

October 18, 1999  
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Rights Action  
calls for international solidarity & support

“Honduran Peaceful March Repressed”

Monday, October 18, 1999

- 18 marchers wounded at Presidential Palace; bloodiest governmental repression of the decade.
- Urgent request for letters, condemning rights violations and demanding compensation.
- Request for funds medical treatment of wounded and legal assistance for 35 indicted indigenous and popular movement leaders.

**Human Rights protest**

On October 12, 1999, over 5,000 peaceful protesters marched in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital, as part of a worldwide movement called "Cry of the Excluded" (*Grito de los Excluidos*). Indigenous and Black organizations initially gathered at the Spanish Embassy in Tegucigalpa, to protest 507 years of conquest, drawing attention to on-going and systemic violations of numerous economic, social, cultural and political rights of a majority of Hondurans.

They later joined other popular organizations at the Supreme Court where documents were delivered to Court officials, while others assembled outside in a festive atmosphere with music and speeches. Similar gatherings later took place at the Security Ministry, the Health Ministry, the Land Reform Institute (INA) and the National Congress. [The latter two gatherings occurred after the most repressive governmental response to peaceful protest in recent memory.]

**Bloodletting at the Presidential Palace**

Around noon, when the mobilization arrived near the Presidential Palace, the march was prevented from approaching by more than 100 police and soldiers in riot gear. March leaders were negotiating with governmental officials for more than an hour, when a truckload of army special forces called "*Cobras*" literally drove through the crowd scattering the marchers. Michael Marsh, an international human rights worker, witnessed the events from a few yards away. He saw the truck hit an elderly woman who fell to the ground. This prevented the truck from moving further.

The soldiers jumped from the truck, some landing on top of marchers. A pushing match started and the first tear gas canisters were soon fired into the crowd. Panic ensued and many ran, some falling on top of others. For those who stayed near the police line, the shoving match got brutal. As the police and soldiers swung their batons causing severe injuries, a small group of protesters began throwing stones. Soldiers then escalated the violence with hundreds of rounds of semi-automatic gunfire. Weapons used were Galils, M-16s and 9mm pistols.

Eighteen indigenous and black marchers were injured, including various bullet wounds and multiple leg and spinal fractures. One Lenca indigenous man lost his eye from a shot to his face.

**Honduran Government Blames Leaders**

Although two police officials have temporarily been suspended while an investigation proceeds, the Honduran government is legally proceeding against 35 march leaders, accused of inciting riot and injuring nine soldiers. The government immediately initiated a venomous campaign in the press against the marchers, especially in *La Tribuna*, a newspaper owned by President Carlos Flores. "International agitators" are also blamed for being behind the protest.

### **Indigenous Woman Activist currently on Tour in U.S.**

Bertha Caceres, age 28 and mother of four, is a leader among the Lenca people in La Esperanza, department of Intibuca, Honduras. Members of the organization she help to found, COPIN, the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations, suffered the most serious wounds in this latest attack. She will speak in Washington, DC on Tuesday, October 26 at 6:30pm at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, 1830 Connecticut Ave. NW (North of Florida Ave).

She will speak on how this current repression is an example of historical patterns of: poverty and discrimination, leading to organization, education and protest, resulting in state repression. She will also speak about Hurricane Mitch, One year later.

### **Action Requests**

Please write to the following Honduran officials to express outrage at the government's repression of the peaceful protest by Indigenous and other organizations. Urge that reparations be paid to the wounded.

Write or call:

Ingeniero Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé

Presidente, República de Honduras

Tel. 011 (504) 221-4547

Fax: 011 (504) 235-6949

Ministerio Público

Abog. Roy Edmundo Medina, Fiscal General del Estado

Tel: 001 (504) 239-3687

Fax: 001 (504) 239-4750

Please contact your Senators and Congresspersons, and the US State Department, to voice your concern.

Tel. (202) 224-3121

Copies of correspondence should also go to:

CONPAH, the *Confederacion de Pueblos Autoctonos de Honduras*. T/F: 011-504-225-4925.

E: [conpah@itsnetworks.net](mailto:conpah@itsnetworks.net), or [papica@sdnhon.org.hn](mailto:papica@sdnhon.org.hn); and

Guatemala Partners / Rights Action, Web: [www.igc.org/GuatemalaPartners](http://www.igc.org/GuatemalaPartners)

### **Financial contributions**

Funds are urgently needed for the treatment of the wounded indigenous and black people, and for the legal defense of falsely accused march leaders. Tax-exempt contributions can be made out to "Guatemala Partners", specifying that the contribution is for "CONPAH".