

Rights Action
March 7, 2014

Canada-Honduras Trade Deal Will Increase And Benefit From Exploitation And Repression

NGO public statement, March 7, 2014

Rights Action signed on to this Statement (below). We encourage all Canadians to send this statement to your own M.P., ask them for their position on this "Free Trade" Agreement (C-20: Canada-Honduras Economic Growth And Prosperity Act), and let them know you will hold them to account for their position.

Two NDP Members Speak

Charles Angus (NDP, Timmins - James Bay, ON) and Randall Garrison (NDP, Esquimalt - Juan de Fuca, BC) share their critical thoughts about C-20: Canada-Honduras Economic Growth And Prosperity Act:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTzM7VfxtH4>

- Please share widely to other organizations.
- More info / What to do: below

Canada-Honduras FTA Will Deepen Conflict

Civil society organizations from Canada and Quebec are concerned that the Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement (FTA), currently being debated in the House of Commons, will further undermine human rights and democracy in Honduras.

The debate began days after the inauguration of Juan Orlando Hernandez following highly contested presidential elections. The elections were fraught with irregularities as well as violence, and deemed fraudulent by most independent international observers.

The proposed legislation sends the message that Canada rewards illegitimate governments as long as they serve Canadian economic interests.

The bilateral trade deal was signed on November 5th, 2013, in the lead up to the presidential election, despite wide-spread opposition and mounting evidence to suggest that the deal will exacerbate the social and human rights crisis. Since the 2009 military coup against democratically-elected President Manuel Zelaya, violence and repression have reached an all-time high. Human rights defenders, women's rights activists, members of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, trans and queer) community, the Garifuna, Indigenous people, union leaders, farmers and journalists are being systematically threatened or killed.

Police Corruption And Militarization Of The State

Police corruption is rampant with high ranking members implicated in criminal activity, contributing to widespread impunity as well as a judicial and law-enforcement system that perpetuates the problem. Just recently, Constantino Zavala the police chief in the western province of Lempira was suspended for allegedly being involved in drug trafficking.

Global Corporations Pay "Security" Tax

The return of the military security state has been a major focus of President Hernandez who spearheaded the legislative effort that created the Law of Public Order Military Police (PMOP). To fund this new military police, the government was able to draw 24.5 million lempiras (\$1.2 million), from a new "security tax" paid for by large corporations. These new units will take over neighbourhoods, residential developments, or public spaces in order to crack down on supposed illegal activities. Human rights defenders in Honduras have testified that they are witnessing the reactivation of the death squads of the 80s with a pattern of assassinations of women, youth and political opponents.

During presidential elections on November 24, 2013, many Hondurans were hopeful that a new political landscape would ensure a break from traditional two party politics in Honduras and lead to improved conditions. However, the situation has taken a turn for the worst with Hernandez' questionable election.

International and local human rights observers reported wide-spread vote buying, irregularities in the voter registry, selling of electoral credentials, militarization, intimidation and even assassinations. Nonetheless, Hernandez was declared the winner and the country has been driven further into crisis.

Canada Contributes To Social Conflict

Although the FTA has not yet been implemented, Canadian investments are already contributing to social conflict in Honduras, particularly in the mining, export manufacturing and tourism sectors.

The Canadian government provided technical assistance and support for the General Mining and Hydrocarbons Law, passed in January 2013. Notably, the new mining law lifts a seven-year moratorium on new mining projects and earmarks 2% of the royalties paid by extractive companies for a Security Tax to help fund Honduran state security.

Goldcorp's Deadly Legacy

The law paves the way for new mining projects which have given rise to increased conflict and militarization of affected communities where mining projects operate. According to the Honduras Documentation Centre, 52% of all conflict in Honduras is rooted in natural resource management. The most notorious case is that of Vancouver-based Goldcorp's which operated the San Martin gold and silver mine in Valle de Siria. The projects legacy is one of water contamination, dried up streams, and reports of serious public health problems in surrounding communities which have yet to be fully addressed.

Gildan And Labour Violations

In the garment and textile export sector, the factories of Montreal-based Gildan Activewear in northwestern Honduras are noted for the debilitating work-related injuries suffered by workers due to excessively long work shifts and high production targets and for firing workers for attempting to unionize.

Finally, in the tourism sector, Canadian investments are displacing Indigenous and Afro-Honduran peoples from their territories with no respect whatsoever for their cultural and land rights.

It is misleading to argue that the FTA will improve the situation in Honduras. FTAs severely weaken the ability of government to legislate for the public good and undermine community, human, labour and environmental rights. Meanwhile, investor rights provisions are substantive, allowing corporations to sue governments if they make decisions companies disagree with. The environmental and labour side

agreements are mere window dressing devoid of any enforcement mechanisms. As such, the FTA favours narrow economic interests, and is bound to lead to greater conflict as well as further violence in Honduras.

We call on Canadian parliament to refrain from passing legislation to implement the Canada-Honduras FTA and for the Conservative government to reconsider its priorities around Honduras, putting priority on the wellbeing of communities, human and labour rights.

Alternatives, Americas Policy Group (APG), Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network (ARSN), Breaking The Silence (BTS), British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC), Climate Justice Saskatoon, Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine (CDHAL), Common Frontiers, Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), Council of Canadians, Council of Canadians - Saskatoon Chapter, Council of Canadians - London Chapter, CUPE Ontario International Solidarity Committee, Latin American-Canadian Solidarity Association (LACASA), Latin American and Caribbean Solidarity Network (LACSN), Les AmiEs de la Terre de Québec, Mining Injustice Solidarity Network (MISN), MiningWatch Canada, Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), Projet Accompagnement Solidarité Colombie (PASC), Rights Action, SalvAide, The National Farmers Union, Unifor, United Steelworkers (USW)

What To Do/ Quoi Faire/ Que Hacer

In Honduras, Repression, Violence, Impunity And Corruption Are Policy

Americans / Canadians: Keep on, keep on, keep on ... sending copies of this information, and your own letters, to your politicians (MPs, Congress members and Senators) and media. Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the last democratically elected government, Honduras has become the 'Murder Capital of the world'. Repression has reached the levels of the worst years of the 1980s.

Since 2009, the U.S. and Canadian governments have legitimized a succession of illegitimate and repressive regimes. North American companies and investors, and "development" banks (World Bank, Inter-

American Development Bank) have increased business activities in African palm production, sweatshops, "model cities", tourism and mining. The Honduran regime remains in power due in large part to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada and the "development" banks. Across Honduras, community based organizations in the pro-democracy movement need considerably more human rights accompaniment, funding, media attention on the harms and violations and education and activism in Canada and the U.S.

Contact:

- Member Of Parliament:
<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>
- Congress: <http://www.house.gov/> to get info for your member of Congress, and call: 202-224-3121
- Senate: <http://www.senate.gov/> to get contact for your Senator, and call: 202-224-3121

Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.)

To support indigenous, grassroots organizations working for justice and human rights in Honduras, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- United States: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations (Canada & U.S.): <http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

- Be a monthly donor (Canada & U.S.)
- To donate stock: info@rightsaction.org

Comments / Questions: info@rightsaction.org

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