

Rights Action
May 30, 2013

Below:

- **Canadian parliament to holds Hearings On Human Rights Situation In Honduras**
- **Article: Why Is Canada Friendly With Repressive Honduran Regime?**, by Rachel Warden, Barbara Wood, Brittany Lambert, Embassy Magazine



(Protesting in Honduras' industrial city, San Pedro Sula, where Canadian PM Stephen Harper was signing a [Free Trade Agreement](#) with post-coup Honduran President Porfirio Lobo. A representative of the Honduran Women's Collective reports to the international press the human rights concerns of Honduran women sweatshop workers and detrimental working conditions of the Montreal based apparel company, Gildan Activewear. PM Harper visited one of Gildan's factory in

Honduras immediately after signing the FTA. [Photo](#), August 12, 2011, @ Karen Spring)

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT HEARINGS

From February to April 2013, the Sub-Committee on International Human Rights of the Canadian House of Commons heard from various witnesses regarding the human rights situation in Honduras. The hearings were scheduled as a result of the severely deteriorated human rights situation in the country but also in anticipation of future hearings related to the Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

In August 2011, Prime Minister Stephen Harper traveled to Honduras to sign the FTA with the post-coup regime of President Lobo. Ignoring countless reports of human rights abuses documented by national and international organizations like Rights Action, Canada decided to utilize the violent and repressive post coup environment to advance its economic interests in Honduras. These include mining, tourism, and the textile and apparel or sweatshop industry. Each of which are industries that have greatly benefitted from the neoliberal policies approved by the Honduran National Congress since the June 28, 2009 military coup; [each of these has benefitted directly or indirectly from the repression of the post-coup regime.](#)

Although the FTA has been signed, it has not been passed by the Canadian Parliament. NOW IS THE TIME to get in touch with Government representatives and express outrage for Canada's clear decision to promote its economic interests over human rights.

- [NO to the FTA with Honduras](#)
- [YES to human rights and justice](#)

WHY IS CANADA FRIENDLY WITH REPRESSIVE HONDURAN REGIME?

Canada's official human rights and good governance rhetoric seems to be subordinated in practice, to business interests

By: Rachel Warden, Barbara Wood, Brittany Lambert, Embassy Magazine, Opinion Section, May 22, 2013, Issue #453

The Parliamentary Subcommittee on International Human Rights' decision to study Honduras was well-founded. The situation there has been called a "human rights emergency" and is widely recognized as one of the worst in the hemisphere. The hearings have painted a dismal picture of extreme violence against rights activists and political opponents, of widespread impunity and police corruption, of judicial politicization, and of institutional decay.

Why then, is Canada treating the current Honduran government like a friendly partner rather than denouncing its human rights abuses and the lack of rule of law?

Honduras took a turn for the worst in 2009, when a military coup deposed democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya. There were elections after the coup, but they were deeply flawed. Hondurans who opposed the coup were systematically threatened and assassinated, and then main opposition candidate spent much of the campaign recovering from a severe beating by security forces. Although voting is mandatory in Honduras, close to half of the population boycotted the election, as did major international observers. The election of Porfirio Lobo Sosa, Honduras' current president, was therefore widely regarded as an extension of the post-coup regime.

Since then, human rights abuses in Honduras have spiralled. In the words of Teresa Lopez, a Honduran community organizer who visited Canada last month: "We all know, theoretically, that a coup will impact the economic and human rights situation of a country, but I never imagined it would be this bad."

Honduras now has the highest murder rate in the world – one similar to a nation at war. There have been 206 politically motivated assassinations in the past three years, and the country is considered the most dangerous in the world for journalists. Most crimes are met with impunity by an inadequate justice system and a largely corrupt police force – one that has deep ties to organized crime and has been accused of running death squads.

Last month, the attorney general of Honduras was suspended for failing to prosecute homicide cases: only 20 per cent of the cases in the past four years have even been investigated. These incredible levels of impunity leave Hondurans, especially those who challenge the status quo, vulnerable to the escalating levels of violence.

In December 2012, the Honduran Congress illegally deposed four members of the Supreme Court, swearing in new justices within hours. Congress then quickly proceeded to review a series of laws that had been overruled by the court.

CANADA BOOSTING TIES

Instead of denouncing the human rights situation and the Honduran government's blatant disregard for the rule of law, Canada is rapidly expanding its presence in, and relationship with, Honduras. Canada's official human rights and good governance theoretic seems to be subordinated, in practice, to business interests.

In January 2013, the Honduran Congress passed a new mining law. This law, developed with support from [CIDA](#) (the Canadian International Development Agency), creates a more favourable environment for large-scale mining, an industry in which Canada is a global leader. Many sectors of Honduran society rejected the new law and there is significant community opposition to large-scale mining.

Canadian investors have also backed Honduras' plan to build "Model Cities," even though they were ruled unconstitutional by Honduras' Supreme Court. The plan would allow private entities to create and enforce their own laws within these cities, ignoring labour, environmental, and other protections enshrined in Honduran law. The proposed cities would also violate laws that prevent foreign ownership of land within 40 kilometres of the coast – land currently claimed by indigenous groups. The imposition of these "Model Cities" seems antithetical to democracy and the rule of law, pillars of Canada's foreign policy in the Americas. Tragically, Honduran lawyer Antonio Trejo Cabrera was gunned down shortly after presenting a legal challenge to the "Model Cities" project, in September 2012.

Canada and Honduras recently concluded free trade negotiations, including parallel agreements on labour and environmental co-operation. This deal, which

will reportedly be finalized within the next few months, is consistent with our governments' recent free trade agreement model which includes human rights and labour protections only in unenforceable side agreements. The FTA will protect and promote Canadian investments, but there is no corresponding guarantee that it will protect Honduras' most vulnerable.

Canada's involvement in Honduras demonstrates that while Canada's Americas Strategy promised engagement along three major pillars - security, prosperity, and democratic governance – the record of action to date has been narrowly focused on the prosperity pillar. In a country like Honduras, where corruption, violence and impunity are widespread, this prosperity will only benefit a small group.

Canada should signal a more genuine commitment to Honduras and to the hemisphere, engaging deeply on issues such as development, security, corporate accountability, democratic governance, and human rights. This could go a long way towards rebuilding Canada's deteriorating reputation in the region, which is increasingly defined by mining controversies rather than by its traditional leadership in peacebuilding and human rights.

Rachel Warden and Barbara Wood are co-chairs of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation's Americas Policy Group, a Canadian civil society group focused on development and social justice issues in the Americas. Brittany Lambert co-coordinates the group. editor@embassynews.ca

WHAT TO DO?

AMERICAN / CANADIAN CONNECTION

Please send copies of this information, and your own letters, to your Canadian and American politicians (MPs, Congress members and Senators) and to your own media. Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the democratically elected government Honduras, the country has become the 'Murder Capital of the world'. State repression has again reached the levels of the worst years of the 1980s. Since the coup, the U.S. and Canadian governments have 'legitimized the illegitimate' post-coup regime. North American companies and investors have

increased their business activities in Honduras since the coup. In no small part, this repressive regime remains in power due to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada.

This bad situation is getting even worse as the November 2013 presidential elections approach. A new party – LIBRE – has been formed and has a good chance of winning the elections, with the support of the Honduran people who are so tired and fed-up with their country being dominated by the military backed traditional parties that are controlled by the wealthy oligarchic sectors. Repression is increasing even more this year, as the elites fear the electoral victory of LIBRE.

MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS (in Canada and the U.S.)

Since 1998, Rights Action – with your support – has been a constant funder of, and partner with COPINH. To support COPINH and the struggle of the Honduran people against the military-backed repressive regime, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- CANADA: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS can be made (in Canada and U.S.):

<http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

- Be a monthly credit card donor (Canada and U.S.)
- To donate stock, contact: info@rightsaction.org

Get on/off Rights Action's listserv: www.rightsaction.org

Follow Rights Action on facebook: www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org

Please re-post and re-publish this information
