



Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras

COFADEH

A NATIONAL EMERGENCY

The day that the President made his first cabinet changes, using football terms and scoring “goals” against rival factions within the National Party, was the same day that the national director of prisons talked about the unsafe nature of these facilities on a radio program in Tegucigalpa... And this was the very same day that the horror in Comayagua took place.

The Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (Cofadeh), along with most of the population, is in shock in the face of the enormous human tragedy in Comayagua Prison which was built for 250 inmates, but holding 850 in 10 cell blocks on the night of the catastrophe.

The facts force us to speak out. Fire-fighters arrived too late to control the fire that suffocated and burned to death over 360 people, and the director of the facility was not on site. The guards failed to open the cells to save the lives of those inside when it was obviously needed, and instead fired on those inmates who tried to escape the flames on their own initiative.

Our Committee is deeply concerned by reports from the survivors. One of them said on Thursday morning during a news program on Channel HCH that “police poured gasoline in the cells from behind and fired shots.” He also referred to the cause of the incident: “there was an escape planned by 85 prisoners who paid close to 85,000 lempiras each.” The plan, according to this inmate, was that at 10pm on Tuesday their cell doors would be unlocked and the 85 prisoners would escape disguised as police officers, and would be shot at as part of the “show”, but they were in fact the first victims. “Look over the director's accounts, because we deposited the money for the escape there. The director knows all about this,” he said.

The scenes which we have witnessed with horror in the last few hours resemble those from 5 April 2003 at El Porvenir Prison in La Ceiba, Atlántida, when 68 people died in a similar fire, and those in 2004 at the San Pedro Sula Prison, when fire left 107 dead, most of them members of the MS gang.

The Honduran state, governed during these prison catastrophes by the same elite which imposed ‘zero tolerance’ policies, is morally and legally bankrupt before the Inter-American human rights system, which made recommendations in March 2006, and brought it to trial before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

The State will face similar charges on 28 February when it appears before the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) for the massacre of prisoners in San Pedro Sula. It is predicted that the state will be found guilty once this Thursday's deadline has expired for granting a conciliation hearing, which was requested by the Attorney General's Office but rejected by the petitioners (the Diocese of San Pedro Sula and ERIC (Jesuit Reflection, Research and Communications Team)).

Barrio La Plazuela, Avenida Cervantes, Casa No. 1301

Apartado Postal 1243

Tel / Fax: (504) 220- 5280 220- 7147

E-mail: mail@cofadeh.org

Sitio Web: www.cofadeh.org



Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras

COFADEH

As those legal proceedings are concluded and the causes and motives for this new massacre are established, our Committee underscores the state of National Emergency regarding human rights in Honduras, which certain sectors must not be allowed to exploit for their own sinister political ends by creating constant turmoil.

Neither the bureaucratic suspension of sinister figures from the National Police, nor acts of official philanthropy, whether local or international, much less the initial theories broadcast as the truth by the lamentable police spokesman are enough. The repressive and criminal practices in the operation and management of our prisons must end!

Final Considerations

In July 2010, more for the financial benefit of national and Israeli contractors than out of any true interest in solving the prison problem, the President declared a state of emergency in 9 of the country's 24 prisons, but failed to establish security and prevention mechanisms, nor mechanisms for controlling and operating them.

In the face of this latest national tragedy which has horrified the entire world, Cofadeh supports the decision by the Inter-American Commission to request an urgent independent investigation into the causes of the fire in Comayagua and more generally into the human rights situation for the country's prisoners. We also applaud the IACHR's decision to convene a hearing on this situation during its next period of sessions, from 19 to 30 March 2012.

Cofadeh demands a proper, serious and impartial investigation of the causes of the tragedy and for those responsible, both directly and indirectly, to be punished in accordance with the law. Although this demand seems like a farce in a broken state, mere words in a climate of barbarity.. We make this demand, rather, to the rest of the world where human life is still valued.

We also demand that measures and mechanisms are implemented to guarantee the safety and security of the surviving inmates of Comayagua Prison, and that their transfer to other prisons is carried out in accordance with international standards, thereby safeguarding their lives and physical integrity.

Protocols must be established and prison officers trained in how to respond in similar emergencies.

The general public must not be lied to, manipulated or distracted for other malign purposes.

The crimes and the perpetrators will neither be forgiven nor forgotten

COFADEH

16 February 2012

Barrio La Plazuela, Avenida Cervantes, Casa No. 1301

Apartado Postal 1243

Tel / Fax: (504) 220- 5280 220- 7147

E-mail: mail@cofadeh.org

Sitio Web: www.cofadeh.org