

Letter by Karen & Janet Spring, Grahame Russell

Misleading statements by Chrystia Freeland (Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs) about political prisoner Edwin Espinal & the human rights situation in Honduras

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/misleading-statements-by-chrystia-freeland-canadian-minister-of-foreign-affairs>

- **TAKE ACTION:** Please support request for meeting between the Spring family (of Elmvale, Ontario) and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister Chrystia Freeland.



Letters written by students at Innisdale Collegiate, Barrie, advocating for release of Honduran political prisoner Edwin Espinal (member of the Spring family of Elmvale, Ontario), were delivered by Member of Parliament John Brassard, to Minister Chrystia Freeland.

Misleading Response by Chrystia Freeland to Parliamentary E-Petition Initiated by Janet Spring, Mother-in-Law of Edwin Espinal, a Political Prisoner in Honduras

April 11, 2019

Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland has responded misleadingly, and even deceptively - in the assessment of the Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor, Rights Action and Honduras Solidarity Network, to a Parliamentary e-petition on the human rights situation in Honduras, the illegal

detention of political prisoner Edwin Espinal, and Canada's role in the on-going human rights crisis.

The petition (<https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-1868>) was initiated October 10, 2018, by Janet Spring, mother-in-law of Edwin Espinal who has been illegally detained as a political prisoner in a maximum-security military-run jail since January 19, 2018. Edwin is married to Janet's daughter Karen Spring, a human rights expert and activist living in Honduras since the 2009 military coup ousted Honduras' last democratically elected government.

- Full response:
http://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/ePetitions/Responses/421/e-1868/421-03231_GAC_E.pdf

Minister Freeland writes:

“Canada is a strong supporter of the rights of people of Hondurans. The promotion and protection of human rights, fighting corruption and improving the lives of vulnerable populations are at the core of Canada’s engagement in Honduras.”

Canada’s “engagement” in Honduras can only be assessed by actual policies and actions since the 2009 military coup, not by the repetition of pro-human rights statements littered throughout the Minister’s response to the petition.

“Canada has contributed \$3 million to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in order to support the office’s human rights monitoring capacity on an ongoing basis. In addition, Canada provided over \$5 million to the Organization of American States Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (OAS-MACCIH).”

The merits of these two “aid” programs are debatable in terms of whether these are the most effective ways to promote human rights and the rule of law in Honduras. The MACCIH has had very limited success at holding high-level government officials accountable for corruption and the pillage of tens of millions of dollars from public institutions. Over 30 Honduran Members of Congress have been indicted on corruption charges, and none has seen the inside of a jail cell.

Compare that to political prisoners Edwin Espinal and Raul Alvarez, who have spent 15 months inside a maximum-security military prison on trumped up charges related to protesting the 2017 fraudulently stolen elections and government killings and repression!

Furthermore, despite MACCIH's criminal indictments against dozens of Honduran officials, Canadian officials continue to do business with family members of these indicted officials.



Minister of Transport Marc Garneau stands next to Honduran Ambassador Sofia Cerrato Rodriguez during the signing of a new transport agreement on December 11, 2018. Sofia Rodriguez's father, Wilfredo Cerrato, has been formally accused by the MACCIH of 125 counts of fraud and embezzlement. Her brother, also named Wilfredo Cerrato, has played a key role in facilitating several transactions through his position as President of the Central Bank of Honduras, to several individuals now indicted on corruption charges.

Why do Canadian authorities do business and pose for photos ops with the Honduran political and economic elites deeply embedded in corruption?

More importantly, the two mentioned "aid" programs have nothing to do with the consistently negative impact of Canadian policies in Honduras over the past 10 years. Since the U.S. and Canadian-backed June 28, 2009 military coup violently ousted Honduras' last democratically elected government, Canada has:

- Endorsed three sets of fraudulent, violent and undemocratic elections (2009, 2013, 2017);
- Pushed for and signed the Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement with these same post-coup governments. Arguably, this agreement should be considered null and void, having been ratified by an undemocratic, illegitimate government;
- Promoted the continuing expansion of Canadian business and investor interests in mining, sweatshops, tourism, and "clean" energy projects.

Canada has done all this, while turning a blind eye to or denying that:

- Levels of government and death-squad repression have risen to levels similar to the years of the U.S.-backed military regimes of the early 1980s;
- Levels of poverty, extreme poverty and inequality have increased to their highest levels in recent history;
- Honduras has become the murder capital of the world and one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, human rights lawyer, land and human rights defender, and environmentalists;
- Organized crime (including drug traffickers) have infiltrated all branches of the government and State, including the President's office;
- More Hondurans are forced to flee their homes and countries in 'caravans' or individually, year after year, than at any time since the early 1980s.

Minister Freeland goes on to state:

“Canada also advocates for democracy in Honduras. Canada helped fund the Organization of American States’ Electoral Observation Mission in Honduras during the last Presidential election in November 2017, and supports the mission’s findings and recommendations.”

“Following the elections, Canada publicly called for an inclusive and legitimate dialogue in order to resolve issues stemming from the electoral process, ...”

This statement borders on being false. The OAS's electoral observation mission in 2017 wrote in their preliminary report: “the abundance of irregularities and deficiencies is such as to preclude full certainty regarding the outcome.” Despite the OAS recognizing wide-spread deficiencies and calling for new elections, and despite the fact that Juan Orlando Hernandez ran illegally for re-election, the Canadian government recognized the electoral results on December 22, 2017.

Canada –along with the U.S.– are the only two governments in the world to recognize as “legitimate” the three sets (2009, 2013, 2017) of fraudulent, violent and undemocratic elections that have served to keep in power repressive, corrupt governments since the 2009 coup.

In our view, it is insulting to the Honduran people that Canada –along with the U.S.– called for ‘dialogue’ after Canada and the U.S. openly supported the President and government that had fraudulently and violently stolen the elections!

Furthermore, the National Dialogue process that did start in August 2018 and ended in December 2018, failed completely. No agreements or consensus were reached on several issues during the so-called “dialogue” and none of the major points discussed have been acknowledged or approved by the Honduran Congress.

One of the major points of conflict during the dialogue process was an amnesty for all political prisoners -including Edwin Espinal- that was agreed upon by all parties, except the Honduran government.

“... and has publicly called upon the Honduran government to investigate human rights abuses reported following the elections. We continue to monitor the situation closely and support a genuine and inclusive dialogue between the government and opposition.”

Here again, Canada’s calls for “inclusive dialogue” ring hollow, given that Canada openly recognized the president and political party that corrupted the electoral process and fraudulently and violently stole the elections, and then continued to use military and police repression, across the country, against the Honduran people –including Edwin Espinal– who were protesting the stolen elections.

“The Minister of Foreign Affairs has publicly called on the government of Honduras to reinstate constitutional rights and guarantees without delay and to uphold democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law.”

At this point, Freeland’s response is simply piling more pro-human rights statements on top of previous ones. In the case of Edwin Espinal, his entire legal process - from the initial illegal detention, based on trumped up charges, to now 15 months of illegal detention in abusive conditions in a max-security military jail - has been characterized by constant violations of due process.

Endlessly repeating calls to respect the rule of law ignores the fact that the Honduran government is, in Edwin’s case and in the case of many others, using the legal and penitentiary systems as tools of repression.

“With respect to Hondurans who have been arrested and detained during the post-electoral protests, Canada continues to call for the application of due process and respect for human rights, although the ability of Canada to provide direct assistance to Honduran nationals such as Mr. Edwin Espinal is limited. Embassy of Canada officials have visited various prisons to see detention conditions, and senior Canadian Officials have met with the Honduran Attorney General, the Vice-Minister of Human Rights, the President of the Supreme Court, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to raise our concerns regarding the application of due process.”

Minister Freeland’s final statement - related to the illegal detention of Janet Spring’s son-in-law Edwin Espinal (held as a political prisoner in a maximum-security military jail since January 19, 2018, on trumped up charges related to protesting the stolen elections) - is also false. One need only consider political, military and/or economic measures the Canadian government has taken

(invariably together with the U.S., Britain and a number of G7 club members) against other governments that Canada opposes or has differences with.

The only difference in this situation is that Canada recognizes Honduras as a “democratic ally” and chooses to maintain full diplomatic, aid, economic and “security” (police and military) relations with the regime.

If Canadian officials met with the above offices, as stated – When did they meet with them? Who did they meet with? What demands did Canada make? What commitments did they secure from them? Have they followed up and continued to push for the release of Edwin, and all political prisoners, and the dropping of all the trumped up charges?

Given that absolutely nothing has changed for Edwin Espinal and other political prisoners in Honduras, we highly doubt Canada has made human rights and Edwin Espinal’s case a priority in their engagement with Honduras.

We call on Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Freeland to meet with the Spring family, and a few supporters, to discuss the urgent matter of the on-going and abusive detention of their family member, Edwin Espinal.

Respectfully,

Janet Spring, mother-in-law of Edwin Espinal
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Karen Spring, partner-spouse of Edwin Espinal
Honduras Solidarity Network, spring.kj@gmail.com

Grahame Russell
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TAKE ACTION

Please write to Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Freeland, with copies to your MP and the MPs listed below, urging them to support this face-to-face meeting with the Spring family.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca

Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland
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MP Erin O'Toole, Conservative Member of Parliament for Durham (Ontario),
Shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vice-Chair Standing Committee on Foreign
Affairs and International Development

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MP Guy Caron, NDP Member of Parliament Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—
Les Basques, Critic for Foreign Affairs

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MP Elizabeth May, Green Party of Canada

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More information

Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor

Janet Spring: jspring2@lakeheadu.ca,

<https://simcoecountyhondurasrightsmonitor.wordpress.com/>.

Trying Times, Again: Guatemala & Honduras crisis response fund

(Rights Action March 2019 newsletter)

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/trying-times-again>

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