

Rights Action
May 6, 2019

Letter from Right Action to PM Trudeau & Minister Freeland

Karen Spring strip-searched while visiting husband Edwin Espinal, a political prisoner in Honduras

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/karen-spring-strip-searched-while-visiting-husband-edwin-espinal-a-political-prisoner-in-honduras>

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca
Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland, chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca,
chrystia.freeland.c1d@parl.gc.ca, chrystia.freeland@international.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Freeland,

Respectfully, do you agree with the decision of the military-backed Honduran government to strip-search Karen Spring while she visited her partner and spouse, Edwin Espinal, a political prisoner illegally held in a maximum-security military jail in Honduras since January 20, 2018?



I ask you this because the government of Honduras has been a close “democratic ally” of Canada (and the U.S.) since the 2009 military coup that ousted Honduras’ last democratically elected government. Canada maintains full and beneficial economic, diplomatic-political and military-security relations with the government headed by President Juan Orlando Hernandez.

Karen Spring writes:

On Saturday, May 4, 2019, I went for my regular visit to see political prisoner & my partner, Edwin Espinal, in the La Tolva ‘torture centre’, a maximum-security military jail, where he has been illegally detained since January 20, 2018.

After going through an airport-style body scanner, I, as are all visitors, was taken into a private room with a female soldier from the new National Force for Control of the Penitentiary System. Her face was entirely covered by a black balaclava and her eyes with sunglasses. She began to pat me down. My shirt was lifted up, my bra was pulled out, the officer cupped her hands around my breasts, and she felt the underwire of my bra.

I had previously complained on a few occasions that this type of search was an assault on my dignity and degrading.

This time during the physical search, the soldier decided that my bra was "suspicious clothing" and forced me to remove it. She took my bra out to the public area to put it through another scanner again. I was left standing with my shirt on and my arms crossed over my chest, absolutely furious and feeling very violated. Other female visitors around me shook their head in disagreement and rolled their eyes, swearing under their breath, likely because they have been treated similarly in previous occasions.

This is one example of the so-called "security protocol" that mostly women and other family members are subjected to when visiting detainees in the La Tolva 'torture centre'. We are probed, touched, violated, and treated like criminals.

Other women, including women in Edwin's family, have had to drop their pants and underwear to their knees in front of their children to also be searched, even after going through a complete body scanner and a physical search. The physical search and violation is worse when a woman wears a sanitary pad into a visit.

After being treated like this, like so many Hondurans, I will go and file a complaint before the relevant Honduran human rights and prosecutorial bodies and to foreign embassies. But I know that once again, my complaint won't be investigated, that women will continue to be violated every time they go into that jail, and that the US and Canadian governments will continue to prop up a regime that is built on mass human rights violations, from inside the jails to the streets to the communities.

IT'S INFURIATING AND WRONG.

The Honduran government is increasing persecution of family members and loved ones of detainees, including political prisoners who shouldn't be in jail in the first place. For over 15 months, Edwin has been detained in a max-security, military-jail, "waiting trial" on trumped up charges

- related to protesting the fraudulently and violently stolen 2017 presidential elections, elections endorsed as legitimate and democratic by the U.S. and Canadian governments;

- related to protesting the government killings of dozens of people protesting those stolen 2017 elections; and
- related to protesting, in general, the violence, repression, corruption and destitution that are systemic throughout the country and that force 10s of 1000s of Hondurans to flee into exile, very year.

This persecution against Karen and other women sends a message to family members and loved ones of political prisoners, as well as to Honduran society in general, that they could be harassed and persecuted in this manner if they try and visit their loved ones.

Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Freeland,

Canada's inaction (as well as that of the U.S. government, and other "international actors") on these systemic human rights violations in Honduras, while maintaining full economic, diplomatic-political, and military-security relations with the repressive and corrupt government, empowers and enables that government to continue to act this way with impunity.

For more information

- Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network, spring.kj@gmail.com
- Janet Spring, mother-in-law of Edwin Espinal, jspring2@lakeheadu.ca

Sincerely,

Grahame Russell, Rights Action
grahame@rightsaction.org

(Karen Spring worked with Rights Action 2008-2014, before heading up the Honduras Solidarity Network since then)

TAKE ACTION

- Read: "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>

Write to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister Chrystia Freeland, with copies to your own MP, media and networks, expressing outrage at this persecution against Karen Spring, and many women visitors to loved ones in jail, and at Canada's support for this corrupt, repressive, anti-democratic government.

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, Erin.OToole.A1@parl.gc.ca

MP Guy Caron, NDP Member of Parliament Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Critic for Foreign Affairs, Guy.Caron@parl.gc.ca
MP Elizabeth May, Green Party of Canada, elizabeth.may@parl.gc.ca

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS TO RIGHTS ACTION

Your support will help Rights Action continue to fund and support community groups in Honduras and Guatemala at the forefront of land, environmental, human rights and justice struggles. 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

Please re-post and publish this information
Subscribe to e-Newsletter: www.rightsaction.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/RightsAction>, @RightsAction
