

Rights Action  
July 17, 2015

## **Honduran people continue courageous, uplifting protests ..., ... despite political, economic and military support for repressive and corrupt Honduran regime from US and Canadian governments, the World Bank and IDB, and global companies and investors.**

- Below: Article by Dana Frank
- What to do: see below

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### **Protests Light Up Long Honduran Night**

By Professor Dana Frank, [danafrank@ucsc.edu](mailto:danafrank@ucsc.edu)

<http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/from-our-inbox/article27393925.html>

It was still partly daylight as the marchers started showing up at the entrance to the university, and everyone kept telling me the numbers looked smaller this week. Most people carried torches — the bamboo kind sold in the U.S. for tropical-themed parties. But by the time we got halfway to the Presidential Palace, the march was clearly huge (later estimated at 60,000).

As we crested a bridge just as it was getting dark, and the marchers by me chanted “No to the dictatorship,” you could suddenly see torches lighting up the boulevard for blocks and blocks as far as you could see in both directions.

It was spine-tingling beautiful.

For seven weeks now, tens of thousands of Hondurans in larger and larger marches throughout the country have lit their torches in protest against the government’s corruption and impunity, especially the bald, documented thievery of hundreds of thousands of dollars from the national health service (IHSS) into the coffers of the ruling National Party’s election fund, documented in May by Honduran journalist David Romero.

The scandal implicates not only President Juan Orlando Hernández (known as JOH) but dozens of others including the vice president, the president of Congress, and the president’s sister, who is minister of communications, as well as the attorney general.

The collapse of the once-respected IHSS in the past two years — used, critics charge, as a pretext for an IMF-dictated privatization — has been monumental. Newspapers report that medicines are often missing altogether or that there are no dialysis machines or plates for x-rays. Women who arrive to give birth are told to come back with all the supplies they’ll need — down to the wrist bracelet — even if it’s late at night and the pharmacies are closed.

The torches, along with the crosses with names on them that many carry, symbolize the 3,000 people, at least, who are estimated to have died because of the IHSS's collapse.

The Tegucigalpa marchers I saw on June 26 and again on July 3 appeared overwhelmingly middle class, many in their 20s and 30s, wearing modish eyeglasses and a lot of crisp black and white. Reports indicate that they span the country's entire political spectrum from right to left; most of these people were apparently not part of the mass resistance against the 2009 military coup that deposed democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya.

This Honduran middle class is now feeling the full ferocious pinch of the post-coup regime. They live in the same dangerous sea of violence as all Hondurans, and are now paying new taxes that the elites who run the government allegedly evade. They pay into and use the IHSS system, and pay taxes into it for their employees as well. Their financial lives are collapsing, I was told; they're pulling their kids out of college because they can't afford the fees.

Meanwhile, President Hernández has ridden roughshod over the rule of law, illegally naming four members of the Supreme Court and the attorney general, and sending the military to increasingly take over domestic policing in violation of the Constitution.

A wide range of human rights groups have reported vast corruption among the police, judiciary, and public prosecutors. The Department of State recently described "corruption, intimidation, and institutional weaknesses of the justice system leading to widespread impunity."

I watched another, much smaller torch march the night of June 27, this one overwhelmingly working-class, in La Lima, the old United Fruit company town on the outskirts of San Pedro Sula. It started with clusters of 10 or 20 weathered-looking men and laughing older women, most of whom had spent decades cutting down banana stems or packing fruit in the packinghouses.

We all waited in the weeds for the march to start, while ants climbed my calves and a high school marching band unloaded their drums from an old yellow U.S. school bus. As it got darker and the march began, the protesters shouted their way past the old headquarters of the United Fruit Company and over the bridge curving into the center of town. Hundreds of people from the very old to the very young joined, including dozens of tiny girls — some on their mini-bicycles, some in strollers, some sandwiched between their parents on motorcycles along the side.

Working people of La Lima have been marching through those exact same streets ever since the 1954 general strike from which all modern Honduran history flows.

That night, they shouted the same slogans as had the middle-class Tegucigalpa marchers — "Fuera JOH!" (Hernández Out!) and "Cuál es la ruta? Sacar ese hijo de puta!" ("What is the route? Throw out that son of a whore!"). But their torches were almost all home-made, from plastic bottles and duct tape, and they marched along with a practiced ease born of lifetimes of struggle — including resistance to the 2009 coup — passed along, now, to yet another generation.

What happens next? To the marchers' demand for his resignation, the firing of the attorney general, and a truly independent, U.N.-sponsored commission on impunity modeled on one in Guatemala, Hernández has craftily countered with a proposal for a national commission on impunity which he will control, with

international advisors and “dialogue.” The protesters don't appear to be fooled. How can a corrupt government investigate itself? they asked. It would be “the rats guarding the cheese,” I heard.

Signals from the U.S. Embassy indicate that the Obama Administration is still shoring up Hernández. Well after the protests had escalated, U.S. Ambassador James Nealon proclaimed, astonishingly, at the Embassy's Fourth of July party that "relations between the United States and Honduras perhaps the best in history."

The White House continues to push Congress for a billion dollars in new aid for Central America, which would include a tripling of funds for the Honduran military.

Hondurans, meanwhile, are speaking eloquently for themselves. While Hernández has blocked almost all official avenues of democratic input, the middle class is discovering the power in the streets which working-class Hondurans have claimed for decades.

In the long, dark, repressive night of post-coup Honduras, the protests, with their magical lighting and ferocious outrage, have brought a sudden burst of exhilarating hope.

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#### **Delegation to Honduras, November 7-15, 2015**

“Connecting the Dots from the Global to the Local: Understanding the Environmental, Human Rights, Poverty and Impunity Crisis in Honduras”

Rights Action and the Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College invite you to join this educational seminar trip to Honduras.

- Flyer: <http://rightsaction.org/action-content/honduras-education-seminar-trip>
- More info: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

#### **“Resistencia: The Fight for the Aguan Valley”**

In your home community, screen the documentary film “Resistencia: The Fight for the Aguan Valley”.

- Trailer / Live streaming: <http://resistenciathefilm.com/>

#### **Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & United States)**

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