

Letter from Rights Action Sébastien Sigouin
(Director, Central America, Cuba and Dominican Republic)

Whistleblowers, politicians & journalists needed in Ottawa: End 10 years of Canadian support for corrupt, repressive, anti-democratic regimes in Honduras

[\[https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/whistleblowers-politicians-journalists-needed-in-ottawa\]](https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/whistleblowers-politicians-journalists-needed-in-ottawa)

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- **Cc: Prime Minister Trudeau, Minister of Foreign Affairs Freeland, politicians and officials**

Dear Sebastien,

I write concerning the email (included below) you forwarded to me, in response to an April 11 letter we sent to PM Trudeau and Minister Freeland:

- “Misleading statements by Chrystia Freeland (Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs) about political prisoner Edwin Espinal & the human rights situation in Honduras”,
<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/misleading-statements-by-chrystia-freeland-canadian-minister-of-foreign-affairs>

Respectfully, Sebastien, the endless repetition of this statement - *“the promotion of human rights and the protection of human rights defenders remain at the core of Canada’s engagement in Honduras. We will continue to advocate for due process and the respect for human rights at every opportunity”* - does not make it true.

This statement is fundamentally false. Canadian government officials have been repeating it since the U.S. and Canadian backed military coup on June 27, 2009, that ousted Honduras’ last democratically elected government. While I recognize that Canada supports, with small grants, some worthy NGOs and human rights efforts, I repeat what is set out in the April 11 letter:

“The mentioned “aid” programs have nothing to do with the consistently negative impact of Canadian policies in Honduras over the past 10 years. Since the U.S. and Canadian-backed June 28, 2009 military coup violently ousted Honduras’ last democratically elected government, Canada has:

- *Endorsed three sets of fraudulent, violent and undemocratic elections (2009, 2013, 2017);*
- *Pushed for and signed the Canada-Honduras Free Trade Agreement with these same post-coup governments. Arguably, this agreement should be considered null and void, having been ratified by an undemocratic, illegitimate government;*
- *Promoted the continuing expansion of Canadian business and investor interests in mining, sweatshops, tourism, and “clean” energy projects.*

Canada has done all this, while turning a blind eye to or denying that:

- *Levels of government and death-squad repression have risen to levels similar to the years of the U.S.-backed military regimes of the early 1980s;*
- *Levels of poverty, extreme poverty and inequality have increased to their highest levels in recent history;*

- *Honduras has become the murder capital of the world and one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, human rights lawyer, land and human rights defender, and environmentalists;*
- *Organized crime (including drug traffickers) have infiltrated all branches of the government and State, including the President's office;*
- *More Hondurans are forced to flee their homes and countries in 'caravans' or individually, year after year, than at any time since the early 1980s.*

Sebastien, it is not that Canada's policies and actions vis-à-vis Honduras, since the 2009 coup, have been a debacle. Our overall government policies and actions are wrong. On request, I can send links to articles and reports documenting the violent and dismal situation in Honduras, that is enabled and kept in place by U.S. and Canadian policies and actions.

Canadian "foreign" or "global" policies and actions are no less "Canadian" than local, provincial and federal policies and actions.

We call on Canadian government officials, politicians and senators and journalists to expose and then hold the Canadian government accountable (under Conservative and Liberal administrations) for 10 years of self-serving and harmful policies and actions in Honduras that have 'legitimized' and empowered corrupt, repressive, "pro-business" governments, while ignoring or openly denying:

- historic and on-going exploitation, poverty and extreme poverty;
- widespread and 'normalized' human rights violations;
- systemic government and private sector repression; generalized societal violence, including the "highest murder rates in the world"; and,
- infiltration of organized crime, including drug traffickers, into all branches of the government and state.

Real political and legal accountability, and fundamental policy change are desperately needed.

Grahame Russell, Rights Action
grahame@rightsaction.org

From: Sebastien.Sigouin@international.gc.ca [mailto:Sebastien.Sigouin@international.gc.ca]
 Sent: Tuesday, May 21, 2019 9:53 AM
 To: info@rightsaction.org
 Subject: RE: Reply Email for you to send ----- RE: About political prisoner Edwin Espinal and the human rights situation in Honduras

Dear Mr. Russell,

Thank you for your electronic correspondence of April 11, regarding the human rights situation in Honduras and the ongoing detention of Mr. Edwin Espinal. I have been asked to respond to you. We understand this is a difficult time for the Spring family and for Mr. Espinal. As you may know, the ability of Canada to provide direct assistance to Honduran nationals is limited. Nevertheless, Canadian officials have taken many actions in support of Mr. Espinal, and Canada continues to be a vocal advocate for due process and the protection of human rights in Honduras. For example, officials from the

Embassy of Canada in Honduras have visited Mr. Espinal in prison on four occasions. They have spoken with him and with other detainees, observed detention conditions and attended his judicial proceedings.

The Canadian Ambassador to Honduras has met with the Honduran Attorney General, the Vice-Minister of Human Rights, the President of the Supreme Court, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, among many others, to discuss Mr. Espinal's case and to express Canada's preoccupations with regard to due process and the conditions of his detention. In addition, a senior official from Global Affairs Canada visited Honduras in November 2018 and raised Mr. Espinal's case with the Honduran Minister of Foreign Affairs. This senior official also raised the case in April 2019 with the Honduran Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs on the margins of the Lima Group meeting in Chile.

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs, has also raised the situation with the Honduran Minister of Foreign Affairs, and has been in touch directly with the Spring family. Many departmental officials have also been in contact with the Spring family to provide regular updates on efforts in support of Mr. Espinal.

The promotion of human rights and the protection of human rights defenders remain at the core of Canada's engagement in Honduras. We will continue to advocate for due process and the respect for human rights at every opportunity.

Thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

Sébastien Sigouin

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Director, Centroamérica, Cuba y República Dominicana

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MORE INFORMATION

- "Karen Spring strip-searched while visiting husband Edwin Espinal, a political prisoner in Honduras: Letter to PM Trudeau & Minister Freeland", <https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/karen-spring-strip-searched-while-visiting-husband-edwin-espinal-a-political-prisoner-in-honduras>
- "Request meeting between Spring family, PM Trudeau & Minister Freeland", <https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/request-for-meeting-between-spring-family-prime-minister-trudeau-minister-chrystia-freeland>

TAKE ACTION

Write to Canadian PM Trudeau and Minister Freeland, with copies to your MP, media and networks, expressing outrage at Canadian policies and actions that are 'legitimizing', enabling and empowering 10 years of corrupt, repressive, "pro-business" governments in Honduras.

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS TO RIGHTS ACTION

Your support will help Rights Action continue to fund and support community groups in Honduras and Guatemala at the forefront of land, environmental, human rights and justice struggles, including work to free political prisoners and 'criminalized' community defenders. 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

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