

Rights Action  
October 23, 2014  
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## **The 2009 Honduran Military Coup: “Free” Trade Agreements, Societal Breakdown and Forced Migration**

*“Eighty-three human rights lawyers and 43 journalists have been murdered in recent years trying to enforce or report on the constant violations of everything decent.”*

- **Below:** Article by Larry Cohen, “CAFTA, Forced Immigration, Deportation Connections”

*“All confirm a unified story: an economy in collapse, widespread violations of minimum wage and all social protection laws, small farmers forced from their land, subsistence farming replaced by African palm production and the jobs created in maquila zones dwarfed by the numbers forced to leave ancestral lands and travel to cities already jammed.”*

- What to do/ How to support: See below

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### **CAFTA, Forced Immigration, Deportation Connections**

By Larry Cohen, Communication Workers of America, Oct.17, 2014

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/larry-cohen/viewpoint-from-honduras-c\\_b\\_5996170.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/larry-cohen/viewpoint-from-honduras-c_b_5996170.html)

At the deportation center in San Pedro Sula, planes land with over 100 Hondurans a day, returned from our border prisons to their native land. They are mostly young men, shackled hands and legs, who have harrowing tales of days in what they call the "ice box," the US detention centers on our borders that are so crowded they must stand up for hours, taking turns lying down to sleep. These were heartbreaking conversations, nearly hopeless tales through tears -- of failed attempts to unify with families or find work.

At the same center, beautiful posters highlighting jobs for English speakers in call centers, handling call center work for US customers. Call center companies tout minimum wage call center jobs for deportees so they can pursue "the American dream" without leaving San Pedro Sula. One particular poster touted a call center company that received a big boost from T-Mobile two years ago after it laid off 3,000 in the US and moved work to Honduras, the Philippines, and other locations. T-Mobile then denied that it had moved the services outside the U.S. and tried to prevent the fired employees from collecting trade adjustment assistance. Consistently, working families pay the cost of increased profits on every side of our disastrous trade policies.

We spoke to community, union, women's, and children's groups, the Honduran government, our embassy. Amazingly, all confirm a unified story -- an economy in collapse, widespread violations of minimum wage and all social protection laws, small farmers forced from their land, subsistence farming replaced by African palm and the jobs created in maquila zones dwarfed by the numbers forced to leave ancestral lands and travel to cities already jammed.

The subsistence farmers or campesinos describe how they are pushed from land where they grew beans or corn. Now it is corporate farms growing African palm for sale to US and other multinationals, while Honduras imports beans from the U.S. or even Ethiopia, and the campesinos line up for work at factories far from their homes. There are not enough jobs and 70% pay under the poverty level minimum wage while labor inspectors say they are outnumbered by the violations.

The unions confirmed constant violations of organizing rights in direct violation of CAFTA. These included everything from the murder of leaders to collapse of bargaining rights where they once existed.

But our AFL-CIO complaint has sat at the Labor Department for more than two years, just as the complaint of widespread abuse in Guatemala was held for 6 years before the US Trade Representative finally raised it with the government there. Eighty-three human rights lawyers and 43 journalists have been murdered in recent years trying to enforce or report on the constant violations of everything decent.

So, as we return, what can we do besides shout loudly motivated by the pain of the Hondurans we met?

- First we need to look at the economic frame that has produced this -- 19th century capitalism largely unregulated.
- Second -- our own immigration policy, concentrating enormous resources on deportation and nothing on resettlement.
- Third -- the trade deals, in this case, CAFTA, that accelerated the free market devastation. NAFTA, CAFTA, trade preferences for China, one after another -- millions of lost jobs in the U.S., our wages depressed by global comparisons, and more than \$10 trillion in total trade deficits destroying our industrial cities, and creating huge budget deficits nationally and in those same cities with cuts to social services.

We await the President's action on immigration. Not only the potential easing of deportation for certain categories of immigrants, but also a change in processing immigrants for deportation. We expect him to act boldly after deferring for months after waiting and waiting for House Republicans to act.

But just as importantly we need to build the widest possible coalition against the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Farming communities in Mexico and central America already devastated by subsidized U.S. corporate farm imports will now see maquila factories close in droves as U.S. and other multinationals head for Vietnam with 90 million people

and a 27 cents an hour minimum wage. That minimum wage is about 1/3 of the minimum in Honduras.

How long will Hanes, Fruit of the Loom and other employers remain in Central America when competitors head to Vietnam with labor costs far lower and a government there that will agree to protect the profits from those lower wages?

Our President promised a different trade regime when he ran for election in 2008. The misery of twenty years of trade deals in the U.S. and the Americas needs to confront his Trade Ambassador. Multinationals and especially the financial sector have benefitted tremendously. The rest of us, whether global north or south, are left only with some combination of hope and anger as motivation to fight for real change.

Let's end Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) which allows multinationals to sue for lost future profits. This means that if Honduras passes new legislation to safeguard the environment from African palm or a higher minimum wage, multinationals that lose profits can sue the government for billions of dollars.

Let's kill TPP or any trade deal that benefits governments like Vietnam where human rights are an illusion. Let's link together the campaigns for immigrant rights, environmental justice, and workers rights like never before. I met amazing freedom fighters in Honduras from labor, women and community who have not given up. We haven't give up either. The voices from Honduras and our won communities will strengthen our determination to stand for justice.

[Larry Cohen, president of the Communications Workers of America, was in Honduras Oct. 12-15 for meetings with Honduran workers and union leaders, community and women's activists, elected officials and others to focus awareness on the immigration crisis affecting Central American families and the connection with CAFTA and similar bad trade deals. He was joined by Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), the leading Democratic member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, AFL-CIO Executive Vice President Tefere Gebre, and other U.S. union leaders.]

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## **WHAT TO DO?**

### **The 2009 Military Coup That Keeps On Giving ... repression, violence and global business opportunities**

This is not only a Honduran problem. This is also a U.S. and Canadian problem. Keep on sharing this information with your families, friends and networks, 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', the 'Repression Capital of the Americas'.

Since 2009, the U.S. and Canadian governments have legitimized a succession of illegitimate, repressive regimes.

Since 2009, 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 – struggling for fundamental reform to the Honduran State and society - need considerably more human rights accompaniment, funding, media attention on the harms and violations and education and activism in Canada and the U.S.

### **Tax-Deductible Donations (in Canada & United States)**

To support our community-based partner groups working for community-controlled development, the environment and the rule of law in Honduras and Guatemala, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

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