

Update by Janet Spring

Day #319: Janet Spring writes of trip to Honduras to fight for release of son-in-law Edwin Espinal (husband of Karen Spring), political prisoner in a military jail since January 18, 2018

Here, CBC Toronto interviews Janet and Karen Spring about their struggle, *while not reporting on* the complicit role of the Canadian-government maintaining full economic and political relations with the corrupt, repressive regime in power

- “Why this billboard in rural Ontario is calling for the release of a Honduran prisoner. Edwin Espinal, 43, was imprisoned following anti-government protests”, by Lorenda Reddekopp, CBC, Dec 1, 2018,
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/billboard-human-rights-honduras-1.4927568?fbclid=IwAR2dPQnTOSGLGcJNO4-64ShMizhwtBwIFC5sxCpueCXKDoZUwDNWjHe8UwE>



My Trip to Honduras: Advocating for Edwin Espinal Human Rights Defender

By Janet Spring

Why People Flee Honduras

November 21, 2018 marked ten months of Edwin Espinal's incarceration in La Tolva Prison, Honduras. That day I returned to Toronto from a two-week trip where I visited Edwin in prison, met with representatives from three different embassies, sat in the courtroom where the Berta Caceres murder trial was taking place, and talked to local

Hondurans who have been victims of poverty, repression, violence, and discrimination at the hands of the Juan Orlando Hernandez government.

The past two weeks in Honduras have further affirmed to me why people flee the country, leaving the life they have built – their homes, possessions, friends and extended family members – to make the uncertain journey to the United States. According to the actions of the Trump regime, the US no more cares about them than the corrupt government they have left behind. Recently at the border, migrants have been teargassed and shot with rubber bullets.

Yet Canada remains silent not only on the corruption in the country that drives people to leave in mass exodus, but the serious human rights crisis occurring at the US/Mexican border.

Edwin in jail

While in Honduras, I applied for special permission to visit Edwin and was given two visits of 4 hours each. He is very thin and has lost over 40 pounds. His face is sunken and complexion is sallow due to lack of sunlight and fresh air. His hair is thinning and his eyes are sunken.

Yet Edwin is hopeful that he and Raul Alvarez who was arrested at the same time, will be released through either an amnesty or a court order. This we have been waiting for since early August. Some officials inside and outside of the prison tell them that they will be released before Christmas, yet we fear that these are merely psychological torture tactics to get Edwin and Raul's hopes up, then to have them and us, disappointed once again.

The wait is heart wrenching and worrisome.

Possible release?

Since late August to November 16, representatives from the Liberal and Libre government opposition parties and the National Party in power have participated in a National Dialogue, facilitated by the United Nations. But no resolution to the political prisoner situation has been determined. Edwin and Raul and other political prisoners could be in pre-trial detention for up to 2.5 years. According to the latest prison data, over 60% or 11,000 inmates in Honduran prisons are in pre-trial detention. All prisoners are very poor; the rich buy themselves out of prison.

The poor have no chance of release; the court system is corrupt and there is no rule of law for the majority of Hondurans.

Brother of president – drug-trafficker

Corruption is rampant in Honduras, where the government elite is made up of members of the ruling oligarchy families. Recently the brother of President Juan Orlando Hernandez, Juan Antonio, was arrested in Miami and has been indicted for cocaine trafficking through Honduras; some of the cocaine shipments were stamped with his

initials and imported to the US. Since he will be tried in the US, he will face up to 20 years in prison if convicted. If he were tried in Honduras, Hernandez would most likely be released.

Father of Honduran ambassador to Canada stole public funds

A week before Hernandez' arrest, Wilfredo Cerrato Duran, the father of the Honduran Ambassador to Canada – Sofia Rodriguez – was arrested for fraud of over 550,000 USD. He was placed on house arrest in Honduras instead of being sent to prison. Special treatment and impunity for the wealthy is common.

Many of the rich oligarchy families run their businesses with help from the gangs. M-15 gang activity and control seriously hinder and terrorize poor Honduran families that are at the mercy of extortion by gangs in their poor neighbourhoods. Gang extortion and violence is one of the reasons that many Hondurans have chosen to join the mass exodus in caravans. This activity is also a serious threat in the prisons.

While in Honduras, our group met with representatives from the Spanish, European Union, and Canadian Embassies. We also hand-delivered documents from the National Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners in Honduras (NCRPPH) to the US, British, and French Embassies and to the United Nations. The Canadian Embassy organized a delegation of the embassy representatives listed above to visit Edwin and Raul to discuss and view the conditions of the prison. They also took them large jugs of water, as the director of the prison had denied any drinking water into the prison beforehand.

The rules for prison visitation are at the whim of the director of La Tolva Prison. Seldom does the director follow the rule of law. Most families travel long distances to the prison to visit their family members and some are denied access on visitation day as was the case with Edwin's sister Delmi, depending on the director's mood. Visitors are not allowed to bring in any personal items and they are not provided with secure lockers. So, most women leave their purses at the gate of the prison attached to the fence, out in the open. The food they take in is scanned through x-ray machines and poked and prodded. Visitors must also go through x-ray machines both upon entry and exit. If they refuse or ask for a pat-down, they are denied entry. Most Hondurans do not complain for fear their visitations will be denied or their family member inside will be severely punished.

Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor (SCHRM)

The Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor (SCHRM) continues to advocate for all political prisoners, for their release and dropping of all charges. On November 1, SCHRM and Kathy Price (Amnesty International Canada) presented at an event in Midland Ontario: Human Rights Abuses in Honduras and the Simcoe County Connection; the event was sponsored by PeaceWorks, and the Explorers Café, Midland. On November 16 and 17, Christine Nugent (SCHRM) presented at two events

sponsored by the Honduro-Canada Solidarity Community in Toronto and St. Catharines, Ontario.

The Spring family and SCHRIM will continue advocating for human rights in Honduras to affect positive change during this very difficult era. As human rights abuses escalate in the country and at the US/Mexico border we fear for the safety of the Honduran people. We demand that Edwin Espinal and others be released from prison and all charges be dropped. SCHRIM will continue to pressure the Government of Canada to take a stand and make a public statement condemning these abuses.

Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Freeland cannot remain silent. They must act now. To quote Justin Trudeau speaking at the UN Summit on September 24, 2018, "Canadians stand for human rights at home and abroad." We demand that Trudeau follows through with this pledge!

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Politely pester U.S. and Canadian politicians

Keep on sending info to your elected politicians in the U.S. and Canada (& to media outlets) holding them to account for their unending support for the Honduran regime, turning a blind eye to the systematic human rights violations, killings, corruption and impunity.

Keep on supporting community based groups in Honduras, struggling to defend human rights, restore democracy and to put an end to the undemocratic regime - a huge and dangerous struggle.

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, 1-613-992-5234, 1-343-203-1851; chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca, chrystia.freeland.c1d@parl.gc.ca, chrystia.freeland@international.gc.ca

Honduran Ambassador to Canada, Sofia Cerrato
Rodriguez: ambassador@embassyhonduras.hn, 1-613-233-8900

Demands - short term

The U.S. and Canadian governments must:

- Rescind their “legitimization” of the Nov. 26, 2017 elections;
- Condemn the multiple acts of electoral fraud carried out by the illegitimate regime headed by Juan Orlando Hernandez;
- Condemn government repression, including the killing of over 40 pro-democracy protesters, and the illegal detentions of dozens of political prisoners, including Edwin Espinal;
- Suspend business and military-police-security 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 killings and illegal jailings.

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

- Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network, spring.kj@gmail.com / <https://www.facebook.com/freeEDWINEESPINALlibertad/> / <https://twitter.com/EdwinLibertad> / <http://freedwinespinallibertad.blogspot.com/> / freedwinespinal@gmail.com
- Janet Spring (Karen’s mom, Edwin’s mom-in-law), Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor <https://simcoecountyhondurasrightsmonitor.wordpress.com/> / janet.spring@utoronto.ca
- Grahame Russell, Rights Action, grahame@rightsaction.org

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

To support the work of our partner groups in Honduras, responding to the permanent 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

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