juicio contra policas torturadoras". Defensores En Línea. COFADEH. June 29, 2011.

[http://defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1460%3Aen-peligro-la-ciudadania-hondurena-jueza-sobresee-juicio-contr-policas-torturadores&Itemid=171](http://defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1460%3Aen-peligro-la-ciudadania-hondurena-jueza-sobresee-juicio-contr-policas-torturadores&Itemid=171)

[4] "CIDH solicita al Estado de Honduras garantizar la vida de Edwin Espinal" Defensores en Línea. COFADEH. July 27, 2013.

[http://defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=892%3Acidh-solicita-al-estado-de-honduras-garantizar-la-vida-de-edwin-espinal&Itemid=150](http://defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=892%3Acidh-solicita-al-estado-de-honduras-garantizar-la-vida-de-edwin-espinal&Itemid=150)

[5] Spring, Karen. "Context of the Honduran Electoral Process 2012-2013: Incomplete List of Killings and Armed Attacks Related to Political Campaigning in Honduras, May 2012-October 19, 2013" Rights Action.

<http://rightsaction.org/sites/default/files//Honduras-Violence-Political-Campaign.pdf>

[6] Emanuelsson, Dick. "Honduras sangra: Ejecutan a Camarógrafo beneficiario de medidas cautelares otorgadas por la CIDH." October 25, 2013. <http://www.kaosenlared.net/america-latina/item/72052-siguen->

[derramando-la-sangre-de-los-periodistas-y-camarógrafos-en-honduras.html?tmpl=component&print=1](http://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2821:policia-militar-cual-orden-de-allanamiento-aca-nosotros-podemos-hacer-lo-que-queramos&catid=54:den&Itemid=171)

[7] “Policia Militar: Cual orden de allanamiento aca nosotros podemos hacer lo que queramos” Defensores en Linea. COFADEH. October 28, 2013.

[http://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2821:policia-militar-cual-orden-de-allanamiento-aca-nosotros-podemos-hacer-lo-que-queramos&catid=54:den&Itemid=171](http://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2821:policia-militar-cual-orden-de-allanamiento-aca-nosotros-podemos-hacer-lo-que-queramos&catid=54:den&Itemid=171)

[8] “Another journalist murdered a month before general elections” Reporters without Borders. October 25, 2013. <http://en.rsf.org/honduras-another-journalist-murdered-a-25-10-2013,45384.html>

[9] See (8) or “Asesinan a un periodista a un mes antes de las elecciones: cuando acabara la violencia?” Reporters without borders. October 25, 2013.

[http://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2815:asesinan-a-un-periodista-a-un-mes-de-las-elecciones-icualdo-acabara-la-violencia&catid=42:seg-y-jus&Itemid=159](http://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2815:asesinan-a-un-periodista-a-un-mes-de-las-elecciones-icualdo-acabara-la-violencia&catid=42:seg-y-jus&Itemid=159)

[10] “Honduras: Special force to solve murders of journalists, lawyers” Rene Novoa, Infosurhoy.

[http://infosurhoy.com/en\\_GB/articles/saii/features/main/2013/11/01/feature-01](http://infosurhoy.com/en_GB/articles/saii/features/main/2013/11/01/feature-01)

[11] “Candidata de LIBRE denuncia amenazas a su vida” El Heraldo. October 31, 2013. [http://m.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-](http://m.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/Candidata-de-Libre-denuncia-amenazas-a-su-vida)

[Principales/Sucesos/Candidata-de-Libre-denuncia-amenazas-a-su-vida](http://m.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Sucesos/Candidata-de-Libre-denuncia-amenazas-a-su-vida)

[12] “Militares raptan a familia completa en la Moskitia” Defensores en linea. COFADEH. November 3, 2013.

[http://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2826:militares-raptan-a-familia-completa-en-la-mosquitia-&catid=54:den&Itemid=171](http://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cms/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2826:militares-raptan-a-familia-completa-en-la-mosquitia-&catid=54:den&Itemid=171)

[13] Bird, Annie. “Human Rights violations attributed to Military Forces in the Bajo Aguan Valley in Honduras”. Rights Action. February 20, 2013.

[http://rightsaction.org/sites/default/files/Rpt\\_130220\\_Aguan\\_Final.pdf](http://rightsaction.org/sites/default/files/Rpt_130220_Aguan_Final.pdf); and

Bird, Annie. “103rd and 104th Campesinos killed in the ‘Murder Capital of the World’, As Presidential Elections Loom in November 2013: Aguan Campesino Movement leader and son killed, wife injured” Rights Action.

June 4, 2013. <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/103rd-104th-campesinos-killed-‘murder-capital-world’-presidential-elections-loom>

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## **North Americans!**

All through November, leading up to and during the November 24 presidential elections, keep on sending this – and other information – to your MPs, Congressional Reps & Senators. Keep on denouncing the very serious and increasing violations of human rights.

Since the military coup of 2009, the governments of Canada and the USA – and many North American businesses – have maintained strong political, military and economic relations with the regime in power, empowering and 'legitimizing' the repressive, military-backed government.

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