

## **Honduras: Mass protests continue against repressive, corrupt, military-backed regime of Juan Orlando Hernandez**

TeleSUR interview with Grahame Russell, Rights Action, June 2, 2019

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/honduras-mass-protests-continue-against-military-backed-regime-of-juan-orlando-hernandez>



The Honduran regime at work

TeleSUR speaks with Grahame Russell, director of Rights Action, on why large-scale demonstrations continue in Tegucigalpa and throughout Honduras. We ask why the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez has been characterized as 'illegitimate', 'fraudulent' and a 'dictatorship' by the opposition and supporters, and why the political situation has received minimal coverage in the mainstream media. Grahame also touches on the government's handling of the environment and indigenous rights, and the role the U.S. and Canadian governments play while multinationals based in the north, create harmful living situations for Honduran communities.

- **View/ listen:** <https://videos.telesurenglish.net/video/780328/honduras-mass-protests-grahame-russell-of-rights-action/>

TELESUR: To delve a bit more into the subject of Honduras and all that's been taking place there, I am joined by Grahame Russell, director of Rights Action. A national strike was held on Thursday and Friday [May 30-31], but since then we've seen these large demonstrations continue. Why are they protesting?

### **10 years of protests**

GRAHAME: In a sense there have been 10 years of protests that are ongoing. In the short term, protests have been going on for the last few weeks with a heavy concentration on Thursday and Friday and through this weekend, due to the latest privatization plans of the government headed by Juan Orlando Hernandez, which is to privatize the public health and public education sectors.

But these privatization schemes are just the latest of a series of pro-global business, pro-global investor policies that Honduran governments have been implementing since the military coup of June 27, 2009 and there have been protests going on throughout the past 10 years on a regular basis.

TELESUR: We have been seeing the mobilizations and organizations, and also the Partido Libre [LIBRE Party] of former president Manuel Zelaya, refer to this government as "illegitimate". This began before the November 26, 2017 elections. And protesters have been out in full force this week. They've been out in full force claiming fraud during the [November 26, 2017] elections, after the elections, and this week they are continuing to say that the government is an illegitimate dictatorship. What are they referring to when they speak about impunity in the country?

### **Timeline, since 2009 military coup**

GRAHAME: There is an important timeline to understand: there was a military coup on June 27, of 2009, backed by the United States and Canada, that ousted Honduras's last democratically elected government - the entire government of President Manuel Zelaya was forcibly ousted by the military.

Since then, there's been three sets of corrupt, fraudulent and very violent elections, in November 2009, November 2013 and November 2017. These elections were fraudulent -- widespread fraud was discovered, they were extremely violent -- many opposition members were killed, but each time these elections occurred, they were legitimized and claimed to be democratic by the

United States and Canada, and other governments and actors in the international community.

In this way, these corrupt, violent governments have kept coming into power through these fraudulent election processes, and that is what we have today.

This is the second government headed up illegally by Juan Orlando Hernandez who came into power through widespread fraud in November, 2017. Since then there's been another outpouring of protests across the country against the illegitimate government, and against the privatization and pro-global business policies that are being implemented through violence and corruption across the country.

TELESUR: Through the work of your organization Rights Action, you've seen firsthand the government's handling of the environment, of Indigenous lands and rights, and the rights of communities when it comes to mining in Honduras. What can you tell us about how these things are looking from the environmental justice and Indigenous rights front?

**“Honduras is open for business”, corruption and repression**

GRAHAME: It is devastating. The roots of some of these issues go back to before the coup of 2009. But by any measure, the U.S. and Canadian backed coup of June 27, 2009 took all the social and human rights indicators and threw them down the toilet, at the same time that the government's bumper-sticker was “Honduras is open for business”. They increased access by international companies into the sectors of mining, hydroelectric dams, tourism, sugarcane production, banana production and the maquiladora sweatshop sector.

In every one of these sectors that the government is promoting, there has been an increase in forced violent evictions of people from their lands, of human rights violations and the killings of leaders.

Every one of these sectors is dominated by businesses and investors in the international community that are turning a blind eye to the corruption and repression, turning a blind eye to the human rights violations, and getting on with sometimes very profitable business.

TELESUR: We have been showing images of what looks like police repression in the streets, as well as images people leaving for these migrant caravans headed to the United States. What do you make of international media coverage which for some time now has provided extensive coverage of the political situation in Venezuela, and last year in Nicaragua? Why aren't we hearing more about Honduras?

**Not a “failed state” – A violent state**

GRAHAME: There are several questions there, but let me respond as briefly as I can. Whereas we discussed earlier that these protests are against the privatization of the public health and education systems, the one sector of Honduran society that is not being privatized and is not suffering any cutbacks is the so-called security sector.

Even as the government is cutting back on everything that has to do with the wellbeing of the population - such as health and education, access to micro credit, etc. - they are not cutting back on military and police spending.

Some international observers refer to Honduras as a failed state. It is not a failed state. It is a violent state in service of the economic interests of the ruling elites in Honduras and their international business partners in the sectors that I mentioned.

For all the reasons that we've seen in the news today, the violent crackdown by police and military against Hondurans who are, for the most part, peacefully protesting the privatization schemes, the corruption of the government - including the fact that drug trafficking has infiltrated into most branches of the government, these are the reasons why more people are forced to flee Honduras today than at any time in its recent history going back to when Honduras was governed by U.S. backed military dictatorships through the 1980s.

**Not a “crisis”**

The numbers of people fleeing every year, in the tens of thousands if not more, is directly related to this ten-year situation. You can call it a crisis, or you can say that repression has become normalized, corruption has become normalized, exploitation of the people and forced evictions have become normalized.

All of the worst aspects of Honduran society are now so normalized it's hard to call them a crisis. It's almost as if real democracy and respect for human rights would be the crisis to this very violent and repressive situation in the country.

### **Media censorship?**

With respect to the role of the media, I pay a lot of attention to the role of the media in Canada and the United States. I think that for the most part, our media has done a very misleading job not just with respect to the forced migrant "caravans" but also what are the underlying causes of why so many people are forced into joining these refugee caravans, or just fleeing on their own across Mexico to try to get into the United States.

I believe the media is doing this because the problems in Honduras are being created by U.S. and Canadian policies. The U.S. has a long and dark history of supporting corrupt, repressive governments in Honduras, going to the 1800s. Canada, certainly since the coup in 2009, is playing sort of a 'front-seat role' with the U.S. It is our public policies that are very much empowering and enabling the very situation that causes so many people to flee.

If and when our media addresses something like the caravans, and the suffering of the people forced to flee, our media does not delve into many of the underlying causes, because that would expose corrupt and selfish Canadian and American policies at play.

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### **Background**

#### **Ashamed to be Canadian: Corruption, Fear, Humiliation and Militarization in Honduras**

by Janet Spring, mother-in-law of Honduran political prisoner Edwin Espinal

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/ashamed-to-be-canadian-corruption-fear-humiliation-and-militarization-in-honduras>

#### **Honduran Presidents linked to drug-trafficking & money laundering, since U.S. & Canadian-backed coup ousted Honduras' last democratic government**

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/honduran-presidents-linked-to-drug-trafficking-money-laundering>

## **The democratic crisis in Honduras has reached a boiling point**

By Ricardo González, May 9, Freedom House's program in Honduras

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/05/09/democratic-crisis-honduras-has-reached-boiling-point/?utm\\_term=.91f5ace5fd2d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/05/09/democratic-crisis-honduras-has-reached-boiling-point/?utm_term=.91f5ace5fd2d)

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