

Rights Action  
February 1, 2018  
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Open Letter to Canadian government officials

**Free Edwin Espinal, political prisoner in Honduras, and partner of Karen Spring, Canadian human rights expert and activist living in Honduras**

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/free-edwin-espinal-political-prisoner-in-honduras>



February 1, 2018

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

Ambassador James Hill, Embassy of Canada in Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua

Minister Chrystia Freeland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- **Illegal detention of Edwin Espinal, a political prisoner in Honduras and partner of Karen Spring, Canadian citizen, human rights expert and activist living in Honduras since 2009**

I write to ask the Canadian government to take all measures – public and back-channel – to secure the immediate release of political prisoner Edwin Espinal, detained January 19, 2018 in Honduras on a laundry list of trumped up criminal charges. He is being held, virtually incommunicado, in a military jail.

Edwin is a political prisoner. He is one of dozens of people improperly charged and jailed in Honduras in recent weeks.

I have known Edwin since the 2009 military coup that ousted Honduras' democratically elected government. Below, you will find a communique (prepared by Karen Spring) detailing who Edwin is and the history of persecution he has suffered at the hands of Honduras' military-backed governments since the coup.

I know very well Karen Spring, Edwin's long-time partner who lives with him in Honduras. From Elmvale, Ontario, 90 minutes north of Toronto, Karen is a Canadian human rights expert and activist living and working in Honduras. From 2009-2014, she worked with me at Rights Action. Since 2014, she has been the director of the HSN (Honduras Solidarity Network), a U.S.-Canadian based organization.

Karen herself has been the target of illegal and threatening slander campaigns in Honduras' pro-government media and social media networks.

Edwin and Karen are people of the highest integrity. Both work passionately, peacefully and legally in favour of human rights in Honduras – Edwin dating back years; Karen since 2009.

**The Canadian government has a responsibility to act immediately and decisively in this case**

- In general terms, it is a matter of promoting and upholding international human rights and demanding the same of other governments, particularly allies such as the post-military coup governments in Honduras;
- More specifically, Karen Spring is a Canadian citizen and a long-time partner of Edwin;
- Most specifically, the Canadian government has a responsibility to act because of the role Canada has played in Honduras, since 2009, being a constant ally of the post-coup regime and succession of military-backed governments, all characterized by corruption, criminality (including organized drug-trafficking), repression and impunity.

Since the 2009 coup, Canada has maintained full political relations with Honduras, negotiated and signed a Free Trade Agreement, and promoted the expansion of Canadian mining, garment industry and tourism business interests while turning a blind eye to endemic corruption, criminality, repression and impunity.

I look forward to hearing back from you soon about what steps have been taken to:

- Visit directly with Edwin in the military prison and confirm his emotional, mental health and physical well-being;
- Advocate directly with the Honduran government for the immediate release of Edwin and the dropping of the trumped up criminal charges due to his community organizing work and political opinions and activism;

I would be glad to answer questions about Edwin, specifically, and about the human rights situation in Honduras since the 2009 coup, and particularly over the past 2 months since the fraudulent, violent elections of November 26, 2017.

As a priority, I urge you to contact Karen Spring directly, who is directly involved in efforts to secure Edwin's safety and release, and is in close contact with Edwin's family.

Grahame Russell, director

[info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

1-416-807-4436

cc: Karen Spring; Janet Spring (Karen's mom); Canadian government officials and elected politicians; media;

(Grahame is a non-practising Canadian lawyer, adjunct professor at UNBC, and director of Rights Action since 1995)

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## **HONDURAS URGENT ACTION**

### **Demand the immediate release of EDWIN ESPINAL, and of all political prisoners in Honduras**

By Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network

Long-time Honduran activist Edwin Espinal has been arbitrarily detained and jailed (January 19, 2018) on charges related to protests against election fraud in Honduras. Due to his activism, he has been subject to State harassment, violence, and threats since the 2009 coup d'état. Immediate action is required to push for Edwin's release and to ensure his safety.



Long-time Honduran activist Edwin Robelo Espinal was arrested by police on January 19, on the eve of a week-long nationwide strike. Edwin faces a laundry list of trumped up charges: arson; property damage; and use of homemade explosive material. Edwin is also under State investigation for terrorism and criminal association related to damages to the Marriott Hotel, a multi-billion dollar US chain, during a January 12 protest in Tegucigalpa.

Thousands of Hondurans from all walks of life attended the January 12 action to protest the election fraud that robbed Opposition Alliance presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla of his victory in the November 26, 2017 general elections; the killings of more than 30 anti-fraud protesters and bystanders by state security forces; and the arrests of dozens of political prisoners during the ongoing post-electoral crisis. Edwin's arbitrary arrest occurred in the context of the election fraud endorsed by the US and Canada, and designed to keep current President Juan Orlando Hernandez in power

Edwin is currently in pretrial detention. At the end of his initial hearing inside military facilities on January 22, the judge ordered pre-trial detention and sent Edwin to La Tolva, a high-security, U.S.-style prison. The prison has extremely restricted visitor access, is run by a military Coronel, and prisoners are only allowed one-hour of sunlight every two weeks amongst other horrific conditions. Although the case has been appealed by local Honduran human rights organization COFADEH, Edwin could remain in detention for two or more years waiting trial.

### **Edwin Espinal has been a target of state harassment for years**

Edwin is an easy-going, kind man who draws young people of all ages to him. Edwin fiercely believes in organizing, supporting all forms of resistance, and solidarity with Honduran social movements and groups. He has never lost hope for change in Honduras.

Edwin's strong and relentless conviction is what the Honduran government fears. Because of this, since the US- and Canadian-backed military coup in 2009, Edwin has been a constant target of State repression and harassment.

In 2009, Edwin's partner, Wendy Elizabeth Avila, was killed after excessive exposure to tear gas when State forces violently evicted thousands of protesters gathered at the Brazilian Embassy to welcome ousted President Manuel Zelaya back into the country.

In 2010, Edwin was abducted and tortured by Honduran police, who were later acquitted – in the corrupted legal system - on all charges for their abuses.

One month before the fraudulent, violent 2013 elections, Honduran Military Police and canine units brought in by the Public Prosecutor's Office illegally raided Edwin's family's home, claiming that he possessed drugs, money, and weapons. At the time, Edwin was involved in a community movement to stop the privatization of public soccer fields in his neighborhood used by impoverished youth with limited recreational spaces and resources.

In 2015, Edwin's mom died in the social security hospital as a result of the \$350 million dollar looting of the Honduran Social Security Institute (IHSS) orchestrated by the National Party, in power since 2010.

Edwin has been detained more than a dozen times since 2009 and has been beaten by security forces. The most recent beating was in December 2017 when he participated in a protest against election fraud in Tegucigalpa.

As a result of this constant persecution, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted Edwin protective measures in 2010. The measures were renewed in 2013, shortly after the illegal raid on his family's home.

Edwin has been interviewed by [Democracy Now!](#), Al Jazeera's [Fault Lines](#) and in the documentary [Resistencia: The Fight for the Aguan Valley](#). His story has also been featured in articles published by [Truthout](#) and [POLITICO](#) Magazine.

Edwin's current detention on trumped up charges is one more example of systematic political persecution and targeting of anti-fraud protesters and political opponents of the government. The illegitimate and corrupt government of Juan Orlando Hernandez is targeting its own citizens – people like Edwin – while doing nothing to investigate the hundreds of killings and arbitrary arrests by State forces of social movement activists, protesters, journalists, lawyers, etc.

The legal proceedings against Edwin have completely violated Honduran law and due process. The case is being heard in “national jurisdiction” courts that, according to the charges against Edwin, have no jurisdiction over the case. The judge presiding over the case is the same judge that ordered the raid on Edwin's house in 2013, which, according to Honduran law, is illegal. Edwin's legal representatives were given one day (a Sunday) to prepare his defense and he was later sent to prison to await trial, which could take years.

### **Immediate action is needed for Edwin's safety and release**

To ensure Edwin's immediate safety, we demand that Honduran authorities immediately release Edwin and drop all charges.

But in the meantime, we demand: that Edwin be transferred to a detention center as determined by COFADEH (the Committee of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared in Honduras), which has provided long-term legal and human rights support for him since 2009. Edwin is currently being held in a jail run by a military officer, and the facility has extremely restricted access for visits by family, friends, and human rights groups. These visits are crucial to help guarantee his safety and well-being while detained.

To date, his family and his lawyers have not been able to visit him.

### **Solidarity and Funding needed**

- We urge human rights delegations, journalists, and investigators to visit Edwin and other arbitrarily detained political prisoners experiencing repression in the context of the post-electoral crisis and the imposition of the Juan Orlando Hernandez regime.
- Financial support for Edwin's family and human rights advocates is needed as they seek justice and work to ensure his safety and demand his release.

For more information about Edwin's case and the human rights situation in the country,

Karen Spring

Edwin Espinal's long-time partner & Coordinator of HSN (Honduras Solidarity Network)

[spring.kj@gmail.com](mailto:spring.kj@gmail.com); + (504) 9584-8572

<https://freedwinespinallibertad.blogspot.com/>

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Email: [freedwinespinal@gmail.com](mailto:freedwinespinal@gmail.com)

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### **Contact the following authorities**

(Send [freedwinespinal@gmail.com](mailto:freedwinespinal@gmail.com) copies of your communications, and responses from government officials, etc.)

#### **United States**

- Contact directly your elected Senators, Congress members: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
- Heide Fulton: US Chief of Mission, Honduras, [BronkeHM@state.gov](mailto:BronkeHM@state.gov)
- Jason Smith, Human Rights and Labor, [SmithJA6@state.gov](mailto:SmithJA6@state.gov)

#### **Canada**

- Directly contact your Member of Parliament: <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>
- Ambassador James Hill, Embassy of Canada in Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua, [James.Hill@international.gc.ca](mailto:James.Hill@international.gc.ca), [tgpa@international.gc.ca](mailto:tgpa@international.gc.ca)
- Minister Chrystia Freeland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Global Affairs Canada, [chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca](mailto:chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca), tel: 613-992-5234
- Canadian embassy for Honduras: Bertrand-Xavier Asselin, [Bertrand-Xavier.Asselin@international.gc.ca](mailto:Bertrand-Xavier.Asselin@international.gc.ca); Isabelle Solon Helal, [Isabelle.SolonHelal@international.gc.ca](mailto:Isabelle.SolonHelal@international.gc.ca); Kyle Sundstrom, [Kyle.Sundstrom@international.gc.ca](mailto:Kyle.Sundstrom@international.gc.ca)
- Alex Nuttall, MP Barrie, Springwater, Oro-Medonte, [Alex.Nuttall@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Alex.Nuttall@parl.gc.ca)
- Bruce Stanton, MP Simcoe North, [bruce.stanton@parl.gc.ca](mailto:bruce.stanton@parl.gc.ca)
- Kellie Leitch, MP Simcoe-Grey, [Kellie.Leitch@parl.gc.ca](mailto:Kellie.Leitch@parl.gc.ca);

#### **Demand**

The U.S. and Canadian governments must pressure their allies in the Honduran government and military to immediately release Edwin and drop all charges.

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

To support the work and struggle of our long-term partner groups in Honduras, responding to the human rights and repression crisis, including the political prisoners, 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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