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News

Open Letter on MLK Day About Human Rights Violations in Honduras

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We, the undersigned organizations of workers, artists, intellectuals, veterans, activists, lawyers, clergy, and community organizers, strongly condemn the widespread human rights atrocities against the Honduran people, beginning with the military coup on June 28th of 2009. Reports from human rights organizations emerge every day detailing state repression, from rape to assassination, of members of the non-violent resistance, whose aim is to restore constitutional order to their country and foster the creation of a more just society.

These abuses by the Honduran state violate nearly every article of the American Convention on Human Rights, to which Honduras is a signatory, beginning with the rupture of constitutional order and resulting in thousands of rights violations. As recognized by the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, and documented extensively by COFADEH, Honduras' leading human rights organization, the coup regime has demonstrated a premeditated pattern of violent tactics with which it aims to quell the resistance to the coup:

- Mass detentions in subhuman prison facilities
- The repression of assembly and mobility by means of excessive force
- The establishment of curfews and the suspension of constitutional guarantees
- Rape and gang rape
- Targeted assassinations
- The censorship of media by means of threatening and killing journalists, employing blackouts, confiscating equipment, & the outright closure of anti-coup TV and Radio stations
- Torture
- Disappearance and kidnapping
- Psychological warfare
- Impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes

Though these acts have been carried out by the police and the armed forces, there has been an alarming increase in the use of paramilitary personnel. The United Nations reported that some 40 ex-members of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia—Latin America's largest paramilitary outfit, & terrorist organization as designated by the US State Department—had been employed by Honduran landowners. An increasing number of assassinations and abductions have been carried out by unidentified agents.

This repression has disproportionately targeted marginalized communities, such as indigenous,

campesino, & afro-Honduran groups. The LGBT community, for one, recently lost one of its young leaders, Walter Trochez, 27, gunned down by masked assailants on December 13th. Trochez' murder is the sixteenth suffered by the LGBT community since the overthrow of Zelaya.

On December 11th, the decapitated body of Santos Corrales Garcia appeared in a neighborhood outside of Tegucigalpa. Garcia was a local leader of the non-violent resistance, and had been detained six days earlier by heavily armed members of the National Criminal Investigation Division. Garcia's body showed signs of torture, indicative of a low-intensity campaign to create collective fear, according to human rights advocate Andres Pavon.

Violence against women has also escalated greatly. As written in the Christian Science Monitor: "As of August, women's groups in Honduras have documented 249 cases of violations of women's human rights, including 23 cases of beatings and sexual assault and seven gang rapes by police explicitly trying to "punish" women for their involvement in demonstrations. The number of femicides – the violent murder of women because they are women – has tripled since the coup, with 51 cases reported during the month of July alone."

In the face of all this, the regime held elections on November 29th, resulting in the "victory" of Porfirio Lobo of the National Party. The sharp rise in brutality in the aftermath of the elections indicates that this may have been the worst thing for the human rights situation in Honduras, as powerful governments in the hemisphere—namely the United States, Canada, and Colombia—have used the elections as an opportunity to whitewash the coup. An ardent supporter of the overthrow of Zelaya, Lobo is already pursuing a general amnesty for its perpetrators.

For those governments that deal with Honduras, particularly the United States, this must be considered unacceptable and dealt with according to national and international law. The unwillingness to condemn the military regime for its thousands of human rights abuses demonstrates a capitulation to the coup, its repressive tactics, and its impact on Honduran democracy and civil society. To remain silent here is to condone the use of military repression against unarmed populations, and to encourage its use in future instances.

It is the moral imperative of the international community to demand the immediate end of the brutality in Honduras, and that the human rights of all citizens, particularly those involved in political activity, be respected without conditions.

Signed,

8th Day Center for Justice
Alliance for Global Justice
Americans Who Tell the Truth
Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network
Binghamton, New York-El Charcon Sister City Project
Boston Democratic Socialists of America
Boston Liberation Health Group
Boston May Day Coalition
British Columbia Teachers' Federation
Brooklyn For Peace
Cambridge, MA-El Salvador Sister City Project
Campaign for Labor Rights
Centro Presente
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America
Chicago-Cinquera Sister Cities
Davis Religious Community for Sanctuary
Democratic Socialists of Central Ohio
Doctors for Global Health
Ecumenical Committee of English Speaking Personnel
Fredericton Peace Coalition
Friends of Chilama- a US-El Salvador Sister City
Georgia Peace & Justice Coalition/Atlanta
Grassroots International
Greater Boston Stop the Wars Coalition

Hondurans for Democracy
International Socialist Organization
InterReligious Task Force on Central America
La Voz de los de Abajo
Latin America Solidarity Committee Aotearoa New Zealand
Latin American Solidarity Organization
Maine Organic Farmers' and Gardeners' Association
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mass Global Action
National Committee in Solidarity with the Honduran People
National Lawyers Guild
Native Forest Network/Gulf of Maine
Nicaragua Network
Nonviolence International
NYU Law Students For Economic Justice
Office of the Americas
Other Worlds
Polo Democratico Alternativo-NYC
Proyecto Hondureño
Rhode Island Mobilization Committee
Rights Action
School of the Americas Watch
Social Justice Committee of the U.U. Church of Nashua, NH
Somerville/Medford United for Justice with Peace
SweatFree Communities
The Americas Program
The Network of US-El Salvador Sister Cities
The Quixote Center
Trade Justice New York Metro
U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Program
United for Justice with Peace, the Greater Boston coalition
US Peace Council
Venezuela Solidarity Campaign
Veterans For Peace, Chapter 9, Smedley Butler Brigade
Wellington Zapatista Solidarity Committee, New Zealand

This statement was also signed by Prof. Noam Chomsky, Prof. Aviva Chomsky, and Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, in addition to hundreds of concerned individuals.