

Grave Concern for Safety of Human Rights Defenders in Honduras

May 15, 2012

Since the June 2009 coup d'état, human rights defenders in Honduras have experienced systematic human rights violations amidst a pervasive climate of impunity. In recent weeks, there have been numerous reports of an increase in incidents of killing, violence and intimidation aimed at human rights defenders.

On May 7, 2012, Erick Martinez Avila, a journalist, prominent human rights defender and leader in Honduras' lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) rights movement, was declared dead after his body was found in a field with apparent signs of strangulation.

On April 30, 2012, the United States-based Honduras Accompaniment Project (PROAH) denounced death threats received via text message by two international members of their accompaniment team. The death threats received by PROAH team members were signed from CAM, a pseudonym that has been used in numerous threats against human rights defenders and journalists in Honduras since the coup d'état. Protective accompaniment through programs such as PROAH for individuals whose lives are at risk has proven to be critically important to defending the rights and protections accorded to human rights defenders per the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Now even those who are there to help increase protection are being threatened.

On April 24, 2012, the Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), a prominent human rights organization in Honduras, held a press conference to report intensified threats, surveillance, harassment and even physical attacks towards COFADEH staff and members.

While the threats to PROAH team members represent the first reported threats against international human rights defenders in Honduras since the coup d'état, these incidents are not isolated but form part of a pattern of ongoing and escalating hostility and assaults. In February 2012, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Margaret Sekaggya, upon conclusion of a mission to Honduras, reported, "The pervasive impunity and absence of effective investigations of human rights violations undermine the administration of justice and damages the public's trust in authorities. The 2009 coup d'état aggravated institutional weaknesses, increased the vulnerability of human rights defenders and provoked a major polarisation in society. Due to the exposed nature of their activities, human rights defenders continue to suffer extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment, death threats, attacks, harassment and stigmatisation."

The undersigned organizations call on the government of Honduras to immediately investigate all reported threats, attacks and killings of human rights defenders, to make the findings of the investigations public and to prosecute all those suspected of involvement. We call on all members of the diplomatic community in Honduras to publicly express support for human rights defenders at this time and join this call for immediate investigations.

Signed,

Center for Constitutional Rights
Dominican Leadership Conference
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Frontline Defenders
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
National Lawyers Guild
Presbyterian Peace Fellowship
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Institute Justice Team
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries