

Tegucigalpa, Honduras
May 23, 2018

U.S./Canadian delegation DENIED entry to La Tolva military prison, where political prisoner Edwin Espinal has been jailed for over 4 months by U.S. and Canadian-backed regime

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/canadianus-delegation-denied-entry-to-la-tolva-military-prison>

- **Below:** Simcoe County delegation press release (May 22, 2018)

On May 23, 2018, after meeting with Honduran prosecutors working on Edwin's highly manipulated case, and a press conference at COFADEH (Honduran Committee of Disappeared and Detained), we drove 1.5 hours east of Tegucigalpa to La Tolva military jail.

Our delegation was denied entry into the military-run prison, where Edwin Espinal and Raul Alvarez are being held as political prisoners. Our group included Karen Spring, long-time partner of Edwin, and Janet Spring, Edwin's mother-in-law.





Copies of our passports and flight information (required!) had been forwarded to the appropriate Honduran authorities, including the Canadian government officials who also said they would forward it.

When we arrived, Janet and Karen Spring, and the group, waited for over an hour, and spoke and pleaded with the masked military officials – armed with machine guns and handguns – on the other side of the entrance ... to no avail.

Thursday, May 24, 2018: we return to La Tolva again.

In Honduras, contact:

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**Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor
Press release, May 23, 2018**

Tegucigalpa, Honduras / Elmvale, Canada – The Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor, from rural Ontario, has sent a seven-person fact-finding delegation (May 22-27) to Honduras to demand the release of political prisoner Edwin Espinal, while focusing critical attention on the policies and actions of the Canadian and U.S. governments that have been empowering and legitimizing the corrupt, violent regime in power in Honduras since the 2009 military coup.

Mr. Espinal is the son-in-law of local Simcoe County resident Janet Spring who will be co-leading the delegation that includes: documentary filmmaker (Jesse Freeston); photographer (Ben Powless); a local minister from Elmvale (Meg Jordan); an emergency medicine physician (William Reeves); and co-leader Grahame Russell of the Canadian and U.S.-non-governmental organization, Rights Action. The delegation is also accompanying Janet's daughter Karen Spring back to Honduras. Karen is the spouse of Mr. Espinal and a Canadian human rights activist and expert who has lived and worked in Honduras since 2009.

Upon arrival into the Tegucigalpa airport, at 11:30 am, May 22, five members of the delegation (Karen and Janet Spring, Jesse Freeston, Meg Jordan and William Reeves) were interrogated one by one, for close to four hours, most particularly Karen Spring who was returning home to where she has lived with Edwin for many years. The delegation members were grilled most particularly about their interests in and concern for human rights issues since fraudulent, violent elections of November 2017.

Upon release, they were met by Ben Powless and Grahame Russell waiting just outside, with other Honduran human rights defenders who had been keeping national and international human rights groups informed of the group's detention.



Mr. Espinal has been held in a maximum-security prison since the date of his arbitrary arrest on January 19 of this year during massive protests against the deeply corrupted and repressive elections of November 2017. The Spring family has not heard from Edwin in over 45 days but know that he is being held in deplorable conditions on trumped up charges intended to criminalize him for his long-standing human rights work and activism.

“The delegation has requested meetings with various Honduran government officials including the Attorney General and the National Penitentiary Institute responsible for the conditions that Edwin is being held in” says Janet Spring, who has traveled to Honduras previously. “We have also asked the Canadian Embassy to help us visit the prison and bring food and water to Edwin and another political prisoner, Raul Alvarez, being held with him.”

In November 2017, protests erupted in Honduras after the country's general elections were fraught with fraud. Mr. Espinal, like hundreds of thousands of Honduras, went to the streets in objection to the electoral fraud that maintained President Juan Orlando Hernandez in power. Protesters were shot at, leaving over 23 dead, hundreds injured, and thousands detained.

A long-time human rights and pro-democracy activist, Mr. Espinal is one of 23 political prisoners the government has been holding in pre-trial detention in military jails. So far, 17 have been released as a result of international and national efforts including those of residents from Simcoe County. However, the Spring family fears that the Honduran government will hold Mr. Espinal to set an example. "Edwin has been the target of political persecuting dating back to the U.S. and Canadian backed military coup d'état in Honduras in 2009," explains Grahame Russell of Rights Action, who has known Edwin for years.

The delegation will also be requesting meetings with Canadian and U.S. embassy officials. "The Honduran government has been empowered and enabled by on-going diplomatic and financial support from Canada and the United States and took advantage of a political crisis to imprison activists like Edwin. We, as Canadians and U.S. citizens -through our policies- have helped create the human rights problem in Honduras."

The delegation will be accompanied by the Honduran human rights organization, the Committee of the Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) who are Mr. Espinal's legal representatives. The delegation will also be coordinating with the Convergence Against Re-election and the National Committee for the Freedom of Political Prisoners.

While in Honduras and upon returning to Canada and the U.S., the delegation will share its findings with government officials in both countries, the media and Simcoe County residents.

For more information, contact:

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Photos

Ben Powless (photographer) is posting delegation photos here:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/21vkqnuldbotpb/AADE--r73rANI2qWi6W_NGDBa?dl=0

More information

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

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