

**Electoral fraud, repression and killings by Honduran government, but don't write letters of protest to the regime**

By Grahame Russell, Rights Action

- <http://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/electoral-fraud-repression-and-killings-by-honduran-government-but-dont-write-letters-of-protest-to-the-regime>

Feel free to re-post and share this opinion article. Though long, the aim is to focus attention on the direct role that mainly the U.S. but also Canada have been playing in Honduras' on-going crisis situation of government repression and violence, fraud, corruption and impunity, dating back (at least) to the 2009 military coup (that was supported by the U.S. and Canada), and to urge North Americans (politicians, media, government officials, citizens, NGOs, etc.) to hold the U.S. and Canada to account for our complicity in this deeply repressive and corrupt situation in Honduras.

If political and legal accountability is not brought to bear on the military, economic and political backers of the Honduran regime, the repression, corruption and impunity – and suffering of the Honduran people - will not stop.

- What to do: see below
- Emergency fund-raising appeal: see below

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**Electoral fraud, repression and killings by Honduran government, but don't write letters of protest to the regime**

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Upset about electoral fraud, repression and killings being carried out in Honduras by the corrupt, repressive government of Juan Orlando Hernandez? If so, don't write letters of protest to the regime - they are impervious to them, protected and empowered by their political, military and economic dealings with the "international community".

Rather, letters of protest should be sent to those actors in the “international community” – particularly the U.S. (the big elephant in the room) – that maintain beneficial economic, military and political relations with Honduras, directly empowering the regime stay in power.



Since the 2009 military coup (supported by the U.S. and Canada), repression and violence, impunity and corruption (including electoral fraud and repression in the three post-coup presidential elections) are endemic in Honduras.

But these are not only “Honduran” problems, they are problems of the “international community”. Brought back to power by the 2009 coup, the economic, military and political elites of Honduras care about two things:

- maintaining economic and political relations with the international community, primarily the U.S., and also Canada, the World Bank and a host of global companies working in the sectors of African palm, sugar cane and bananas production, garment “sweatshop” factories, mining and tourism; and
- maintaining support from the U.S. military.

These international military and economic relationships are the lifeblood of the regime. This is how power and wealth, corruption and impunity work.

The U.S. and Canadian governments, and other international actors, must be held politically and legally accountable for how they are acting complicitly with the government in Honduras, turning a blind eye to and –in effect– benefitting from repression and violence, impunity and corruption (including electoral fraud).

### **Elections 2017: Fraud and repression**

It has been reported widely around the world – though covered only somewhat by the media in the U.S., and ignored almost completely in Canada - that there is a violent campaign of electoral fraud and military repression going on in Honduras.

This most recent flashpoint of government fraud, corruption and repression has two immediate causes. Firstly, Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH, as he is referred to) ran illegally for re-election as President - his entire campaign ought to have been rejected outright by the TSE (Supreme Electoral Council), as Presidential re-election is illegal.

Secondly, when JOH and the National Party realized they were going to lose the elections, notwithstanding the electoral fraud they had been perpetrating, they suspended the vote count, militarized the TSE (Supreme Electoral Council), imposed an illegal curfew on the country, and mobilized police and soldiers to repress pro-democracy, anti-electoral fraud protests.

COFADEH (the Committee of family members of disappeared and detained Hondurans) reported on December 7 that since election day (Sunday November 26), there had been 14 confirmed killings by military and police; 51 wounded (7 seriously, 2 with permanent damage); 844 arbitrary detentions; at least 4 illegal raids/searches of people's homes in Tegucigalpa.



*"Out – JOH, Narco-dictator"*

This is much more than a slogan. President Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) has been linked to organized crime and narco-trafficking. It has been widely reported on how organized crime and drug trafficking mafias have infiltrated all branches and institutions of the Honduran State and government.

(More info: <https://www.insightcrime.org/honduras-organized-crime-news/>)

This crisis of electoral fraud and repression also has broader underlying causes. Honduras' current nightmare began June 28, 2009, when the country's weak but stable democracy was stolen by the military coup. Since then, Honduras has lived through a permanent situation of government repression, generalized violence, corruption and impunity.

Throughout 2009 and into 2010, hundreds of thousands of Hondurans – young and old, men and women, from all walks of life - took to the streets on a daily and weekly basis, protesting the coup.

The regime responded simply and repeatedly: with repression.

In November 2009, the post-coup regime held elections that were boycotted by a majority of Hondurans and the international community, except the U.S. and Canada. Rejecting the legitimacy of the coup regime itself and the possibility of democratic elections, no international delegations were sent to Honduras to observe the elections, except from the U.S. government.

The candidate of the coup plotters, Porfirio Lobo of the National Party, "won" the elections that were marked by corruption and repression. Soon after, Lobo's presidency was accepted as legitimate by the U.S. and Canada.

There followed four years of repression against any opposition to the 2009 coup, to the fraudulent elections and to the government's economic agenda that is encapsulated by their slogan "Honduras is open for business". As companies in the sectors of mining, dams, tourism, African palm, garment industry, etc., initiated or increased business dealings with the regime, repression reached levels similar to the early 1980s when U.S.-backed military regimes carried out widespread repression in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

Crime and violence exploded across the country. Honduras came to have the highest murder rate in the world. As global business investments increased, organized crime, repression, corruption and impunity became the hallmarks of the country.

In November 2013, the same sectors (dominated by the National Party, military and economic elites) that carried out the 2009 coup and fraudulent 2009 elections, organized and used repression and fraud to steal the 2013 elections.

By this time, a range of groups that had opposed the 2009 coup and ensuing repression, corruption and fraud, had formed a new political party – LIBRE. But for the fraud and repression of the regime, LIBRE would have won the 2013 elections - dozens of LIBRE members were killed leading up to election day.

Barely a word of this was reported in the North American media. The fraudulent, violent electoral process was again accepted as legitimate by the U.S. and Canada.

The newly "elected" president was Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) of the National Party. *"President Juan Orlando Hernández was an enthusiastic supporter of the 2009 military coup and was elected president of congress in January 2010. In December of 2012, he led a "technical coup," in which congress deposed four members of the Supreme Court and named four new loyalist judges the next day. In August 2013, congress illegally named a new attorney general to a five-year term. After that, Hernández controlled all the key institutions of power, including the Supreme Court, the attorney general's office, the police, and the military. Hernández built his campaign on promises to end the very security crisis that his government helped produce."* (Dana Frank,

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/140283/dana-frank/hopeless-in-honduras>)

### **“Honduras is open for business”**

*"Honduras has been a dream for multinational corporations since the 2009 coup, as the illegitimate government hammered through laws to favour international investors in tourism, mining, dams and model cities, while communities trying to protect their land have been criminalised and militarised."* (Karen Spring,

[http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/22/honduras-elections-leftist-party-libre?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/22/honduras-elections-leftist-party-libre?CMP=tw_t_gu))

What followed was four more years of:

- the Canadian “porn king” Randy Jorgensen (a tourism operator who made his ‘fortune’ operating pornography businesses in Canada) and other North American tourism operators using government corruption and repression to evict indigenous Garifuna communities from their Caribbean coastal lands, to build cruise ship ports, 5 star beach resorts and timeshare condos for North American and European ‘snow birds’;
- mining companies expanding their legally-contested and widely opposed mining operations. From 2000-2008, Goldcorp Inc’s San Martin mine left chronic health harms and environmental destruction in the Siria Valley. On-going today, Aura Minerals is expanding its open-pit, cyanide-leaching gold mine, backed by the military and police, and are threatening to destroy a 200 year-old cemetery in Azacualpa to get at the gold underneath;
- World Bank (and other international) investments in the production of African palm to produce ethanol and bio-diesel fuels for international ‘green energy’ markets. Since the coup, over 150 small farmers in the Aguan region have been killed by the military, police and Honduras’ land-owning oligarchy;
- Gildan Activewear, Hanes, Nike and other textile companies expanding production in low-wage, no benefits, no unions, unregulated maquiladora sweatshops;
- international investments in the Agua Zarca hydro-electric dam, an illegal project of the Honduran elites, widely opposed by the Lenca communities indigenous to that region. This community defense struggle resulted in the plot to assassinate Berta Caceres, the widely respected and loved indigenous rights, anti-imperialist, anti-patriarchy, anti-coup activist and leader.

For the Honduran elites and their “international community” partners, the 2017 elections were supposed to rubber-stamp four more years of “Honduras is open for business”.

But they underestimated the courage and resolve of the Honduran people who voted so massively on November 26, 2017, that the Opposition Alliance, headed by President-elect Salvador Nasralla, was winning by an “unsurmountable margin.”



So, late on election day, the TSE (Supreme Electoral Council), dominated by the government of JOH and National Party members, pulled the plug on the electoral computer system, crashing it for almost five hours. Once the system came back on line, JOH, the illegal candidate of the National Party, had somehow shot to the forefront and ... millions of Hondurans again took to the streets to demand respect for their election, to use honorably use democracy and the rule of law to put an end to their U.S. and Canadian-backed regime.

### **Day 16 of electoral fraud resistance**

As of the writing of this article, the electoral crisis has not been resolved. But for the courage and dignity of the Honduran people, who are taking to the streets

day and night –and suffering repression for it-, demanding respect for the election of Salvador Nasralla, as their new President, these elections would have been stolen already by JOH and the National Party.

Stay tuned ... Get involved at home in Canada and the U.S.

### **U.S. and Canadian problems**

Don't write your letters of protest to the Honduran regime that is allied with and empowered by its political, military and economic dealings with the "international community". Through our denunciations and activism, we have to make this "international community" –particularly the U.S. and Canada– accountable for their actions.

**U.S.:** In the U.S., call the Capital Switchboard to contact your Senators and Representatives: (202) 224-3121. Get their phone numbers and email addresses; send them copies of this and other information; politely insist that they agree to the demands below; share your efforts with the media, family, friends and networks.

**Canada:** In Canada, find your MP by entering your postal code on this page: <http://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>. Get their phone numbers and email addresses; send them copies of this and other information; politely insist that they agree to the demands below; share your efforts with the media, family, friends and networks.

In the short term, the U.S. and Canadian governments and elected politicians must:

- condemn the multiple acts of electoral fraud being carried out by the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez;
- condemn the suspension of constitutional rights, the imposition of a curfew and the acts of police and military repression against anti-electoral fraud protesters and other citizens;
- state that the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez will be held fully accountable for any and all electoral fraud and repression taking place;
- suspend all economic, military and police related relations with the corrupt government in power;



- advocate for a complete recount of ALL votes, carried out under full national and international supervision, or for a new run-off election held under full national and international supervision.

In the medium and longer terms, there must be legislative and senate inquiries in the U.S. and Canada into the causes of Honduras' endemic situation of repression and exploitation, corruption and impunity, focusing specifically on the role played by the U.S. and Canadian governments:

- supporting the 2009 military coup;
- supporting and legitimizing fraudulent and violent elections in 2009, 2013 and 2017 (though the 2017 elections remain unresolved);
- supporting the expansion of corporate and investor interests in Honduras in the areas of mining, garment "sweatshop" industry, bananas, hydro-electric dams, tourism, etc., while turning a blind eye to and – in effect – benefitting from repression, fraud, corruption and impunity.

If political and legal accountability is not brought to bear on the military, economic and political backers of the Honduran regime, the repression, corruption and impunity – and suffering of the Honduran people - will not stop.

(Grahame Russell is a non-practising lawyer, adjunct professor at UNBC (Prince George), writer and, since 1995, director of Rights Action, based in the U.S and Canada. Since 1998, Rights Action has supported grassroots organizations in Honduras carrying out their own community, environmental, human rights and territorial defense projects.)

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#### **More information / Get involved**

- Honduras Solidarity Network: <http://www.hondurassolidarity.org/>,  
<https://www.facebook.com/HondurasSolidarityNetwork>,  
<https://twitter.com/hondurassol>
- Witness for Peace: [www.witnessforpeace.org](http://www.witnessforpeace.org),  
<https://twitter.com/WitnessforPeace>,
- School of Americas Watch: [www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org), <https://twitter.com/SOAWatch>
- La Voz de los de Abajo: <https://www.facebook.com/lavozchicago/>,  
[@lavozchicago](https://twitter.com/lavozchicago)

- Rights Action, [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org), [www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org](http://www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org), <https://twitter.com/RightsAction>

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### **Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.) – Emergency relief funds**

As the Honduran people courageously protest and say no to electoral fraud and repression, they are suffering the consequences of military and police repression. Rights Action is sending relief funds to our long-term partner groups in Honduras - COPINH and OFRANEH- and other community groups for their community development, environmental and human rights defense work, and their emergency work in response to electoral fraud and repression. Make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

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

Credit-Card Donations: <http://rightsaction.org/donate/>

Donations of stock? Write to: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

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