

Rights Action  
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**Murder of nurse Keyla Martinez, detained by police over Covid curfew, highlights violence faced by Honduran women**

by [Nina Lakhani](#), 12 Feb 2021, The Guardian

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/nurse-keyla-martinez-murdered-by-police>

The US and Canada maintain full economic, military and political relations with military-backed, corrupt Honduran regime, staunch “democratic ally” since the US and Canadian-backed June 28, 2009 military coup ousted Honduras’ last democratic government

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*“[Keyla Martinez’ was the latest victim in a relentless wave of misogynistic killings and state-sponsored violence in Honduras – one of the most dangerous and corrupt countries in the Americas.”*

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**Murder of nurse Keyla Martinez, detained by police over Covid curfew, highlights violence faced by Honduran women**

by [Nina Lakhani](#), 12 Feb 2021

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/12/honduras-femicide-keyla-martinez-women-violence>

Keyla Martínez screamed for help from inside the police cell, but no one came to save her.

Martínez, a 26-year-old trainee nurse from La Esperanza, western [Honduras](#), died in police custody last weekend after being detained for breaching a coronavirus curfew.

Police officers initially claimed Martínez had killed herself. But a preliminary autopsy found she had died from “mechanical asphyxiation” and prosecutors announced they were investigating her death as a murder.

She was the latest victim in a relentless wave of misogynistic killings and state-sponsored violence in Honduras – one of the most dangerous and corrupt countries in the [Americas](#). Twenty-nine women have been killed so far this year in Honduras, which has a population of about 9 million – only slightly more than New York City.

This week, security forces have teargassed protesters demanding truth and justice for the young nurse. Human rights groups are also demanding accountability amid the alarming escalation of deadly violence against women. At least six women have been killed since Martínez died.

“This killing has all the hallmarks of an extrajudicial execution and must be investigated as such,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas director at Amnesty International. “Grave human rights violations such as the killing of Keyla Martínez do not happen in a vacuum. They are the product of rampant impunity and the lack of political will to address the human rights crisis in Honduras. This dire context has produced a relentless and widespread stream of abuses by state security forces.”

Honduras is one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a woman or girl. It is a deeply machista society where conservative church leaders exert a powerful influence over the personal and political spheres – including women’s access to reproductive healthcare and protection from violence.

Last month, congress voted to amend the constitution [to make it virtually impossible to overturn the country’s abortion laws](#) – which are already some of the strictest in Latin America.



Health workers demand justice on Nurse Keyla Martínez during her funeral in La Esperanza.

Photograph: Orlando Sierra/AFP/Getty Images

In 2009, a coup orchestrated by a network of military, economic, political and religious elites, ushered in an authoritarian government, which remains in power despite multiple allegations of corruption, extrajudicial killings, electoral fraud and ties to [international drug trafficking networks](#).

Since then emigration has risen dramatically, as hundreds of thousands of men, women and children have fled north looking for safety and jobs. [A culture of impunity](#) has also meant that violence against women has only worsened.

In the decade before the coup, 222 women were murdered annually, according to analysis by the Centre for Women's Studies - Honduras (CEM-H). In the past five years, 381 have been killed on average annually. Ninety-six per cent of the murders remain unsolved.

“The militarization of the country since the coup has increased the threat to women’s lives, there are guns everywhere and we know the police have links to criminal gangs,” said Suyapa Martínez (no relation to Keyla Martínez) from CEM-H, a feminist organisation based in Tegucigalpa.

Advocates claim that the government has used the pandemic as an excuse to crack down on legitimate protesters, poor Hondurans who have been left with no income because of the lockdown, and communities opposed to environmentally

destructive mega-projects. Hundreds of people have been arrested for violating the 9pm-to-5am curfew that has been in place on and off since last May.

Martínez, a final year nursing student, was visiting her family in La Esperanza last weekend and went out to eat with friends on Saturday evening.

Police claimed that they detained Martínez and her friend, Dr Edgar Velásquez Orellana, around 11.45pm after stopping their car because of the curfew. Officers alleged that Martínez was drunk and disorderly, but her friends told local media that she had not been drinking.

The pair were taken to the police station and separated. Martínez was locked up in a cell alone. Police claimed that Martínez was discovered trying to hang herself with her blouse during a routine check, but was still alive. She was taken to hospital, but doctors say she was dead on arrival.

Through his lawyer, [Velásquez Orellana](#) has said that he heard Martínez shouting for help, before it went quiet. He is currently in hiding, apparently fearing reprisals.

Authorities in Honduras have a long history of issuing inaccurate information about high-profile crimes.

After the indigenous environmentalist Berta Cáceres was murdered in 2016, the minister of public security falsely claimed that it was a crime of passion. A court later ruled that Cáceres, who was shot dead at home in La Esperanza, was murdered for opposing an internationally funded hydroelectric dam.

In 2018, police commanders claimed that the [criminal investigator Sheryl Hernández killed herself despite](#) forensic science evidence suggesting that she had been murdered and the crime scene tampered with by her colleagues.

“We’re suffering an unprecedented wave of violence and femicides in Honduras, and it’s clear that it is women and girls who are the most affected by the rising levels of impunity and corruption linked to the dictatorship. This is an alarming moment for the country,” said Olivia Zúniga Cáceres, congresswoman for the opposition Libre party and the eldest daughter of Berta Cáceres.

The attorney general's office launched an investigation into 13 police officers after several days of protests organised by students and women's rights groups in La Esperanza and the capital, Tegucigalpa – which were met by security forces using teargas and rubber bullets.

On Wednesday, police in the capital arrested five protesters who remain in custody. Advocates fear they could face trumped-up terrorism charges which prosecutors have used liberally against protesters since the government pushed through changes to the criminal code.

Zúniga added: "The suspension of constitutional rights, supposedly to curtail Covid, has not reduced the level of infection, but has increased the systematic violation of human rights by the police. Women are not safe at home, in the streets or in custody."

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#### Background

**US government promises pathway to citizenship for 11 million people, but will the US & Canada continue to treat Honduras and Guatemala like "shithole countries", creating ever more forced migrants and refugees?**

By Grahame Russell, Rights Action, February 9, 2021

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/us-government-promises-pathway-to-citizenship-for-11-million-people>

#### **'Juan Orlando Hernandez is our narco-trafficking son of a bitch'**

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt is reported to have said that "Somoza may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch", referring to the ruthless military-backed dictator of Nicaragua that the US government was propping up.

One can imagine US and Canadian leaders saying: 'Juan Orlando Hernandez is a narco-trafficking son of a bitch, but he is our narco-trafficking son of a bitch', referring to the military-backed dictator of Honduras, illegally in power since (pretty much) the 2009 US and Canadian-backed coup.



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