

Rights Action
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Who's Responsible For Flight Of Honduran Children?

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Who's Responsible For Flight Of Honduran Children?

07/09/2014, by [Dana Frank](#), Professor of History, University of California, Santa Cruz
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Suddenly, all eyes are on the 47,000 unaccompanied minors from Central America who have been apprehended at the U.S. border since the beginning of this year, the largest number of whom are from Honduras. Quite rightly, most discussions have underscored that gangs and violence are the immediate cause of their flight.

Missing from the discussion about Honduras, though, is the post-2009 coup regime governing the country that is largely responsible for the vast criminality that has overtaken it. Equally absent is the responsibility of the United States Government for the regime. Yes, gangs are rampant in Honduras. But the truly dangerous gang is the Honduran government. And our own tax dollars are pouring into it while our top officials praise its virtues.

This June 28 marked the fifth anniversary of the military coup that deposed democratically-elected Honduran President Manuel Zelaya. Since then, a series of corrupt administrations has unleashed open criminal control of Honduras, from top to bottom of the government. Current President Juan Orlando Hernández, who entered office in January, was himself an enthusiastic supporter of the coup, reports from the Honduran congress establish, and in 2012 led the illegal 2012 ejection of four members of the Supreme Court and the illegal naming of a new attorney general to a five-year term.

The Honduras police are overwhelmingly corrupt, working closely with drug traffickers and organized crime. Last August, even a [Honduran government commission](#) overseeing a cleanup of the police force admitted that 70 percent of the police are "beyond saving." [InSight Crime](#) concludes: "a series of powerful local groups, connected to political and economy elites...manage most of the underworld activities in the country. They have deeply penetrated the Honduran police."

Hernández's answer to police corruption, though, has been dangerous militarization. Not only does the regular military now patrol residential neighborhoods, airports, and prisons, but Hernández's new 5,000-strong military police force is fanning out across the country.

The judiciary and prosecutors are often corrupt as well. [The U.S. Department of State's Human Rights Report](#) for 2013 on Honduras speaks of "widespread impunity" caused by a weak justice system. "Perpetrators of killings and other violent crimes are rarely brought to justice," reports Human Rights Watch. As a result, post-coup Honduras now boasts the highest murder rate in the world, according to [United Nations figures](#).

Worse, the police and military themselves kill and beat people with impunity. [Human Rights Watch](#) has documented widespread allegations of killings of land rights activists by security forces, and reports that "impunity for serious police abuses is a chronic problem." Until last December, the national chief of police was Juan Carlos "El Tigre" Bonilla, who according to documents obtained by the [Associated Press](#) (AP) participated in death squad killings in 1998-2002. More recently [AP has documented](#) at least five alleged death squad killings by the Honduran police. On May 13, the new military police surrounded, tear gassed, brutally beat up, and forcibly ejected from the main hall of congress all 36 congressmembers of the center-left opposition party LIBRE.

At the same time, the post-coup government is rapidly destroying much of what is left of the Honduran economy. In the two years following the coup, 2010-12, spending on public housing, health, and education all dropped, according to the [Center for Economic and Policy Research](#), while extreme poverty rose by 26.3 percent. "Through neoliberal privatizations, cutbacks, and reorganizations they're wiping out unionized public sector jobs," observes German Zepeda, Secretary-General of Honduras' Federation of Agroindustrial Workers. In May, for example, the entire agency charged with children's interests was eliminated and all its asset liquidated. The [AFL-CIO](#) reports that labor laws are rarely enforced, assassinations and threats against trade unionists are not investigated, and a much-touted private-sector "jobs creation" program breaks apart full-time, permanent jobs into part-time precarious ones, eliminating access to the public health system and eligibility for unionization, along with a living wage. In this overall scenario, children indeed die.

With few jobs and without a functioning criminal justice system, truly terrifying gangs have proliferated, and drug trafficking engenders spectacular violence, including multiple massacres of children in April and May splayed all over the papers. According to Casa Alianza, the leading independent advocate for homeless children in Honduras, in May 2014 alone 104 young people were killed; between 2010 and 2013, 458 children 14 or younger were assassinated.

On May 6, José Guadalupe Ruelas, the director of Casa Alianza, charged that police are operating operate "social cleansing" death squads killing children. Two days later, stationary car was rammed by a government security vehicle and he was brutally beaten and arrested by the military police, according to [Amnesty International](#).

Yet despite overwhelming evidence, the U.S. government continues to support, even celebrate the regime. Two days after the military police attacked the opposition members in congress, U.S. Ambassador [Lisa Kubiske](#) baldly praised President Hernández, lauded the TIGRES -- a dangerous new special forces unit he has promoted -- and said that the U.S. wants to invest "more and more in the Honduran police." Commander [John Kelley](#) of the U.S. Southern Command, visiting Honduras on May 19, praised Hernández for his "impressive" and successful work against drug traffickers. Now, as a response to the influx of unaccompanied minors at the border, the [White House](#) has authorized \$18.5 million in additional funds for the corrupt Honduran police.

The U.S. is indeed pouring funds into the Honduran police and military, in the name of fighting drug trafficking. Exact figures are unavailable, but according to the Congressional Research Service approximately \$25 million flowed to Honduran security forces in 2013. Other U.S. funds support Honduran forces through USAID, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI).

At the same time, U.S. policies are contributing directly to the destruction of the Honduran economy -- hence the lack of viable jobs. The Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), for example, has forced small and medium-sized producers to compete with U.S. agribusiness and other corporations. In

Honduras as elsewhere, neoliberal policies enforced through the U.S.-funded International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank promote the elimination of public-sector jobs, privatization, and the reduction of social services. A June 13 statement from the IMF Executive Board, for example, advocates "reducing the wage bill" of the Honduran government.

The U.S. Congress, though, is loudly and clearly challenging U.S. policy. On May 28, 108 Members of Congress, led by Rep. Janice Schakowsky (D-Illinois), sent a [letter to Secretary Kerry](#) questioning U.S. support for the regime. The [2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act](#) places human rights conditions on a substantial chunk of U.S. to Honduran security forces.

As young Hondurans risk spectacular dangers crossing borders to try to escape their country's horror, the U.S. should take responsibility for that nightmare, and cut its ties with gang of oligarchs running Honduras, stop pouring funds into their police and military-including funds for police training. At the same time we need to treat the arriving children with vast care and respect, observing legally mandated procedures. We need to provide them with lawyers, allow independent observers to inspect all facilities in which are held, and, if their parents are here make every effort to reunite them with their families in the U.S.

Rights Action

Since 1983, Rights Action has been funding grassroots organizations in Guatemala and Honduras (and in southern Mexico and El Salvador) that are struggling for community controlled development, environmental protection, truth, justice and human rights, and for democracy and the rule of law. Rights Action does extensive education and activism work concerning how the United States and Canada contribute to and benefit from endemic harms and violations in Guatemala and Honduras. Rights Action (Canada), founded in 1999, is independent from Rights Action (USA).

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Say No To "Business As Usual"

The U.S. and Canadian governments, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, and North American companies and investors (including public pension funds like Social Security and the Canada Pension Plan) maintain profitable economic and military relations with the Guatemalan and Honduran elites, turning a blind eye to repression, violence and impunity that are the norm in both countries.

Send, and keep on sending copies of this information, and your own letters, to your own elected politicians (MPs, Congresspersons, Senators), to your media, and to your own pension and investment funds, asking why our governments, companies and investment firms do nothing about repression and violence, and environmental and health harms associated with North American businesses, while benefiting from these economic relations with the Guatemalan and Honduran political, military and economic elites.

Honduras – Murder Capital of the World

Americans / Canadians: Keep on, keep on, ... keep on sharing this information, and sending copies to your MPs, Congress members and Senators, and media. Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the last democratically elected government, Honduras has become the ‘Murder Capital of the world’. Repression has reached the levels of the worst years of the 1980s.

Since 2009, the U.S. and Canadian governments have legitimized a succession of illegitimate and repressive regimes. North American companies and investors, and “development” banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank) have increased business activities in African palm production, maquiladora sweatshops, privatized “model cities”, tourism and mining.

The Honduran regime remains in power due in large part to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada and the “development” banks.

Across Honduras, community based organizations in the pro-democracy movement need considerably more human rights accompaniment, funding, media attention on the harms and violations and education and activism in Canada and the U.S.

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