

Rights Action  
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## **U.S. [And Canada] Should Rethink Support For Honduras**

All the arguments made here by Dana Frank apply to Canada, as well.

2015 will be a busy year providing as much support as possible to pro-democracy, grassroots Honduran organizations, and reporting as much as possible on how Canadian and American government and private sector interests are contributing to and benefitting from the lack of democracy and rule of law in Honduras, and the repression and impunity, exploitation and poverty. Stay tuned. Have a good year of living and work for a fair and just global human order.

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### **U.S. Should Rethink Support For Honduras**

By Dana Frank, January 2, 2015, Houston Chronicle

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/outlook/article/Frank-U-S-should-rethink-support-for-Honduras-5990919.php>

President Obama, to his great credit, has just broken through the Cold War wall to normalize relations with Cuba. But elsewhere in Latin America, in Honduras, his administration is supporting a terrifying military takeover.

For the first time in the 16-year history of the position, the country's president has just named an active-duty general from the Armed Forces, Julián Pacheco Tinoco, to be the country's new Minister of Security, with full jurisdiction over the domestic police. Pacheco's ascendance is just the latest in a dangerous militarization of post-coup Honduras.

While many in the U.S. have been alarmed at the arrival at our border of unaccompanied, undocumented minors from Honduras, and followed closely the terrifying gangs and violence they're fleeing, we haven't heard about the Honduran government's own role in state terror. The Obama administration, meanwhile, is silent about the Honduran military's takeover - while helping to pay its bills.

It's well-established that the military coup that deposed democratically elected Honduran President Manuel Zelaya in June 2009 threw out the rule of law and plunged the country into abyss of violence, poverty and repression. Perhaps most famously, the coup opened the door to spectacular corruption among police, who are reportedly interlaced with drug traffickers, organized crime and gangs.

Rather than clean up the police, the successive governments of Presidents Porfirio Lobo and now Juan Orlando Hernández have sent in the military. Lobo first dispatched soldiers in 2011 and '12 to police residential neighborhoods and land-rights activists, even though the Honduran constitution explicitly bars the military from engaging in domestic policing.

Current president Hernández based his 2013 campaign on the promise of "a soldier on every corner" through the creation of a new military police force, now 5,000-strong. The military and its police now occupies the nation's airports, prisons, tourist zones, residential neighborhoods and ubiquitous checkpoints. Hernández is pushing hard to change the Honduran constitution to allow even greater expansion of its domestic scope.

This past Independence Day, Sept. 15, TV stations broadcast a stadium full of happy parents and little children cheering as unit after unit of the armed forces marched by in lockstep. The newspapers ran big photo spreads of glowing children and baton-twirlers parading in celebration of the military police - who were themselves clad all in black, with rifles crossed grimly across their chests and balaclavas hiding their faces. There's even an alarming new government program designed explicitly to indoctrinate children as young as five into the military, called "Guardians of the Homeland."

Yet in the past two years, the Honduran military and its new police have committed widespread human rights abuses with near-complete impunity. Amnesty International reports that in July 2013, the Honduran Army shot and killed Tomás García, an indigenous activist who was peacefully protesting a hydroelectric dam; and on May 8, the new military police arrested and brutally beat José Guadalupe Ruelas, the country's leading independent advocate for children. On Nov. 22, a young woman reported to police that while she was waiting for her bus after work near San Pedro Sula, she was kidnapped and raped by eight members of the military police.

U.S. Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., who studied with the Jesuits in Honduras in 1980 and '81, told the Senate in June: "When I was there it was a military dictatorship. It was a very brutal place....But it's worse now than then."

Last May, 108 members of the U.S. Congress wrote Secretary of State John Kerry challenging U.S. support for the Honduran security forces. But the administration remains staunchly supportive of Hernández and silent about the military takeover. Indeed, alarm over unaccompanied kids arriving at the border has resulted in more enthusiastic support for the Honduran government, and floodgates of new funding for Hernandez's regime and its security forces are pouring in, now supported by much of Congress as well as Obama.

We need to challenge U.S. support for the dangerous security forces in Honduras and demand that the Obama administration suspend all police and military aid immediately and publicly call for the Honduran military to pull out of any role in domestic policing. Then the kids, who already face corrupt police, crime, gangs and a bleak economy, will at least have one less thing to fear.

[Frank is professor of history at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and an expert on U.S. policy and human rights in Honduras.]

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**Honduras: A Country Of Repression, Impunity And Global Business Opportunities**

The extremely high levels of repression and violence in Honduras are not a “Honduran problem” – they are also a U.S. and Canadian problem.

Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the last democratically elected government, Honduras has become the ‘Murder Capital of the world’, the ‘Repression Capital of the Americas’. Since 2009, the U.S. and Canadian governments have supported and legitimized a succession of illegitimate, repressive regimes. North American companies and investors, and “development” banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank) have increased business activities in: African palm production, maquiladora sweatshops, privatized “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 – struggling for fundamental reform to the Honduran State and society - need considerably more human rights accompaniment, funding, media attention on the harms and violations and education and activism in Canada and the U.S.

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- Member Of Parliament:  
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To support community organizations working for locally-controlled development, the environment, human rights and the rule of law in Honduras and Guatemala, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

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