

Rights Action – September 18, 2011

## **HONDURAS – On-going Systemic State Repression by Military-backed Regime**

### **WHAT TO DO:**

#### **LETTER WRITING:**

North Americans should keep on sending this information to their own Senators, Congress members and Members of Parliaments, holding the governments of the USA and Canada partially responsible for the on-going systemic State repression by the military backed regime in Honduras.

#### **FUNDS NEEDED:**

See below, how to donate funds to grassroots groups in Honduras in the pro-democracy movement.

- Please re-post this information
- To get on-off Rights Action's listserv: [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)
- Follow Rights Action on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org](http://www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org)

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## **HONDURAS: STUDENT KILLED ON THE BATTLEFRONT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SANTA BARBARA**

From: [presente-honduras-bounces+info=rightsaction.org@lists.mayfirst.org](mailto:presente-honduras-bounces+info=rightsaction.org@lists.mayfirst.org)

On Behalf Of Caitlin Hancey

Sent: Wednesday, August 24, 2011 10:31 PM

To: Presente Honduras; ARSN list; APG-Honduras list

(The following is a translation of a statement circulated (in Spanish) on the La Compa mailing list (the mailing list of the members of the Convergence of the Peoples of the Americas))

Nahum Guerra, 17 years old, in his second year of agronomy studies at the "Pompilio Ortega" Agricultural School in Macueliso, Santa Barbara, was assassinated on August 22nd at 7:00pm while on shift with other student colleagues at the front gate of his college on the international western highway.

Nahum and his student colleagues had taken over the agricultural school with the purpose of defending public education, in front of a bonfire illuminating the Honduran flag. These students, heroic and patriotic, united their voices with thousands of students across the country in defense of their right to public education.

The State media campaign against students is no longer tolerable. A vehicle was circulating along the highway, and upon seeing the bonfire, the students, and the Honduran flag, its occupants shouted "Strikers, Strikers!" and opened fire on them. The bullets struck Nahum.

The people of the department of Santa Barbara condemn these acts of violence and impunity, and the violation of human rights. We declare ourselves in solidarity with the students of the agricultural school and with the family of Nahum in Cabañas, department of Copán, in light of this irreparable loss.

We condemn these acts of violence and death and consider Misters Porfirio Lobo [President of the Republic], Juan Orlando Hernandez [President of Congress], and Alejandro Ventura [Minister of Education] responsible for the education crisis in the country.

Long live the students! Nahum your death will be a seed of liberty.

FNRP.SB [National Front of Popular Resistance - Santa Barbara]

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## **TODAY: POLICE & MILITARY ATTACK PROTESTORS IN TOCOA**

09/15/2011, <http://quotha.net/node/1976>

REPRESSION IN TOCOA, COLON (translation by Adrienne Pine)

The national independence day celebration of September 15th was an excuse for an attack in the city of Tocoa, Colon, militarization center of Bajo Aguán.

As in the two previous years, the National People's Resistance Front (FNRP) called for peaceful public protests throughout the country. Tocoa was by no means the only site of protest, but as had occurred in previous years, the military and police forces dedicated themselves to the task of repression in the interest of silencing the voices that denounced them and demanded justice facing the situation of violence against the organized campesino population of this region of the country. This violence has increased in recent days with the massive presence of soldiers in the region and with the murders of various recognized regional agrarian leaders.

On this day, September 15th, the FNRP carried out its protest immediately following the parades of educational and military institutions of the department. They began at 8:30am. From the FNRP, around 600 people participated, including homesteaders, professional campesinos/as, homemakers and students. Students expressed their outrage against the attempts to privatize public education.

Soon after the march had begun, leaving from a well-known commercial center at the exit to Trujillo and going toward the central park of the city, the protesters came up against a massive police blockade which threateningly surrounded them and presented an obstacle to their peaceful march. Then, a little bit further, more agents joined the contingent of police and military, always with the aim of provoking fear among the FNRP protestors.

As the group was approaching the central park, in the busy commercial street at 11:45am, a group of police tried to arrest three protestors with the aim of capturing them without giving specific reasons or warrants for their arrests.

Several leaders of social organizations tried to mediate to avoid the illegal detention, but the police responded with teargas and attacking those who approached them with their batons.

With the gas attacks, the protest was dispersed and soldiers and police officers unleashed a brutal attack against the protestors throughout the center of the city, even breaking into private residences where many had taken refuge.

An elderly gentleman was brutally beaten, and numerous children suffered from the teargas they inhaled. Two people were severely wounded: Arnulfo Alvarado, from the "La Confianza" campesino settlement and Carlos Martínez from the "Lempira" campesino settlement, both of

whom were immediately hospitalized. Both of the injured come from settlements that pertain to the Unified Movement of Campesinos of the Aguán (MUCA).

Furthermore, two people were detained by police authorities: Elmer Ángel Villeda Andrade, minor, resident of the 18th of September neighborhood of this city, and Gregorio Godoy Caballero, who works as a taxi driver in the city. The charges against them have not been made public, and as of this afternoon, they have not been released.

Program of Human Rights and Justice  
POPOL NAH TUN  
Tocoa, September 15, 2011

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## **URGENT ACTION: HONDURAS DOES NOT AFFORD RIGHTS TO JOURNALISTS**

The Committee for the Families of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), expresses its outrage and concern for the violation of rights carried out against journalists, social communicators, and especially for the safety of Mario Castro Rodríguez, Director of the Program "Whip Against Corruption" (Látigo Contra la Corrupción), transmitted two hours each day by Globo TV.

Since September 08, 2011, threats against his the life and physical safety of Journalist Mario Castro Rodriguez have intensified. Over this period he has received 70 text messages on his cell phone threatening him with death. Unknown persons who monitor his program sent threatening, insulting, and profanity-laden text messages from the following numbers: 9808-5215; 9789-6663; 9842-7723; 98493203.

Among the messages sent we note: "It is magnificent that they kill pigs," a message that was sent five times. From the number 9842-7723 he received the following messages, "It would be best if they take you all out" and "You old fool, I hope they kill you all," which was repeated three times. From 97896663 he received a message that said, "hahaha, they are killing the pinkos, you idiot," and was repeated seven times.

When Journalist Mario Castro denounced the content of the text messages that he was receiving someone sent him another text that said the following, "These brave recruits" followed by four question marks.

Previous events:

In May of 2010, Mario Castro and his brother Edgardo Castro, entered into the protection program provided by CIDH[1] because their criticisms had been the object of surveillance and Mario Castro had been subject of persecution. On three occasions Mario Castro had been followed by a white, double-cab vehicle, with tinted windows, no license plates, and broken right rear-view mirror. The vehicle waited for him to leave the TV station for his home after 8pm. The next time they were parked on Las Fuerzas Armadas Boulevard, and on one occasion rolled down the window so that Mario Castro could see that there were four people in the vehicle, with black ski masks. One passenger in the front seat mimed the act of shooting Mario Castro with his thumb and forefinger; the subjects in the vehicle were carrying firearms.

Since then, his program has taken on critical themes such as Security, the performance of top police officials, and also denounced the distortion of the truth and the media control that

some security officials have taken regarding human rights violations and murders of various people, such as in the case of Bajo Aguan.

Those who exercise their freedom of expression and the right of society to be informed, consecrated in the Constitution and provided in the International Human Rights Law, are currently facing aggression, intimidation, and are being stalked by the powers that be. Crimes against journalists and the escalation of violence against freedom of expression across the country have reached intolerable levels that have never before been seen in Honduras. Since 2009, 15 journalists have been murdered, 25 journalists have received death threats, 14 have suffered illegal detention, 4 have been kidnapped and tortured, and 37 have been assaulted, among others.

In Honduras there are structures and threats that restrict freedom of expression, in large parts of the country, among the most serious are the political censorship and organized crime. The latter has led to self-censorship as a legitimate way to preserve the safety of journalists in the absence of state action to impose exemplary punishments for crimes against journalists and guarantee freedom of expression.

COFADEH asks the National and International Community to:

Publicly condemn the intimidation of journalists and demand that the Honduran state commit to protecting the members of this profession;  
Request immediate action to bring about all necessary protection for Mario Castro, in accordance with his wishes;  
Request an urgent, exhaustive, and impartial investigation about the activities that have put Mario Castro's life at risk; as well as investigate the homicides of the 15 journalists, and the threats against other journalists, make their results public and bring those responsible to justice.  
Demand that all the protection orders dictated by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission be implemented in favor of the JOURNALISTS AT RISK.

Send appeals, concerns, and demands to:

Jorge Alberto Rivera Avilés  
President of the Supreme Court of Justice  
Tel (504) 2269-3000 2269-3069  
Mail: [cedij@poderjudicial.gob.hn](mailto:cedij@poderjudicial.gob.hn)

Luis Alberto Rubí  
General Prosecutor for the Republic of Honduras.  
Fax (504) 2221-5667  
Tel (504) 2221-5670 2221-3099  
Mail: [lrubi@mp.hn](mailto:lrubi@mp.hn), [gsuazog@mp.hn](mailto:gsuazog@mp.hn)

And copy (cc):

Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH)  
Barrio La Plazuela, Avenida Cervantes, Casa No. 1301  
Apartado Postal 1243  
Tegucigalpa, HONDURAS  
Fax:+504 2220 1528  
Mail: [berthacofadeh@yahoo.com](mailto:berthacofadeh@yahoo.com)

Also send copies to the accredited diplomatic representative of Honduras in your country.

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## **ANOTHER JOURNALIST MURDERED IN HONDURAS**

AFP. September 10, 2011

[http://www.ticotimes.net/Current-Edition/News-Briefs/Another-journalist-murdered-in-Honduras\\_Saturday-September-10-2011](http://www.ticotimes.net/Current-Edition/News-Briefs/Another-journalist-murdered-in-Honduras_Saturday-September-10-2011)

TEGUCIGALPA – Radio reporter Medardo Flores became the 16th journalist murdered in Honduras over the past 18 months when he drove into an ambush and his car was sprayed with bullets, his boss said Friday.

Flores, 50, was attacked when he was driving from his small farm to Puerto Cortes on the Caribbean coast, some 300 kilometers (185 miles) north of Tegucigalpa, said Arnulfo Aguilar, director of Radio Uno, where Flores worked.

"The vehicle was riddled with bullets – it was attacked on all four sides," Aguilar said.

Flores was also a supporter of ousted former president Manuel Zelaya and was a regional treasurer for a pro-Zelaya group. The late reporter had spent the 1980s in exile fearing for his life during the low-intensity conflict against leftists in Honduras.

Public safety has been hit hard in Honduras since the June 29, 2009 coup that ousted Zelaya.

President Porfirio Lobo was elected president in November that year, amid a political impasse between the de facto government that followed the coup and Zelaya.

Sixteen journalists have been killed in Honduras since February 2010.

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## **HONDURAS: INVESTIGATE KILLINGS OF PEASANTS [1] DOZENS OF MURDERS, NO ARRESTS**

Human Rights Watch, September 9, 2011

(Washington, D.C.) – Honduras should conduct a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation into the killings of dozens of peasants in the Bajo Aguán Valley, Human Rights Watch said today.

Fifteen people, including six peasants and four private security guards, were killed in the Bajo Aguán Valley in August 2011, according to a local group. The administration of President Porfirio Lobo ordered the military to patrol the area after these incidents.

"A prompt and impartial investigation is absolutely critical to ensure that those responsible for the killings in the Bajo Aguán Valley are brought to justice," said José Miguel Vivanco, Americas director at Human Rights Watch.

The killings occurred in the midst of a longstanding territorial dispute between peasants and landowners in the Bajo Aguán Valley. At least 40 peasants, as well as several security guards and bystanders, have been killed in the region since President Lobo took office in January 2010.

The authorities have issued arrest warrants, but no one has been arrested or charged for these killings, a prosecutor told Human Rights Watch.

Honduras is party to several international treaties, including the American Convention on Human Rights. These treaties obligate countries to deter and prevent rights violations, investigate and prosecute offenders, and provide remedies to victims.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has held that “the State has the obligation to use all the legal means at its disposal to combat [impunity], since impunity fosters chronic recidivism of human rights violations and total defenselessness of victims and their relatives.”

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## **IN HONDURAS, LAND STRUGGLES HIGHLIGHT POST-COUP POLARIZATION**

By ELISABETH MALKIN, September 15, 2011

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/16/world/americas/honduras-land-conflicts-highlight-polarization.html?\\_r=1&ref=americas](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/16/world/americas/honduras-land-conflicts-highlight-polarization.html?_r=1&ref=americas)

TOCOA, Honduras — The settlement on the giant Marañones plantation looks like a refugee camp, where children play between rows of huts and chickens peck at garbage heaps. But the farm workers living here plan to stay, laying claim to land owned by one of the country's richest men.

At the gate, a handful of men sit guard with shotguns and machetes under a red flag painted with defiant words: “Justice, Land, Liberty.” “If they give land to the people, the problem can be resolved,” said Marcos Tulio Paredes, one of the community's leaders.

In the past few weeks, a long-running battle over land in Bajo Aguán, this fertile valley near Honduras's northern coast, has flared. At least 15 people have been killed in recent weeks alone, including two of the workers' leaders, and the people here are on edge, fearful that the unrest could spread.

The conflict in Bajo Aguán is the most volatile example of the social divide that burst into view in this tiny impoverished country two years ago, when the country's power-brokers orchestrated a military coup to expel the president at the time.

A veneer of normality has returned. A new president was elected on schedule, and the ousted former president finally returned from exile in May. But the political polarization that the coup revealed and the violence it stoked — including the murders of journalists and government opponents — have persisted, and no place more so than in Bajo Aguán.

“The opportunity was lost to introduce some very significant reforms that were sorely needed in Honduras,” said Kevin Casas-Zamora, an expert on Central America at the Brookings Institution in Washington. “Honduras is a country with obscene social imbalances and very little is being done to address that.”

In Bajo Aguán, where oil palm tree plantations occupy most of the farmland, President Porfirio Lobo has alternated between dispatching troops and brokering agreements between farm worker groups and the businessmen who own vast swathes of the valley. But events rapidly slip beyond the government's control.

"This is a country where there are no institutions," said Elvin Hernández, a researcher at the Jesuit-supported Reflection, Research and Communication Team in the city of El Progreso. "It is the law of the strongest and Aguán is the place where you see that most clearly."

The government appeared to move a step forward to negotiating a solution last week, when Congress approved a mechanism to guarantee bank loans that would allow the farm workers to buy land. An estimated 4,000 families will be eligible for 15-year loans to buy more than 11,000 acres.

But the 1,400 families camped on the Marañones plantation since last year have been frozen out of the latest pact. Without a land title, they fear they could be evicted at any time.

"It is better to die here," said one leader, who asked that her name not be used because she had received threats. "We don't have anywhere else to go. We can't give up on the struggle. Where would that leave the deaths of our comrades? In vain?"

The presence of hundreds of troops sent here after the latest round of violence could also set off more conflict. The day before the congressional vote, soldiers and police officers surrounded Marañones and two other plantations. "It appeared to be a rehearsal for the massive raid they plan to carry out," one farm worker group wrote in a press release.

"It's a very critical situation," said Sandra Ponce, the Honduran attorney general for human rights. "What is latent elsewhere has already developed in Bajo Aguán."

The conflict here goes back to the early 1990s, when wealthy landowners bought up plantations from farmer co-operatives. Farm worker groups argue that these purchases were illegal because members of the co-operatives were tricked by their leaders or signed deals they did not understand.

The largest single landowner in the region is Corporation Dinant, owned by Miguel Facussé, the octogenarian patriarch of one of the handful of families controlling much of Honduras's economy. The company owns about one-fifth of all the agricultural land in Bajo Aguán, more than 22,000 acres of well-groomed plantations that supply oil for export and for its snack foods, margarine and cooking oil business. It acquired that land legally, said Roger Pineda, the company's treasurer.

"The country needs agrarian reform," said Mr. Pineda. "Too many people don't have land. But not on the lands that are already under production. It can't be, 'I like your car, and then I take it.'"

Just days before he was ousted in June 2009, former President Manuel Zelaya intervened in the disputes, signing an agreement to start talks on redistributing land. In December that year, farm workers staged coordinated land invasions to put pressure on Mr. Lobo as he prepared to take office.

The occupations cost Dinant \$20 million in lost revenue last year, Mr. Pineda said. In addition, pressure by human rights groups earlier this year prompted a German investment bank, DEG, to withdraw a loan, he said.

The choreography of evictions in Bajo Aguán unfolds violently but fails to sap the workers' resolve.

In June, 300 families who had been living for 11 years on a farm of orange groves outside the hamlet of Rigores were expelled by soldiers and police officers who gave them two hours to gather their possessions. Then the men torched and bulldozed their houses, their two churches and their school.

Three days later, the farm workers came back to the farm and began to rebuild.

Against the backdrop of negotiations, murders have continued. More than 40 people, most of them workers, have been killed in the region since the beginning of last year, said Ms. Ponce, the government's human rights prosecutor. "Not a single investigation has been concluded," she said.

When impunity is the rule, she added, "it does not contribute to discouraging the violence."

The workers have accused the landowners' private security guards of carrying out the killings. Mr. Pineda denied that, except in the case of five workers killed by Dinant security guards during a land invasion last year.

Adding to the combustible mix is the rise of drug trafficking in the region, which has become an important transshipment point, like much of Central America. Drug traffickers may be encouraging some groups to take over land that could be used for landing strips, Ms. Ponce said.

The latest violence flared up last month when four Dinant security guards, a company employee and a teenager were found dead after an unknown group invaded the Paso de Aguán plantation. Five more people were killed the following day. Troops later surrounded the farm, and the invaders fled, evading capture.

In late August, two farm worker leaders, both of them involved in negotiations with the government, were also killed. One of them, Secundino Ruíz Vallecillo, was shot by a motorcyclist as he was driving home after making a withdrawal from the bank. Eliseo Pavón, his close friend and the group's treasurer, was slightly wounded in the attack.

Mr. Pavón waved off the government's theory that the motive for the killing was robbery and accused the landowners of ordering his friend's slaying. "They think that with this they can weaken the group, stop the fight," he said. "But it won't happen."

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### **TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS**

for campesino organizations working for justice and real democracy in Honduras, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887

CANADA: 552 - 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: <http://rightsaction.org/contributions.htm>

DONATIONS OF STOCK: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

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### **3 SOLIDARITY DELEGATIONS TO GUATEMALA AND/OR HONDURAS ...**



**1- HONDURAS, JANUARY 6-15, 2012**  
**“ACCOMPANIMENT AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY DELEGATION”**

Sponsored by Alliance for Global Justice, join AfGJ Coordinator Chuck Kaufman, Karen Spring (long-time Honduras human rights accompanier with Rights Action) and Tanya Kerssen (food policy analyst from Food First). For an application: [AFGJ@AFGJ.org](mailto:AFGJ@AFGJ.org).

**2- HONDURAS & GUATEMALA, JANUARY 2012 (EXACT DATES TBD)**  
**“MINING, BIOFUELS & MILITARIZATION: US MILITARY AID & CANADIAN-AMERICAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS”**

Sponsored by Rights Action, join Annie Bird (Rights Action co-director). Information: [annie@rightsaction.org](mailto:annie@rightsaction.org), 202-680-3002.

**3- GUATEMALA, MARCH 10-17, 2012**  
**“DAMS, MINING & AFRICAN PALM PRODUCTION \* versus \***  
**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS”**

Sponsored by Rights Action, join Grahame Russell (Rights Action co-director). Information: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), 860-352-2448.

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