



Nicaragua-United States

## Friendship Office of the Americas

June 2011

Dear Friends,

We continue to be both inspired and alarmed by events in Honduras. Month after month, peaceful protests sweep across the country in response to a battery of “shock” reforms implemented by the Lobo administration. These reforms deepen existing inequalities and negatively impact the poor majority of Honduras.

In March, repression intensified as state security forces launched daily, massive attacks against teachers protesting the looting of social security funds by the coup regime, repeal of core labor rights and privatization of public education. Police and military responded to protests with excessive and lethal force, including firing tear gas canisters directly at people’s heads and the use of live bullets in violation of United Nations standards.

Three weeks of heavy state repression against teachers, school children and their families resulted in scores of detentions and injuries including the tragic death of teacher and co-founder of the Committee of the Families of the Disappeared and Detained of Honduras (COFADEH), Ilse Ivania Velasquez.

Former Honduran Human Rights Commissioner, Leo Valladares, was forced to flee the country due to constant threats after he publicly questioned the growing power of the Honduran military.

**The Commission of Truth offices and staff suffered several attacks** in March and April including the attempted kidnapping and severe beating of a security team member by police.

In the midst of state repression that outstrips the capacity of human rights organizations to respond, the people of Honduras sustain non-violent protest; day after day saying NO to the coup and policies that further injure the poor and the earth.

Thanks to your support and encouragement, we continue to accompany **TRUTH and HOPE.**

- In March the Friendship Office helped to bring Honduran human rights defenders and attorneys, including Bertha Oliva (COFADEH) and Brenda Mejia (Commission of Truth), to testify at a U.S. Congressional Briefing sponsored by Rep. McGovern. They also testified with other Hondurans, at hearings of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the OAS. All of the witnesses presented harrowing accounts of an increase in politically motivated killings, targeting of human rights defenders and lack of rule of law in Honduras during the first year of the U.S. backed Lobo administration.
- On March 19th, the 21st anniversary of the assassination of Oscar Romero, the Friendship Office together with the Commission of Truth and the Center for Constitutional Rights held a press conference in Washington, calling on the U.S. government to release documents requested under the Freedom of Information Act as part of the search for the full truth regarding the June 2009 coup d'état.
- We co-sponsored an "Open Letter to the International Diplomatic Corps in Honduras" signed by 127 organizations, expressing support for the work of the Commission of Truth. The letter requests Governments to insist on the safety of the Commission's staff and the universally recognized right of all victims, families and witnesses to present their cases and to seek the truth without suffering threats, harassment or repression in any form.
- Thanks to many experienced volunteers giving weeks of their time, the Honduras Accompaniment Project (HAP) is coordinating international accompaniment for the Commission of Truth offices and mobile teams working throughout the country. HAP is also responding to a heightened number of accompaniment requests from partners impacted by and responding to the repression.

The response of U.S. State Department and Embassy officials to concerns about the deepening crisis is troublesome; justifying state repression, attributing violence to protestors in a dangerous misrepresentation of facts and promoting increased military and economic assistance. We are grateful however, to Rep. McGovern for hearing our concerns. **Please share his strong Dear Colleague Letter calling for suspension of U.S. military and police assistance to Honduras with your members of Congress.** <http://www.friendshipamericas.org/rep-mcgovern-releases-dear-colleague-letter-honduras-urge-your-rep-sign>

While in Honduras last month, Nobel Peace Prize recipient and Truth Commissioner, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, called on the United States to cease imposing "dictatorships and projects of death and subjugation" in Latin America. He exhorted the people of Honduras to remain steadfast in the daily non-violent struggle to confront the bulwark of immunity, "to have great strength, hope and never give up."

We are deeply grateful for your support. You give us great strength. Please consider a gift to support our efforts to accompany TRUTH and HOPE in Honduras.

In solidarity,

  
Rita Clark   Jenny Atlee   Tom Loudon   Caitlin Hancey Power

*P.S. – Rita returned from Nicaragua in the spring after visiting partners and projects. Jenny is headed there in August. In our next newsletter, we look forward to updating you on plans and projects for the year ahead.*

*P.S.S. – “Nicaragua: Surviving the Legacy of U.S. Policy” is now available! To order: [www.NicaraguaPhotoTestimony.org](http://www.NicaraguaPhotoTestimony.org) “These remarkable photos and the stories that accompany them should be on billboards from sea to shining sea, so the pain and suffering they represent might fall drop by drop upon the American psyche and against our will, by the awful grace of God, wisdom might come to these United States and her foreign policy.” —**Charlie Clements**, Executive Director, Carr Center for Human Rights at Harvard University, author of *Witness to War**