

Rights Action
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info@rightsaction.org

Rights Action Guarantee: The Canada-Honduras free trade agreement will contribute to more exploitation and poverty, violence and repression, impunity and corruption in Honduras

“Canada is taking advantage of a [Honduran] regime change that is disastrous for millions of Hondurans, but highly convenient to Canadian corporate interests, providing a further example of just how far the Canadian government is willing to go to protect them. Hondurans – and Canadians – deserve much better.” (Jen Moore)

As hundreds of thousands of impoverished and desperate Central Americans (mostly Hondurans) endure violence and hardship traveling north to the USA, fleeing exploitation and poverty, violence and repression, impunity and corruption, Canadian politicians, corporations and investors give thanks for the 2009 military coup in Honduras that paved the way for the just-signed “Canada-Honduras free trade agreement”.

Rights Action can pretty much guarantee that the “Canada-Honduras free trade agreement” will benefit Canadian corporations and investors and contribute to more exploitation and poverty, violence and repression, impunity and corruption in Honduras, ... that many more people will have to flee.

- **See Below:** How to support and get involved in work and struggle for a return to real democracy in Honduras and a “development” model designed and controlled by Honduran people across their country

No Small Coup: The Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement

By Jennifer Moore, July 14, 2014, jen@miningwatch.ca

There was no doubt that the Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement would be rushed through the Senate and [receive Royal Assent](#) before parliament recessed in June.

Five years ago, however, – before then-Honduran President Mel Zelaya’s back door was shot open and he was flown to Costa Rica in his pyjamas in a military-backed coup – such a trade pact was not so sure.

Over the course of Zelaya’s mandate and under pressure from civil society groups, Zelaya had gradually been making progressive policy shifts. In the mining sector, this included ratifying a moratorium on new mining projects, in place since 2004, and taking steps to draft a new mining bill that incorporated civil society demands, including a ban on open-pit mining.

It took the June 28, 2009 coup – plus tacit support from Canadian and US governments, who turned a blind eye to targeted repression against broad opposition to the coup and endorsed the profoundly corrupt regime; the shredding of Honduran institutions; and the terrorizing of Honduran society – to get where we are today.

Today, thanks to [Canadian lobbying efforts](#) and financial support from 2010 to 2013, Honduras also has [a new mining law](#) that has lifted the nine-year moratorium and unleashed a wave of violent repression for which communities are paying a high price.

The Honduran Accompaniment Project (PROAH) [reported last week](#) that priests and international human rights accompaniers were beaten and threatened with guns on July 3rd. The priests and other members of the community Nueva Esperanza in the department of Atlántida have faced death threats and violence, including from representatives of the Honduran Minerales Victoria mining company, the National Police and others, as a result of the community's peaceful and legitimate opposition to an iron ore mine project. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) issued precautionary measures for the two priests and sixteen community members, but they still lack adequate protection.

PROAH also reported that 38 people from the Indigenous Tolupan community of San Francisco de Locomapa in the department of Yoro have been issued [precautionary measures by the IACHR](#), after three community leaders were murdered last August. According to PROAH, the alleged killers remain free despite warrants for their arrest and have been intimidating people opposed to an antimony mining project.

In May, the Honduran Centre for the Promotion of Community Development (CEHPRODEC) issued a [statement condemning the brutal murder of community leader](#), Rigoberto López Hernández, in Santa Cruz, in the department Santa Barbara. Rigoberto was found dead with his tongue cut out. His assassination is understood to be a message to his community to shut up about their opposition to an iron ore project over potential damage to local water supplies.

Environmental activist, Carlos Amador, from the Siria Valley Environmental Committee, who regularly speaks out about the negative impacts of mining on the environment and health based on experiences with [Goldcorp's](#) San Martín mine, [has reported being followed](#) by unknown individuals and is also in danger.

Further, Amnesty International has warned that the Committee of the Families of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras (COFADEH), which has accompanied mining-affected groups and [denounced the State of Honduras](#) for “not adopting effective measures to dissuade insecurity and implement protective measures,” has been [facing a range of threats and attacks](#).

It is in this context that Liberal and Conservative Members of Parliament and Senators overwhelmingly – and even enthusiastically – approved the Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement. In a rush evening session of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade on June 12th, Liberal Senator Dennis Dawson stated that the decision was made even before the final hearing:

“[As I said] this afternoon, [...] with all its flaws and with all the flaws that this government might have on other issues, and with all the flaws you can give to the Honduras government, we think that, in the scale of important things for Canada, because of companies like Gildan and companies that are investing in Honduras and helping the Honduran economy -- and helping the Canadian economy at the same time -- we decided that we are supporting this bill.”

Despite the rhetoric about benefits to Honduras, on the trade side, benefits are expected to be slim, favouring firms like Gildan Activewear. On the investment side, Canadian mining companies will be able to resort to costly international arbitration and sue the government of Honduras if it makes any decisions that they do not like.

We have seen examples of mining companies resorting to such arbitration in other cases where there is broad opposition to their projects and where government or court decisions find against them, including in the case of [Infinito Gold against Costa Rica](#) and [Pacific Rim Mining \(now OceanaGold\) against El Salvador](#).

Currently, mining firms enjoy strong support from Honduran authorities and agencies. But Honduran communities and civil society organizations have not given up their tenacious fight to protect their lands, water and health – despite the risks to themselves – that could still put a dent in future mining plans. In March, for example, El Negrito, in the department of Yoro, became [the first municipality to declare itself free of mining](#).

However, this trade agreement was not decided on in June. It has been on its way ever since the coup five years ago, since which time the Canadian government has been the most consistent supporter of the Honduran regime, unmoved by the escalation of violence, the dismantling of the justice system, the deepening corruption, and profoundly undemocratic policy-making. This is no small coup. Canada is taking advantage of a regime change that is disastrous for millions of Hondurans, but highly convenient to Canadian corporate interests, providing a further example of just how far the Canadian government is willing to go to protect them. Hondurans – and Canadians – deserve much better.

(Online: <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/miningwatch/2014/07/no-small-coup-canada-honduras-free-trade-agreement>)

(Jennifer Moore, Latin America Program Coordinator, MiningWatch Canada, t: 613.569.3439, www.miningwatch.ca, <https://www.facebook.com/MiningWatch>, twitter: @MiningWatch)

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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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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