

Karen Spring writes to Edwin Espinal, 4 months political prisoner in Honduras

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/karen-spring-writes-to-edwin-espinal-4-months-political-prisoner-in-honduras>

Karen Spring (Edwin's long-time partner, and director of Honduras Solidarity Network) sends this message (below) to Edwin, followed by an update.

- Emergency delegation to Honduras (May 22-26, 2018): Rights Action is participating in this delegation in support of the Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor (headed by Karen's mother Janet Spring). Information: Grahame Russell, info@rightsaction.org, Cel/Whassap: 1-416-807-4436

Please send Karen's words –and the accompanying update– to your politicians and government officials. Message of concern notwithstanding, the U.S. and Canadian governments have not changed their economic and military/security policies one iota vis-a-vis the military backed Honduran regime. Since the 2009 military coup, that ousted Honduras' last democratic government, the U.S. and Canada [and the World Bank, IDB, a host of companies and investors) have maintained full and beneficial relations with the deeply corrupted, anti-democratic and repressive regime.

Karen Spring writes

Four months ago today, you were surrounded by police and arrested. Since then, you have been surviving in a maximum security prison where you cannot write, read, or communicate with us, your family, or the outside world. Its now been 46 days since I last heard your voice.



I found this picture from our trip to Guatemala in 2011. I think it was the first time you met my mom who is now fighting like me, for your freedom. We miss you. Four months of fighting has only made us more determined. We, and so many others, have achieved the conditional release of two-thirds of the Honduran political prisoners but haven't had the same success with you and Raul. We will keep fighting ... and I know you know that.

Free Edwin Espinal update, May 19, 2018

Edwin Espinal was arrested four months ago today. The latest update on his case and that of other Honduran political prisoners is in English below and it's also online with photos (check out the collage made out of all of your solidarity selfies!):

<http://freedwinespinallibertad.blogspot.com/2018/05/the-struggle-for-honduran-political.html>

- Aquí está la versión en español: <http://freedwinespinallibertad.blogspot.com/2018/05/la-lucha-por-la-liberacion-de-lxs.html>

Today marks four months since longtime activist Edwin Espinal was arrested, on January 19. These past several weeks have been largely filled with great news, as many of the political prisoners are being released on bail. However, Edwin and others remain in jail, in terrible conditions, so it's crucial to keep up the attention and pressure until not a single political prisoner remains behind bars in Honduras.

First of all, though, huge thanks to everyone who participated in the recent social media solidarity campaign for political prisoner freedom! Everyone who spread the word, helped out with graphic designs, and posted and shared photos is greatly appreciated. People posted selfies and group photos sending solidarity from Chile, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, and all over the US!

The good news: many prisoners have been released

The majority of the political prisoners arrested in connection to protests against election fraud in the months following the November 2017 elections are now out of jail.

The first to be released was Eduardo Urbina, a resistance and student movement activist. For years, he had been subject to political persecution, police harassment, and threats, and he fled the country on December 10 for his own safety. But then the government accused him of setting a military truck on fire during a protest, five days after he had left, and continued to press charges even though Urbina had the paperwork to prove he was not in the country at the time. Due to the Honduran government's arrest warrant, which is still on the books, and a regional immigration alert, Urbina was detained in Nicaragua earlier this year, and then handed over to Costa Rica, where he spent weeks in immigration detention and then judicial detention before he was finally granted refugee status by the United Nations and released.

Jhony Salgado, one of the political prisoners from El Progreso, was next to be released on bail. The prisoners from Pimienta – 10 men imprisoned in the El Pozo maximum security prison in the Santa Bárbara department, and Lourdes Johana Gómez jailed in Tela, Atlántida department – then had bail review hearings, in two groups. They were all granted bail. And just this past week, between two separate hearings, five more political prisoners were released on bail in El Progreso.

All in all, over the past two months, 17 political prisoners have been released! With the exception of Urbina, who was granted refugee status and remains in Costa Rica, all of them still face trial in Honduras, but they are now at home with their families. Their release is a testament to the unwavering struggle for their freedom waged by their relatives, as well as activists, lawyers, organizations, and supporters. Since their release, however, several of the former political prisoners from Pimienta have reported incidents of threats and intimidation, particularly by police.

The bad news: Edwin was denied bail

On May 9, Edwin Espinal had a bail review hearing. It was held in the same courtroom as his initial hearing, on the grounds of a military base on the outskirts of Tegucigalpa, and presiding over the hearing was the same judge, Claudio Aguilar, whose checkered past includes ordering a 2013 raid by military police on Edwin's home.

The hearing was attended by a few observers from the Honduran office of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Canadian Embassy, and the US Embassy. Other human rights observers as well as journalists who managed to get onto the military base grounds attempted to observe the hearing, but were told by the judge that there were already human rights people there and that there was no more room. Most people, however, including Edwin's relatives, activists, journalists, and supporters, were not permitted past the military base entrance, and instead held a rally at the entrance calling for Edwin's freedom.

Edwin's lawyers from the Committee of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) had several well-prepared arguments against continued pretrial detention as well as generous offers of money, property and support for his bail. However, the judge quickly shot everything down. After he had denied bail, Edwin's lawyers attempted to propose house arrest and then a transfer, but everything was swiftly denied. Generally at bail hearings, there is first a block of time in which the prosecution and defense present their arguments, and then the judge establishes a set time later in the day for the ruling, following a substantial recess. That did not occur in Edwin's case. In approximately an hour, the judge heard the arguments and ruled immediately, denying bail and all other alternative measures.

Edwin remains imprisoned in the La Tolva maximum security prison. The water, food, and health conditions are dire. He is also still unable to communicate with anyone outside the prison except for during visits by one of his legal representatives from COFADEH or from a relative who recently obtained authorization, though even visits from accredited lawyers and authorized relatives are still subject to arbitrary restrictions and changes above and beyond the already prohibitive regulations. The telephone communication system for prisoners in La Tolva is still offline. It has been more than one and a half months since Edwin and Raul have been able to speak to nearly all of their loved ones.

Next steps: solidarity and action until they are all free!

It has been a rollercoaster couple of months. So many political prisoners have been finally able to reunite with their families, and each release is a victory well worth celebrating!

At the same time, however, the outcome of Edwin's bail review hearing was yet one more instance of political persecution in a long line of nearly a decade of injustices, attacks, and intimidation due to his activism, but this latest injustice could potentially have serious and long-term impacts on his health and well-being, as well as that of his family members.

Four other political prisoners also remain imprisoned: Raúl Álvarez, charged and jailed with Edwin in La Tolva; Edy Gonzalo Valle from Choloma, jailed in El Pozo; and two political prisoners, Gustavo Adolfo Cáceres Ayala and José Gabriel Godínez Avelar in El Progreso. There are also indications that arrests in connection with protests against election fraud will continue, and more names may need to unfortunately be added to the list.

As well as the work of the dedicated lawyers, organizations and activists on the ground, broader ongoing support and pressure will be needed until there is **FREEDOM FOR ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS IN HONDURAS!** We must also continue to fight for all charges to be dropped against the political prisoners that have been released.

There will be more urgent action demands in the future, but for now, please continue to contact the Red Cross and demand they visit Edwin Robelo Espinal and Raul Alvarez in

La Tolva prison, speak with them directly, and again verify the conditions including the water and health situation inside the jail.

Keep on writing

United States

Contact directly your elected Senators (<https://whoismyrepresentative.com/>) and Congress members (<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>) and make your demands known to them.

Canada

Directly contact your Member of Parliament and make your demands known to them (<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>) and ask them to write directly to:

- Ambassador James Hill, Embassy of Canada in Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua, James.Hill@international.gc.ca, tgipa@international.gc.ca
- Minister Chrystia Freeland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Global Affairs Canada, chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca, chrystia.freeland.c1d@parl.gc.ca, chrystia.freeland@international.gc.ca

Demands - short term

The U.S. and Canadian governments must:

- Do an about face and rescind their “legitimization” of the Nov. 26, 2017 elections
- Condemn the multiple acts of electoral fraud carried out by government of Juan Orlando Hernandez
- Condemn the repression including the killing of over 40 pro-democracy protesters, and the illegal detentions of dozens of political prisoners, including Edwin Espinal
- Suspend all economic, military and political relations with the government of Honduras, until the political / electoral crisis has been resolved and impartial justice processes are proceeded against the intellectual and material authors of the electoral fraud and stolen elections, and the endemic repression

Demands - medium term

There must be legislative inquiries in the U.S. and Canada into the causes of Honduras’ now endemic repression and exploitation, corruption and impunity, with specific focus on the role played by the U.S. and Canadian governments:

- In support of the 2009 military coup
- In support and legitimization of fraudulent and violent elections in 2009, 2013 and 2017
- In support (in the case of Canada) of the promoting and signing of the potentially illegitimate “Free Trade Agreement” with the government of Honduras; In support of the expansion of corporate investments in Honduras (mining, garment “sweatshop” industry, bananas, hydro-electric dams, tourism, African palm, etc.), while turning a blind eye to and – in effect – benefitting from repression, fraud, corruption and impunity.

More information

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spring.kj@gmail.com / <https://freedwinespinallibertad.blogspot.com> / [Free EDWIN ESPINAL Libertad](#) / #FreeEdwinEspinal #LibertadEdwinEspinal /

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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:

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