

Rights Action  
February 21, 2018  
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**Day #32 of Edwin Espinal's arbitrary detention**

Rights Action Letter to Canadian government

**What has the government done to pressure the Honduran regime to free Edwin and all political prisoners, and to respect human rights?**

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/day-32-of-edwin-espinals-arbitrary-detention>

February 21, 2018

Ambassador James Hill

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Cc: other government officials and politicians

Dear friends,

What has the Canadian government done to secure the release of the unjustly jailed Edwin Espinal and other Hondurans who can only be qualified as political prisoners?



Edwin Espinal with his partner Karen Spring, a Canadian human rights expert living in Honduras who worked for Rights Action from 2008-2014, before directing the Honduran Solidarity Network since then.

*"My last pic with Edwin before he was arrested. We took the picture in Zacate Grande in southern Honduras when we went to support communities fighting against land evictions to*

*make way for the construction of a “Model Cities/ZEDE” investment zone, and to free illegally detained anti-election fraud protesters in Choluteca. Edwin was arrested four weeks ago (January 19) and I haven’t been able to visit him. I miss him and feel for all the families of the 22+ political prisoners in Honduras who are in the same position as I, especially the families whose loved ones are being held in military-run prisons where the Honduran state invent “laws” and “procedures” that prohibit visits from human rights organizations and family members. The fight is just beginning and it won’t end until all political prisoners fighting for a better Honduras and against U.S. and Canadian foreign policies that support corrupt dictatorships, are free and home with their families. It may be hard and long, but we will achieve it.” (Karen Spring)*

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Rights Action, and many other groups, disagree with the Canadian government and its political support for and promotion of business and investor interests with the Honduran governments in power since the 2009 military coup. But we should not differ on demanding respect for human rights and the rule of law.

I have written you previously and heard nothing back. Rights Action – a Toronto-based tax charitable organization - has worked in Honduras since 1998. Karen worked with Rights Action from 2008-2014, and has lived and worked in Honduras since the 2009 military coup.

Canada has a direct responsibility. Canada took the public policy stance of basically legitimizing the illegal and violent 2009 military coup. Since then, Canada has maintained political and economic relations with a succession of regimes characterized by repression and criminality, corruption and impunity. Most recently, Canada quickly recognized the fraudulent and violent re-election of Juan Orlando Hernandez, November 26, 2017.

Karen, a respected human rights expert on Honduran issues and a Canadian, had been reporting on the electoral fraud and violence of the recent elections, when Edwin, her partner, was illegally detained and remains now jailed in isolation in a military jail; this, simply because he is a respected community leader who was protesting the electoral fraud and violence that Karen, and many others, documented.

While the Canadian government will obviously not agree with this analysis, it is equally obvious that Edwin was arrested on fraudulent charges and is being illegally detained. As Canadian government officials charged with respecting and promoting human rights, please get back to me about what steps you have taken:

- To visit Edwin in prison and to confirm his emotional, mental health and physical well-being;
- To advocate for the immediate release of Edwin and dropping of all trumped up charges.

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## **HONDURAS URGENT ACTION**

### **Demand the immediate release of EDWIN ESPINAL, and of all political prisoners in Honduras**

By Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network

Long-time Honduran activist Edwin Espinal has been arbitrarily detained and jailed (January 19, 2018) on charges related to protests against election fraud in Honduras. Due to his activism, he has been subject to State harassment, violence, and threats since the 2009 coup d'état. Immediate action is required to push for Edwin's release and to ensure his safety.



Long-time Honduran activist Edwin Robelo Espinal was arrested by police on January 19, on the eve of a week-long nationwide strike. Edwin faces a laundry list of trumped up charges: arson; property damage; and use of homemade explosive material. Edwin is also under State investigation for terrorism and criminal association related to damages to the Marriott Hotel, a multi-billion dollar US chain, during a January 12 protest in Tegucigalpa.

Thousands of Hondurans from all walks of life attended the January 12 action to protest the election fraud that robbed Opposition Alliance presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla of his victory in the November 26, 2017 general elections; the killings of more than 30 anti-fraud protesters and bystanders by state security forces; and the arrests of dozens of political prisoners during the ongoing post-electoral crisis. Edwin's arbitrary arrest occurred in the context of the election fraud endorsed by the US and Canada, and designed to keep current President Juan Orlando Hernandez in power

Edwin is currently in pretrial detention. At the end of his initial hearing inside military facilities on January 22, the judge ordered pre-trial detention and sent Edwin to La Tolva, a high-security, U.S.-style prison. The prison has extremely restricted visitor access, is run by a military Coronel, and prisoners are only allowed one-hour of sunlight every two weeks amongst other horrific conditions. Although the case has been appealed by local Honduran human rights organization COFADEH, Edwin could remain in detention for two or more years waiting trial.

**Edwin Espinal has been a target of state harassment for years**

Edwin is an easy-going, kind man who draws young people of all ages to him. Edwin fiercely believes in organizing, supporting all forms of resistance, and solidarity with Honduran social movements and groups. He has never lost hope for change in Honduras.

Edwin's strong and relentless conviction is what the Honduran government fears. Because of this, since the US- and Canadian-backed military coup in 2009, Edwin has been a constant target of State repression and harassment.

- In 2009, Edwin's partner, Wendy Elizabeth Avila, was killed after excessive exposure to tear gas when State forces violently evicted thousands of protesters gathered at the Brazilian Embassy to welcome ousted President Manuel Zelaya back into the country.
- In 2010, Edwin was abducted and tortured by Honduran police, who were later acquitted – in the corrupted legal system - on all charges for their abuses.
- One month before the fraudulent, violent 2013 elections, Honduran Military Police and canine units brought in by the Public Prosecutor's Office illegally raided Edwin's family's home, claiming that he possessed drugs, money, and weapons. At the time, Edwin was involved in a community movement to stop the privatization of public soccer fields in his neighborhood used by impoverished youth with limited recreational spaces and resources.
- In 2015, Edwin's mom died in the social security hospital as a result of the \$350 million dollar looting of the Honduran Social Security Institute (IHSS) orchestrated by the National Party, in power since 2010.
- Edwin has been detained more than a dozen times since 2009 and has been beaten by security forces. The most recent beating was in December 2017 when he participated in a protest against election fraud in Tegucigalpa.
- As a result of this constant persecution, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted Edwin protective measures in 2010. The measures were renewed in 2013, shortly after the illegal raid on his family's home.
- Edwin has been interviewed by [Democracy Now!](#), Al Jazeera's [Fault Lines](#) and in the documentary [Resistencia: The Fight for the Aguan Valley](#). His story has also been featured in articles published by [Truthout](#) and [POLITICO](#) Magazine.

Edwin's current detention on trumped up charges is one more example of systematic political persecution and targeting of anti-fraud protesters and political opponents of the government. The illegitimate and corrupt government of Juan Orlando Hernandez is targeting its own citizens – people like Edwin – while doing nothing to investigate the hundreds of killings and arbitrary arrests by State forces of social movement activists, protesters, journalists, lawyers, etc.

The legal proceedings against Edwin have completely violated Honduran law and due process. The case is being heard in “national jurisdiction” courts that, according to the charges against Edwin, have no jurisdiction over the case. The judge presiding over the case is the same judge that ordered the raid on Edwin's house in 2013, which, according to Honduran law, is illegal.

Edwin's legal representatives were given one day (a Sunday) to prepare his defense and he was later sent to prison to await trial, which could take years.

### **Action Needed for Edwin's safety and release**

- That family, lawyers, human rights advocates be permitted direct visits with Edwin in prison to confirm his emotional, mental health and physical well-being;
- That Edwin is released from his illegal detention and all trumped up charges be dropped.

To date, his family and his lawyers have not been able to visit him.

### **Solidarity and Funding needed**

We urge human rights delegations, journalists, and investigators to visit Edwin and other arbitrarily detained political prisoners experiencing repression in the context of the post-electoral crisis and the imposition of the Juan Orlando Hernandez regime.

Financial support for Edwin's family and human rights advocates is needed as they seek justice and work to ensure his safety and demand his release.

Karen Spring

Edwin Espinal's long-time partner & Coordinator of HSN (Honduras Solidarity Network)

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<https://freedwinespinallibertad.blogspot.com/>

Facebook: [Free EDWIN ESPINAL Libertad](#)

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### **United States**

Contact directly your elected Senators, Congress members:

<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

Heide Fulton: US Chief of Mission, Honduras, [BronkeHM@state.gov](mailto:BronkeHM@state.gov)

Jason Smith, Human Rights and Labor, [SmithJA6@state.gov](mailto:SmithJA6@state.gov)

### **Canada**

Directly contact your Member of Parliament:

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Parliamentarians/en/members>

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### **Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & U.S.)**

To support the work and struggle of our long-term partner groups in Honduras, responding to the human rights and repression crisis, including the political prisoners, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations: <http://rightsaction.org/donate/>

Donations of stock? Write to: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

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### **More information / Get involved**

- **Rights Action:** [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org); [www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org](http://www.facebook.com/RightsAction.org);  
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