

Toolkit for Advocacy: From Experience to Action

ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION, HONDURAS 2019 PILGRIMAGE

August 2019



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Thank You

We thank the hosts, the communities, and the individuals of Honduras who opened their arms to us. They shared their homes, personal perspectives, on-the-ground knowledge, sense of the future, and clarity about what we must do to effect change.

We dedicate this report to them in the hope that their voices will be heard. We will work together toward understanding and positive change, drawing from the research and writings collected for our one-to-one conversations, public declarations and writings, delivered requests and expectations, and partnership with those we win over.

If you are ready to act, you will find essential support here.

Acknowledgements

The writing team, chaired by Lawrence Couch, commends this report as a down payment on our vow not to remain silent. It is a resource to all. It is our first step. It is not our last.

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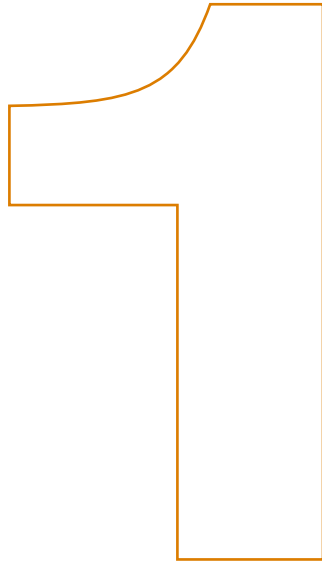
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OVERVIEW & USER GUIDE

OVERVIEW + USER GUIDE

This report sets forth the experiences and lessons of the Root Causes pilgrimage to Honduras in March, 2019. We hope it will serve as a record and a reference for action as we educate potential allies, advocate for change in U.S. policy, and prepare more people to join such trips. To meet these objectives, we offer this Toolkit for Advocacy.

The message from Honduras was clear. The United States government and its citizens who do not act are primary contributors to the problems Hondurans face today. This truth, though uncomfortable, also means we can and must be part of the solution. The facts, figures, talking points, and tools included here are tailored for charting a path to change. We hope the stories, testimonies, pictures, and videos we've gathered, the relationships we've forged in Honduras, and our continuing connections with each other will fuel and motivate us, and further our progress.

SUMMARY OF REPORT COMPONENTS

This Overview lays out the goals, strategy, and contents of this report. In addition, Chapter 1 also contains a User Guide, which spotlights some key ways in which specific components might be used for advocacy. This is by no means an exhaustive list of uses, but rather a way to get us started.

Meant as a touchstone for our continued commitment, and to sustain our spirits, A Moral and Spiritual Framework for Solidarity (Chapter 2) provides various perspectives on solidarity, advocacy, action, and philosophy, both from delegates and from others.

Chapter 3, the largest and most personal component, shares the experiences of the delegation in the cities, mountains, and agricultural valleys of Honduras—telling the stories of those places, and amplifying the voices of the brave and passionate leaders who devote their hearts and lives to positive change. These stories include the words of Hondurans we met along with recollections and reports of delegates, told from personal experience. Stories and photos are powerful and persuasive evidence, with a multitude of uses, none more important than bringing to life, in the minds of those we wish to persuade, the realities we witnessed in Honduras.

Chapter 4 offers a brief grounding in historical context and modern history, intended to bulwark our knowledge and get us ready to act, interact, and answer questions. It lays out for easy reference a shared set of reliable facts, from early history to contemporary realities of the last few decades; a graphic timeline; and a crucial set of facts regarding arms sales (not covered so fully elsewhere in document).

Chapter 5 is our toolkit. Talking points for advocacy come with sample rebuttals alongside. A short article discusses the practical and philosophical underpinnings of solidarity, oneness, and the possibility of accomplishing change. Tools for letter-writing, social media campaigning, and speaking truth to power round out the package. Finally, appended here is the congressional brief, which was produced before this report so it could be distributed to 1,400 congressional staffers and elected members. It is likely that new materials will be added over the months ahead.

We traveled with a desire to immerse ourselves and learn, and to lend our solidarity. We were welcomed, embraced, and impressed with community members young and old, while on the same days we were devastated, overwhelmed, and energized for the essential advocacy ahead.

As advocates for social justice, every one of us, we will not stop with this report, but rather use it to advance our goals through action.

USER GUIDE:

Chapter	“If you are....”	Potential Uses
1	...about to send this report off to colleagues, elected representatives, potential donors, or partners in action ...recommending to others that they join a future delegation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The text in Chapter 1 can be excerpted to clarify the purpose and content of the report and its component parts—and can accompany your personal requests and recommendations.</i>
2	...feeling overwhelmed and challenged, and need to refresh your spirit or find inspiration for the work ahead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>See where other delegates, social action pioneers, and faith leaders find their guidance for action, as presented in Chapter 2.</i>
3 and 4	...giving a presentation on the challenges facing women threatened by the prevalence femicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read the stories from San Pedro Sula in Chapter 3.</i> • <i>Review key facts in Chapter 4's Contemporary History and Weapons Sales pieces.</i>
3 and 4	...about to meet with youth in the social justice movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tell some show-stopping stories using compelling photos from Chapter 3.</i> • <i>Give yourself a foundation in History—long past and recent—and be ready to describe how a country can suffer, all in Chapter 4.</i>
3	...looking to close the deal with communities from whom you seek signatures or funds, by communicating what you learned and what you felt in Honduras	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Report what we witnessed, as told by delegates and as spoken by community leaders – all reported in Chapter 3.</i>
3	...starting a weekly podcast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Get your first five stories from the geographic locations in the Stories.</i>
4 and 5	...lobbying your congressperson to sponsor the Berta Cáceres Act (or other future actions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read the contemporary history, Chapter 4.</i> • <i>Turn to a template on talking to people in power, Chapter 5.</i> • <i>Use the ready-made social media content in Chapter 5.</i>

Chapter	"If you are...."	Potential Uses
4	...laying out the facts, nothing but the facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Know that each of the members of the delegation will be using the facts provided here to put forward a firm and shared sense of history and community needs, with sources cited and numbers confirmed.</i>
5	...appalled at something you just read in the newspaper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Turn to Chapter 5 and pull out the template for a Letter to the Editor – but do it right now if you want to have impact!</i>
5	...too busy for long talks or papers, but are ready on Twitter, Instagram, or other new media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Go right to the Social Media Toolkit and post away...</i>
5	...writing an editorial for your social, spiritual, or political group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read through to see what might be most important to them, and then gather the background you need. Feel free to quote this report/toolkit.</i>
Global	...able to help by taking a collection during a presentation, or can help with raising needed funds in other ways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The SHARE Foundation helps raise funds for Radio Progreso and the faith communities we visited. Donate online to SHARE at the URL below, or write a check to "SHARE Foundation," and in the memo line, add "Honduras - Radio Progreso." Mail it to 2425 College Ave., Berkeley, CA 94704.</i> • <i>https://share-elsalvador.networkforgood.com/projects/76330-support-radio-progreso</i>
Global	...considering joining a future Pilgrimage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Use the contact information available at the end of this report, or contact any of our authors to get their perspectives.</i>
Global	...ready to take on more to support the work of our Honduran partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Host the autumn 2019 speaking tour! Padre Melo (coming separately), Radio Progreso staff, members of the Guapinol 12, and others are slated to be hitting the U.S. early this fall. Contact SHARE to make hosting arrangements.</i> • <i>...or help raise money for it! There is a campaign to raise funds for travel and accommodations for the Hondurans coming here. Donate to the SHARE Foundation (as above).</i>



MOTIVATIONS

A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOLIDARITY

To stand in solidarity is to be called to action. Sentiments won't suffice; we must do the hard work. In this contentious moment, we will need to draw inspiration and motivation from our moral and spiritual storehouse to refresh our energy along the way.

We live in a culture in which fear and hostility toward immigrants is being fanned. Based on our experiences in Honduras and elsewhere, how do we converse with people who have believed the lies of national self-interest and imperialism? Fellow pilgrim and theologian, Sister Mary-Paula Cancienne, RSM, remarked, "There is no one way to be in solidarity, but if relationship, sacrifice, and transformation across divides and separations are not possibilities, then we might be deluding ourselves if we think we are 'in solidarity.' Ultimately, 'solidarity' is a way that we must live as we heal, vision, and grow. [...] Honduras beckons people from up and down the Americas to wake up, because what happens here, happens everywhere."

Conversion comes through relationships, conversations, and dialogue. We begin by listening to the other person. As the theologian Jean Vanier said, "This can be done only when we are in relationship with another, when we take the time to connect, to listen—really listen—to what someone is saying, to hear the story behind the story."

This emphasis on listening is echoed by Rabbi Adina Allen, who said, "The act of listening can seem easy on the surface. We just open

our ears. But true listening is not the passive act that simple hearing is. Listening to another means allowing another to be fully who they are in the present moment, whether they share our views or not. The act of listening opens us up to take in an experience different from our own. Whether we agree or not, if we are really listening, we internalize the experience of another and are opened into empathy. In true listening heart touches heart and we are changed. That is why the Shema—the central prayer in Judaism, which calls us to Listen!—leads directly into the V'ahavta, the prayer which calls upon us to love. Listening opens us to loving."

Our fellow pilgrim, Sister Mary Ellen Brody, RSM, commented, "I have signed petitions and participated in marches, but the situation seems to be worse than ever. We need to focus on spiritual conversion through one-to-one conversations. We need to help people move beyond the fear instilled in them by politicians."

In terms of solidarity, pilgrim Sister Kathleen Erickson, RSM, finds inspiration in the writings of Thomas Merton and the French philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Merton comments, "In the long run, no one can show another the error that is within him, unless the other is

convinced that his critic first sees and loves the good that is within him.” And in the words of Teilhard, “Love alone is capable of uniting living beings in such a way as to complete and fulfill them, for it alone takes them and joins them by what is deepest in themselves.”

Social activist Sister Clare Nolan, RGS, comments, “Solidarity, then, is entering into relationship. Like any relationship of depth, it calls for new perspectives and willingness to change. I find this personally demanding and challenging. As I reach, through small practices, toward another’s reality I find that my energy turns outward and seems to be strengthened, even when confronting disturbing realities.

“When I seek unity with the ‘other,’ as my heart opens toward [the] other, it becomes an endless circle that, in my personal identification with the other’s distress, impels me to strive beyond personal interconnectedness and to work for changes in social realities that impede human dignity. Solidarity then is an endless meeting of self, of other, and of transformative activity.”

In the words of W.H. Auden

(from September 1, 1939):

*“And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.”*

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION, MOTIVATION, AND PRACTICE

Many of our delegation, and countless others, have given time and thought to these crucial questions. Their words are a valuable source of wisdom and strength as we push forward. These links, suggestions, notes, and excerpts are intended to point the way to further sources of spiritual grounding, insight, encouragement, fuel, and guidance.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL BY DELEGATES—LINKS, EXCERPTS, AND QUOTATIONS

MARIE DENNIS, PAX Christi International, quotation on significance of the mandala (altar) on the floor of Radio Progreso:

“The beauty and richness of Honduran spirituality was evident in the mandala designed by the staff at Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación, y Comunicación (ERIC) and Radio Progreso, and carefully crafted in a large space on the floor of the auditorium where we met the staff of ERIC and Radio Progreso. The mandala symbolized life and memories, deep connections to the earth, and ERIC’s and Radio Progreso’s daily work.

Carefully crafted from the fruits of the earth—beans, tomatoes, and other vegetables, and symbols of ERIC’s and Radio Progreso’s amazing work for human rights—the mandala held our attention as we listened to Padre Melo welcome us to Honduras, a land of rich biodiversity (mountains, valleys, rivers, clean waters, flora and fauna) and abundant natural resources that in 50 years will be exhausted.”

REV. ROGER SCOTT POWERS, St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, opinion piece published in Albuquerque Journal (May 2019)

Link: <https://www.abqjournal.com/1309313/leaders-should-address-root-causes-of-caravans.html>

Excerpt:

“Asked what message the Hondurans wanted us to bring back to the U.S., the answer was always the same: Stop sending U.S. military and police aid to the Honduran government. ‘U.S. weapons are killing our women and children,’ one Honduran said. ‘We don’t need more guns!’”

RABBI BRANT ROSEN’S BLOG

Link: <http://rabbibrant.com/2019/04/02/bearing-witness-to-root-causes-at-radio-progreso/>

Excerpts:

“It is a time to open our eyes and come face to face with our own country’s complicity in the root causes of migration which have compelled thousands to leave their countries.”

“Pilgrimage is about reconnection with each other, with our ancestors, with mystery and the depth of life. It is not an escape like tourism but a returning to the center of pivotal events, embedded in the land itself. It is also not a viewing of an “other” people, but regaining awareness of our deep connections and “common context of struggle.” ...a re-centering, re-entering and recovery of history; it is a rediscovery that we are part of a living and vital collective memory. We remember in order to heal, to recover memory, to decolonize ourselves, to restore our deeper souls.”

QUOTATIONS: EXPRESSIONS OF MOTIVATION, LOVE, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM HISTORIC[AL] FIGURES

“¡Despertemos! ¡Despertemos Humanidad! Ya no hay tiempo. Nuestras conciencias serán sacudidas por el hecho de sólo estar contemplando la autodestrucción basada en la depredación capitalista, racista, y patriarcal.”
–Berta Cáceres

(Translation: ‘We must wake up! We must wake up, Humanity! We’ve run out of time. We’re all going to get a huge jolt to our consciences when we realize the fact that the only reason we’re looking our self-destruction in the face is our own capitalist, racist, and patriarchal predation.’)

“Vos tenés la bala... Yo la palabra... La bala muere al detonarse... La palabra vive al replicarse.” –Berta Cáceres

(Translation: ‘You have the bullet... I, the word.... The bullet dies with detonation... The word lives on with replication.’)

“The question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love...for the preservation of injustice or for the preservation of justice?” –Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“The opposite of good is not evil, the opposite of good is indifference. In a free society where terrible wrongs exist, some are guilty, but all are responsible.” –Abraham Joshua Heschel

Regarding **TIKKUN OLAM**, God's commandment to repair the world:

"Now, more than ever, we need some moral grandeur and spiritual audacity to guide us. We must call upon the values and deepest-held beliefs of our American democracy AND our Judaism. We are faced with multi-faceted, complicated, and deeply divisive issues in our society. But we cannot look away and hope our problems will GO away."

—Abraham Joshua Heschel

"I will not tire of declaring that if we really want an effective end to violence, we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, repression. All this is what constitutes the primal cause, from which the rest flows naturally."

—St. Oscar Romero

VERSES:

Deuteronomy 10:19

You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

Micah 6:8

*It hath been told thee, O man, what is good,
And what the LORD doth require of thee: Only
to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk
humbly with thy God.*

Leviticus 5:1

*If he be a witness—having seen or known—if
he does not express it, he shall bear his sin.*

Ruth 1:16

Your people will be my people.

ACTS OF SPIRITUAL AFFIRMATION

"I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me"
Prayer Service* (Jesuit)

(<http://jesuitscentralandsouthern.org/Assets/Regions/UCSPROV/media/files/Lenten%20Prayer%20Service.pdf>)

*Adapted from a prayer service developed by the Education for Justice website, educationforjustice.org

HIAS, the venerable refugee aid agency, asks Passover Seder participants "to place a pair of shoes on the doorstep of your home to acknowledge that none of us is free until all of us are free, and to pledge to stand in support of welcoming those who do not have a place to call home." This acknowledges that "we have stood in the shoes of refugees, and as we're celebrating our freedom we are committing to stand with today's refugees, and take a stand," says Rabbi Jennie Rosen, vice president of community engagement at HIAS. [We honor] "the essence of the Jewish experience: a rootless people who have fled persecution time and time again," says the HIAS supplement. "When we recite these words [of the Seder service], we acknowledge that we have stood in the shoes of the refugee."



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THE STORIES OF HONDURAS

WITNESS AND EXPERIENCE

REPORT OF THE HONDURAS ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION DELEGATION,
MARCH 18-25, 2019

Stories are our most powerful tool to communicate the realities of life in Honduras today—stories we heard, events we witnessed, and experiences we shared. This is the heart of the report from the March 2019 Root Causes Delegation—these stories of extraordinary bravery in leadership, commitment to family and community, and love of country. Stories here illuminate the steadfast determination of the people we met, their multifaceted resistance, embrace of difference, and willingness to step in where services of government have been criminally withdrawn and withheld.

These vivid photographs and perceptions, the contributions of many delegates, convey a deeper understanding of the warmth, resilience, and determination demonstrated daily by those striving for freedom, safety, and justice under law. Our delegation, our hosts, and the communities and individuals that opened their lives to us speak through these stories. It is up to each of us to lift up their voices through our advocacy efforts.

These stories are intended to help bring to life the difficult realities facing many Hondurans, to examine the forces that might contribute to a decision to leave home and community, and to pinpoint our own country's culpability. These are glimpses into the incredible bravery of people who persevere, often at great personal risk, to secure a future for themselves, their families, and their communities, there, in the country they love.

From the very beginning, the organizers voiced the hope that, upon return to the U.S., the delegates would “find many ways to share your experience and all that you’ve learned with your community and engage with your Members of Congress” and others. With these stories we challenge our own country’s broken, ignorant, pernicious narrative of the migration, and call out the U.S.’ role in helping to keep corrupt kleptocrats¹ in power and perpetuate the conditions that lead people to leave their homes, fleeing for their very lives. We call on ourselves and all who listen to do better, to work harder for each other, and to keep the faith.

Our delegation was large: 75 people from all around the U.S. and two from South America. To cover more territory, physically and philosophically—and not impose too heavily on our generous hosts—we split into three smaller

¹ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/30/when-corruption-is-operating-system-case-of-honduras-pub-69999>



Delegates gather in front of the Jesuit radio station Radio Progreso, in the city of El Progreso, Honduras, March 18, 2019. Radio Progreso is one of the only independent media outlets in the country and reaches an audience of roughly 1.4 million. As our hosts, they provided us with introductions to communities and organizations, and valuable context for what we witnessed.

groups for our first three-plus days in Honduras.

Group 1 went to the Santa Bárbara area, where people are being killed over land tenure and evicted to make way for developments and hydroelectric dams. We heard from a community of indigenous Lenca people, and stayed with the residents of La Presa, which will be flooded out of existence if a proposed dam is built.

Group 2 went to Bajo Aguán, a region of the fertile Aguán River valley. In the town of Tocoa, a panel of eight regional land and water protectors, including a representative of the Afro-indigenous Garifuna community, taught us about their struggles to protect their resources and hold onto their land. We ‘walked a mile’—and stood in solidarity in the face of the Honduran Army—

with families of the Guapinol, whose drinking water was contaminated in 2018 by a mining project of the largest landowner in Honduras. Smaller groups fanned out to meet with: the local office of the Human Rights Commission; Tocoa city officials; the governor of the Department of Colón; and police and military officials.

Group 3 was immersed in urban displacement issues and the concerns of women and children in San Pedro Sula and nearby El Progreso. We met with the people of three separate impoverished urban communities at risk of eviction from their land. We heard stories from sixteen remarkable women’s groups, and environmental and human rights activists. We were educated on the realities of femicide and

near-total impunity for perpetrators. We visited two orphanages—one for children who are HIV positive—as well as a program for children and parents in a community with rival gang members. San Pedro Sula—the 2nd largest city in the country—is sadly now known for having a murder rate among the highest in the world.

The delegation regrouped in Tegucigalpa, the capitol, to join a night rally in front of the U.S. Embassy. We took meetings in the capitol, including with Heide Fulton, the Chargé d’Affaires at the U.S. Embassy, where we refused to attend until they allowed in our companions, two environmental activists (one, one of the recently acquitted Guapinol 12²) to share their perspectives. Several of us also met with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras.

Then we made the long drive back to El Progreso, where our last two days were spent with Radio Progreso. We heard presentations, and gathered with our hosts and each other to participate in ceremonies and celebrations. In addition, we joined two local marches through the streets of El Progreso, standing with communities fighting for their land, resources, and human rights, and against the repression, abuses, and near-total impunity of the fraudulently elected government of Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH).



² The ‘Guapinol 12’ are defenders of land and water from the remote village of Guapinol, Honduras. They were arrested and jailed for protesting the contamination of the river that sustains and is sacred to them. It was the first time that the charge of organized crime was applied to the act of protesting. With the help of the SHARE Foundation, all 12 members were released (though their ordeal is not yet over).

THE STORIES

SANTA BÁRBARA / GROUP 1

BAJO AGUÁN / GROUP 2

SAN PEDRO SULA / GROUP 3

TEGUCIGALPA

EL PROGRESO /

THE RADIO STATION
THE PRESENTATIONS
IN THE STREETS

[A note to readers: Because so many of the people we met live under constant threat, we have in some cases intentionally withheld names (or last names) from these accounts. The people whose full names are given are either public personages (e.g., President Juan Orlando Hernandez) or already well-known for their work, and are openly speaking about it (e.g., Padre Melo).]

SANTA BÁRBARA

GROUP 1

EMPLOYMENT /

POVERTY /

HEALTHCARE /

DAMS AND FLOODING /

DISPLACEMENT /

MIGRATION /

RESILIENCE

Root Causes Pilgrimage delegates approach the town of La Presa in the Department of Santa Bárbara, crossing over the Hamaca (Hammock) Bridge, which provides the only access to La Presa and tether to the outside world. On the far side of the Tapalapa River, about 80 community members wait to welcome them.



In the Santa Bárbara area,

people are killed over land tenure and evicted to make way for development projects and hydroelectric dams. The Department of Santa Bárbara, part of Honduras' western border with Guatemala, is home to numerous rivers that flow from the mountainous interior to the Caribbean Sea, and most communities are centered around and sustained by these waterways. We had the opportunity to visit and meet with several small communities. The indigenous Lenca people are threatened by hydroelectric projects, as are the residents of La Presa, which will be flooded out of existence if a proposed dam is built.

La Presa is a small community—about 82 families—that lies along the Tapalapa river. Upon arrival, delegates were made to feel at home for the day, sharing meals, sleeping in the homes of community members, and learning about the realities of this extremely impoverished community. Like many local communities, La Presa deals with chronic shortcomings in government-run health and education systems. High unemployment and underemployment also contribute to the pressures to migrate. Every family in La Presa now has relatives in the U.S.

Of deep concern to the La Presa community is a hydroelectric dam project that has been a threat to them for 10 years. After the 2009 coup, when the new Honduran government declared that it was “open for business,” and quickly granted rights for 144 hydroelectric dam projects, water rights to the Tapalapa River were sold to a Taiwanese company. Although surveys were done of the Tapalapa and surrounding area, the people of La Presa quickly removed the survey stakes, and actual work has not begun.

The disastrous experiences of other communities in Santa Bárbara related to hydroelectric energy projects justifiably worry the people of La Presa—the damage, displacement, and



Photo: Ann Pratt



Photo: Theo Rigby



Photo: Theo Rigby



Photo: Theo Rigby



One of the places the delegates visited was this ‘medical clinic’ in La Presa. You will notice that there are some things missing. The clinic was built with funds from the U.S., in cooperation with the ministry of health in Honduras. Upon completion, the ministry of health was supposed to provide the supplies, the equipment, and the staff. That never happened. And so, this town really doesn’t have any medical facility. Their closest medical help is about 1.5 hours away, across the Hamaca Bridge.



There is a school in La Presa, teaching kindergarten through 9th grade. The children put on a very impressive program of singing, dancing and recitations. Currently, 6th- through 9th-graders attend only half a day, and then switch, such is the state of overcrowding. (A building to expand the school is under construction but incomplete.)



This father in La Presa, Don, talks about the difficulties of finding employment. The main employer in the area is a sugar cane mill. He explains that they hire only young people, believing that older people are more likely to recognize when rights and labor laws are being violated, whereas “young kids don’t revolt.” Many in the community are unemployed or underemployed. Don is strong, physically able, says he wants to work, and his family needs the money; still, he cannot get hired.



Don Miguel is one of the incredibly warm hosts who generously offered to share his home for the night. He takes great pleasure and pride in explaining the story behind every possession. Everything was sent to him by his daughter, who is living in Houston. Next to him is his great nephew, who lives with him, but he now has very little family in La Presa.

unfulfilled promises. The people of La Presa have actively organized around this threat and are prepared to challenge any attempt to proceed with the dam project. If it goes forward, La Presa, the surrounding land, and the 82 families who live there will be flooded out.

A broad coalition of indigenous Lenca groups

actively defending the Ulúa River graciously welcomed the delegates. For the Lenca and many other communities, as they emphasized to us, rivers are not only a necessary resource; they are sacred entities and holy sites, and deeply significant to their cultural and spiritual identities.



Photo: Theo Rigby

Meeting the Lenca Community: Betty Vasquez

Activist and leader of the Lenca community, Vasquez calls herself a feminist environmentalist... then smiles and says that makes her a double criminal in Honduras!

“I had to move from San Pedro Sula to the Santa Barbara area when gang members literally moved in and took over my house.” Now, due to her efforts to stop the destruction of land and rivers by hydroelectric corporations, she has received death threats.



All Photos on This Page: Theo Rigby





All Photos on This Page: Theo Rigby



BAJO AGUÁN

GROUP 2

LAND CONFLICTS /

MONOCROPS /

MINING /

TOURISM /

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION /

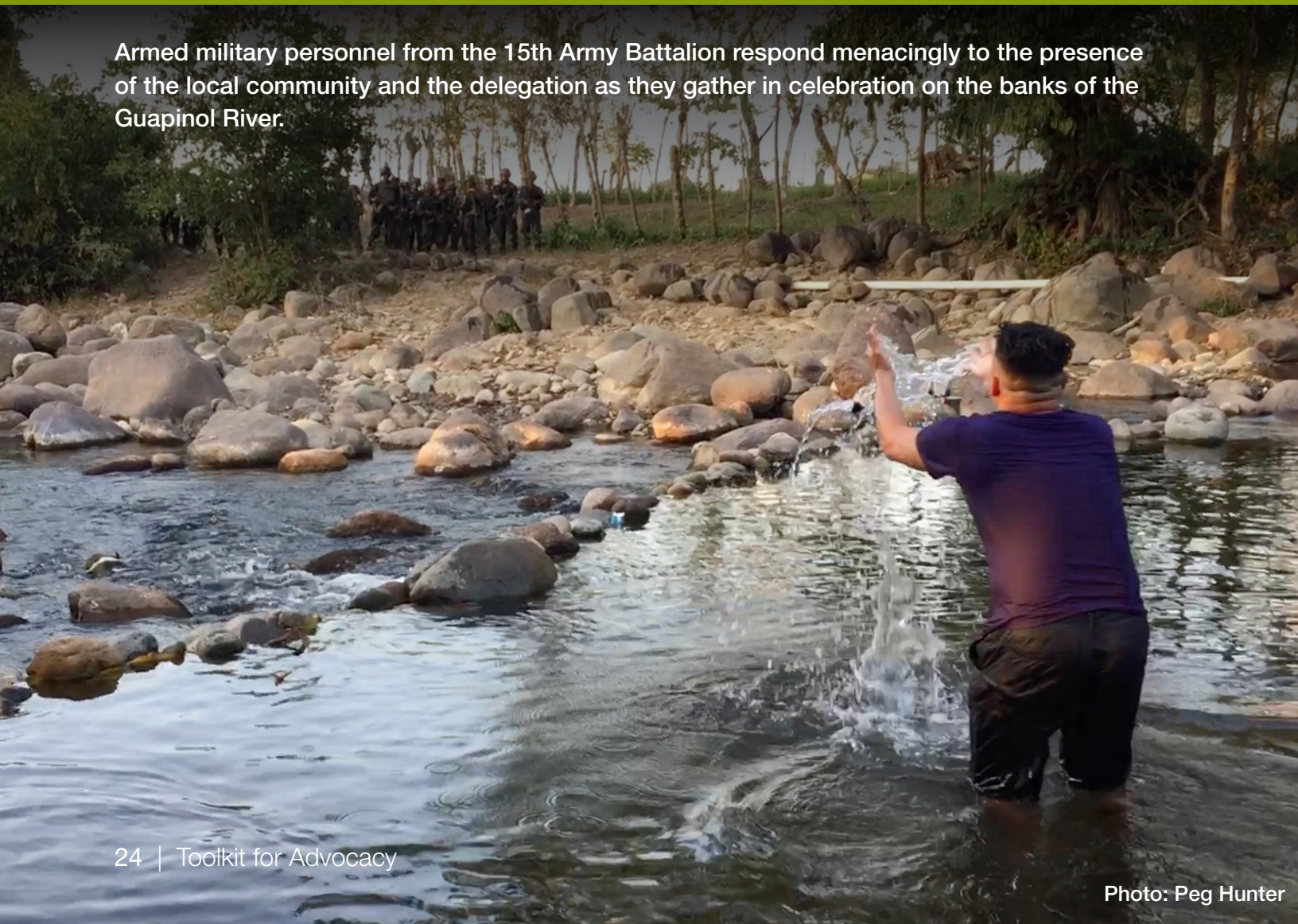
CRIMINALIZATION OF DEFENDERS /

IMPUNITY /

MILITARIZATION /

THE U.S. ROLE IN WEAPONS SALES AND MILITARIZATION

Armed military personnel from the 15th Army Battalion respond menacingly to the presence of the local community and the delegation as they gather in celebration on the banks of the Guapinol River.



THE TOCOA PANEL: WATER AND LAND DEFENDERS AND THE GARIFUNA

community of the northern coastal region of Honduras spoke of their forced displacement, due to large-scale tourism development projects, from land that has been their home since 1779. They are fighting desperately to hold onto their unique culture and identity.

All of the panelists shared stories of displacement and looting of protected natural resources. The history of the Aguán region is a long story of land grabs, often for monocrops, from bananas and pineapples to sugar cane and, now, palm oil. Following the 2009 coup d'état, there was a sudden increase in mining concessions granted to Canadian and U.S. mining interests, and the novel granting of concessions in previously protected national park land.

These communities are fighting for their land, fighting for their resources and their clean water, and fighting for their basic human rights. Their efforts have been met with criminalization (i.e., false accusations, unfounded criminal charges, and wrongful convictions, used to punish activists and discourage others from speaking out), imprisonment, harassment, smear tactics (e.g., on social media), threats, violence, and assassinations—more than 100 campesinos have been killed. Activists (including several on the panel) often must avoid their own homes and/or communities due to credible death threats.

Says one panelist, shown here, representing Garifuna communities, “We have been leading the path of resistance to the big corporations and extractive industries today under the Special Economic Development Zone.³ Today, all 44 Garifuna communities are involved in struggles to defend their land against the concessions the government is granting to tourism corporations. Four out of five now face eviction from their land.

“All these comrades,” the speaker motions to others on the panel, “all these sisters and brothers have been criminalized, stigmatized, just because they are defending who they are. We are defending our land, so we are very willing to stand up to all the abuse, to stand up for the defense of our territory and against this dictatorship, this patriarchal system. And, as a community, if we come together, no matter where in Honduras, no matter which territory, together we are going to win.”



Photo: Peg Hunter

³ Special Economic Zones are zones created to attract foreign investment, within which business and trade laws differ from the rest of the country. The zone in question poses a direct threat to the Garifuna's way of life.

In the fertile northern region of the Aguán valley,

delegates in Group 2 were warmly welcomed by close to 100 members of the community of Guapinol. Together, we made our way along dirt paths to the beautiful flowing waters of the Guapinol River, where many put their feet in the water. Children, dogs, and a few adults swam, and blessings were given to the sacred water that sustains this community and so many others.

As we celebrated together that afternoon on the bank of the Guapinol, the army appeared on the opposite bank of the river, hands on their weapons, and immediately the rage of the community was clear. The delegates who were able went to stand between the army and the community, to make it clear that international



observers were present. Visible behind the army is the fencing that marks the land boundary of the mining interests that threaten the community's water source, as well as the community itself.





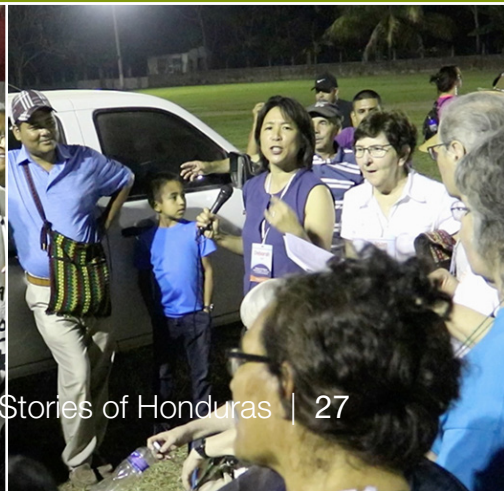
All Photos on This Page: Peg Hunter



A delegation member raises her fist at the soldiers as they finally leave after a tense 20 minutes' face-off.



After the experience at the river, the community and the delegates came together for an evening celebration of song and speeches at the community soccer field as the full moon rose.



The story of Guapinol exemplifies the theme that echoed through so many of our talks with community members—the Honduran governments’ use of heavily armed security forces (both military and para-military/private forces) to protect multinational corporations and the country’s elite. In 2018, when the Inversiones Los Pinares mining company (linked to one of Honduras’s wealthiest families) began exploratory work in the region upland from their community, the river that is their lifeblood ran black with mud and became unusable.

Four hundred members of the community set up a non-violent encampment to block mining vehicles on the road to the mine. On the 88th day of the blockade, 1,300 soldiers, trained and armed with U.S. military aid, broke up the camp with violent force and massive use of tear gas. We saw the spent canisters; they were manufactured in Pennsylvania.

On our last day in the Bajo Aguán region, we fanned out to meetings: the local office of the Honduran Human Rights Commission (CONADEH); the mayor and city council members of Tocoa; the governor of the Department of Colón; the Tocoa office of the National Police; and military officials at the headquarters of the 15th Battalion. (The 15th Battalion headquarters is the home to the Xatruch taskforce that patrols the Guapinol River and the Aguán region. As evidenced by the results of the investigations into the assassination of Berta Cáceres, this unit is trained by the U.S. in counterinsurgency operations, and is known for serious past human rights abuses.)



Photo: Peg Hunter



Reynoldo, one of the water defenders at the Tocoa panel, talks about the pollution of the Guapinol River caused by the activities of the mining company. “If you could have seen the river [in] those days, or the videos that were circulating on social media, you could have seen how the water was coming, completely turning to mud and it was impossible to use it for anything. Dear sisters and brothers. Without water we can simply just not live.”



Photo: Peg Hunter



Photo: Noella Poinsette



Photo: Peg Hunter



Photo: Peg Hunter



Photo: Peg Hunter



Photo: Peg Hunter

The mayor of Tocoa, Adán Fúnez, is the person who approved Inversiones Los Pinares' 5- to 10-year mining concession. Asked if, after 5-10 years, the community could end the concession, Mayor Fúnez responded, "Who will pay back the company for their lost investment? The city can't—no money."

When we met with Carlos Ramón Aguilar, Governor of the Department of Colón (pictured seated behind desk, with Israeli flag), we asked about the militarized police force; constitutionally, the military's actions are limited to issues of sovereignty—i.e., border protection and national defense. The governor described their function as being similar to that of UN 'blue helmets,' acting as mediators. He also implied that they were needed due to internal conflicts among community members. This is apparently a common narrative used by local and national government to justify their injustices. Commenting on the migrant caravans, he blamed the opposition for making the exodus ideological, and thought it would be very nice if the opposition would just recognize everything nice that the government is doing, and they could all work together in peace.

Scenes from Bajo Aguán. Says the man pictured to the left, "We know how bad things can get. So, we keep united, keep looking after each other, caring for our compañeros and compañeras, basically living in fear. But we are united."



Juana Esquivel is a land and water defender

from the Aguán region. She addressed Governor Aguilar with authority as well as urgency (pictured). Later in the week, she brought her passion and eloquence to the meeting with the U.S. Chargé d’Affaires.

Esquivel’s statement to the governor is translated from the Spanish and slightly condensed for brevity.



“What we are talking about is an historic situation of agrarian conflict, so the solution should be an agrarian one, that has to do with the theme of the distribution of land. There has not been a political will, on the part of the government, to find a solution to the conflict. [...] When the analysis talks about a group coming in, and occupying land, this is the result of a structural problem that we have in this country, [...] the problem of the poor distribution of land. The poverty of the people leads them to say, ‘Well, I’m going to occupy a bit of land... I can die of hunger, or they’ll kill me in the fight for a little piece of land.’

“The government says that ‘the people were given 4,500 hectares, but that [they] were not satisfied.’ Well, the government had committed itself to provide 11,000 hectares, and not only to provide the land but also the resources needed to make the land productive—to produce food crops, not only African palm—[and] to support housing, education, health services. These were the commitments the government had taken on.

“Also, as long it as it is not recognized that mining is taking place within a protected area, we are trivializing the conflict, and misrepresenting it [by] saying that the people are opposed to development. But we know that we are talking about a protected area that is the source of water for all of the municipality. For this reason, I would expect for there to be a more profound analysis carried out by the departmental authorities.

“There was very little dissemination of information about this mining project, and this was just one month before the granting of the mining permit, informing people that the mining project would have such and such an impact, and that it would be done in such and such location. They just said that there’s going to be this mining project, that there will be improvements to schools and to roads. This is not the way to involve the communities in the project, or of consulting with them.”

SAN PEDRO SULA

GROUP 3

EXTREME POVERTY AND LACK OF OPPORTUNITY /
UN-CHECKED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN,
INCLUDING SHOCKING RATES OF FEMICIDE /
LAND CONFLICTS /
REPRESSION /
THREATS /
ATTACKS /
IMPUNITY FOR PERPETRATORS

Residents of the Pedregal community join with delegates in the shadow of high-rise condominiums of San Pedro Sula, performing a ritual of commitment to hear and honor each other, and not to forget or forsake each other.



Getting to know the people

of the communities of Pueblo San Isidro, Colonia Alemania, and Pedregal brought us right to the heart of the problems people face in disadvantaged, threatened, and cruelly ignored neighborhoods throughout the cities of Honduras. The communities that welcomed us are passionate and determined to bring their cause into public view, and win their legal case for each family to own their piece of land—but the threats are great.

There are 100,000 people living in abject poverty around the edges of the city of San Pedro Sula, in communities of 20 to 250 families, all of them eking out an existence and dreaming of “a dignified life and safety,” says a Radio Progreso reporter who regularly visits these communities.



Fifty representatives of the 250 families of Pueblo San Isidro welcome our group, share their stories, and outline potential paths to advocacy. The mayor of El Progreso is siding with business interests and pushing for eviction of the entire community, despite the paperwork that supports the community’s claim to the land. To general agreement, a resident says, “We are humble people who need your help. Nobody wants to leave. We are here for the land.”

An older neighbor exclaimed, “Where are the men? Women have more courage than men.”

SAN ISIDRO





Karen, a community leader and mother of three (center, speaking), described to the delegates how she awoke one morning to find a bulldozer poised to tear down the community's homes. When she and her children climbed on top of the bulldozer, they stopped the destruction, for at least that day.

She argued that they have rights to the land. Reporters recorded her plea to the president to respect the rights of the people: "Just because we don't come from rich families, you can't do this to us... What do you want us to do, leave in caravans?"



Photo: Mark Coplan



250 families have gathered rough materials to create simple homes for their families in San Isidro.



Matalieno's life is a constant challenge. Her husband had a stroke, partly due to the stress of living in fear that they would be displaced at any moment. He must be carried from bed to hammock, and the fight for medical care is daunting, with no support provided for the disabled. "I work and I care for my husband. He cannot move. Thank God for your good hearts. The authorities are against us."



Photo: Mark Coplan



Photo: Jeremy Dickey



Photo: Karen Alschuler



ALEMANIA

Alemania residents and delegates rally around an Earth banner, a symbolic gift from the delegation, in celebration of our shared values of unity and environmental stewardship.

We were inspired by Rachel, who leads the community council of the 250-family Colonia Alemania. She described her eight years of work on the community's behalf. She told us of deaths, threats to her, and city incompetence, but promised she "will not give up!"

In the months since our departure, Alemania (and other communities) have been threatened with removal. Members of the delegation are offering support, at the communities' request, by sending letters to the Mayor. We have collected signatures from several hundred individuals, as of June 2019.

Scenes from Alemania.



All Photos non This Page: Mark Coplan



In the shadow of a towering condominium (see photo, page 31) lies the small community of Pedregal, home to 20 families. This community, like many others in Honduras, is on the frontlines of Honduras's war on the poor.

Living spaces are constructed by the families with whatever materials they can scavenge or find on-site. With nearby condo owners anxious for a parking lot, the inhabitants of Pedregal are under extreme pressure to leave their home of 10 years.

A woman in the community spoke about her job collecting plastic to recycle. She earns about \$1 a day, which buys 1 lb. of rice, 1 lb. of beans, and masa for tortillas to feed her family of five. Six people from this small community have already left in the caravans. More are considering it.



Photo: Karen Alschuler

Radio Progreso reporter Inner Gerardo Chavez (in blue polo shirt and glasses), delegates, and townspeople discuss the deteriorating situation.

PEDREGAL

A Community Under Threat



FORO DE MUJERES (WOMEN'S FORUM)

Foro de Mujeres opened a window into the lives and deaths of women in Honduras. Femicide is rampant, with assassinations of women averaging 400+ per year since 2013, and violence lurking at every public gathering, every job site, and in many homes.

Many representatives of the Foro's 16 member organizations told their stories. We heard from, among others, a "feminist environmentalist," a "dream weaver," an indigenous leader fighting for the right to land and to stop forced migration, and a college-age investigative team, and we

stood in awe of what is being accomplished by these amazing leaders. One woman noted: "In the eyes of many, women have no worth. [...] The face of the struggle is a woman's face."

Many of the activists we met during the pilgrimage were women, it is worth noting. Karen, the San Isidro resident we met who climbed onto a bulldozer with her children as it was about to destroy their settlement (see p.XX), had to take that drastic action, and has since led initiatives to register objections and petitions with high level politicians. Activists like Rachel, a leader in Alemania, often have to be guarded around the clock by their communities despite the fact that 'the poor of Honduras' were deeded the land by a German gentleman, the previous owner.

Women's Forum for life | for the dreams cut short | for the smiles erased | for the lives snatched away | Justice!

Photo: Pam Cobey



Ninety-six percent of crimes against women, including femicide, are never investigated, according to Noemi, who spoke with us at Foro de Mujeres. “We’ve also seen regression in terms of policies and laws,” she went on. “For example, abortion is criminalized [in all cases]. Three months after the coup, they criminalized the Day After pill—a criminal offense to take it. Not only have sexual violence and disappearances and trafficking increased, but also pregnancies among girls—12- and 13-year-olds. You asked what our challenges are? Well, we would like more attention to be put on these issues but unfortunately we have a dictatorship as a government...”

Honduras has the second highest rate of femicide in the world (trailing El Salvador); it also has the second highest murder rate. When asked why so many activists are women, one woman responded that “the culture of machismo benefits men, while women have nothing to lose.” Also, as is true in many cultures that embrace machismo and/or conservative values, LGBTQ people are commonly targeted for violence and persecution.

One delegate makes a profound connection: “It struck me in a way as never before that the culture of machismo is a tool which helps to maintain the oligarchy, diverting men’s attention away from root causes of oppression, while dividing men and women and keeping them from working together for their common liberation.”



Photo: Mark Coplan



Photo: Mark Coplan

Noemi spoke to us at Foro de Mujeres.



A mandala altar at the Women’s Forum filled the center of the small room. Memories and hopes are reflected in the choice of artifacts on display, with none more powerful than photos of the disappeared.



CASA CORAZÓN

Casa Corazón is a Heart of Mercy Home, a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy in San Pedro Sula. For 23 years, it has provided a warm and supportive setting and excellent medical care for young people with HIV—helping children from infancy through their college years. The spirit of community and the joy of close friendships among the children and youth of the Casa Corazón family were wonderfully apparent, with song and hugs all around. Sadly, even this beautiful place is busy building razor-wire-topped walls to project the residents from dangers in the street.

TEJEDORES DE SUEÑOS / DREAM WEAVERS

This outing in San Pedro Sula was unforgettable! The Tejedores de Sueños organization, another Sisters of Mercy sponsored ministry, brings formerly injured and threatened women into the light of self-confidence, knowledge of their rights, personal independence, and pride in their work.

Vanessa spoke to us of the LGBTQ community's steady, but slow and dangerous path "toward making the community visible," seeking justice, and providing access to education and legal counseling.

Lorencia, pictured at right, spoke of her transformation—from a woman who had virtually never left her home, never mind her neighborhood, to a woman who now knows the city, knows her rights, and started an organization called Las Cascades to spread the word that women matter!



Photo of Casa Corazón: Mark Coplan



Photo of Dream Weavers: Karen Alschuler



Photo of Institute Notre Dame: Mark Coplan

Maria Christina, a founder of “Women in Action Marching” spoke of losing her fear through work at Dream Weavers: “Before, I asked permission to leave the house, now I just let them know I am going.” All of these women bowled us over with their strength and steadfastness in challenging a world of forced migration, violence, and poverty.

INSTITUTE NOTRE DAME, ESCUELA BILINGÜE

Our visit to the Institute Notre Dame in El Progreso, run by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, was a complete delight. This school, which educates over 300 economically and socially diverse students, provides the ‘something extra’ that each unique young person needs to succeed, be it helping them design and meet education goals or providing support to kids from widely varied home settings.

The institute graduates leaders, scholars, and trained workers ready for a new Honduras. Kindergarten through high schoolers were enjoying the beautiful natural setting, sports and grounds and remarkably broad learning options from Fine Arts to Science Labs or Psychology. Courses aimed specifically at work in areas of administration, secretarial/business and technology/programming skills are even beginning to see a mix of girls and boys in all areas. One impressive teacher, Mercy (pictured), shared her story from being a poor child studying by candlelight to graduate here, spend 6-years in the U.S. before being deported, and now after college serving as a teacher and advisor to students.

COMPROME CHILDREN’S HOME, EL PROGRESO

For 30 years, this School Sisters of Notre Dame children’s home, a gracious space in a natural green setting, has opened its arms to the children who bear the brunt of social dysfunction, major lack of jobs, desperate acts of violence, guaranteed impunity and near starvation. Children from toddlers to high school students, from 35 to 50 at any one time, are welcomed into a true home with the health care, living conditions, access to education, and other essentials of life. Perhaps best of all, a trained and caring staff hold them in their embrace throughout their childhood.

PASO A PASO

Sitting at the heart of one of San Pedro Sula’s most dangerous neighborhoods (which is to say, one of the most dangerous places in the world today), Paso a Paso creates a safe haven under the spread of a magnificent tree. The energetic, inventive leaders here prepare children and families to survive and to flourish. They attack the root causes of daunting problems, addressing the needs of mind, body, and spirit. Where public schools have cut classes, Paso a Paso organizes classes and recreational activities. The group works hard to take up the slack, offer hope to the neighborhood, and prepare the kids for life.

Young women with extraordinary energy serve as wise leaders. Mothers trained in sewing or cooking or health lead programs and sell their products. Children play in safety, work together, and build new skills. Paso a Paso’s famous ‘five pillars’ guide everything they do, from dawn to dusk: Non-Violence, Feminism, Education, Environment, and Self-Care.

HONDURANS ANSWERING VIOLENCE WITH COURAGEOUS, ACTIVE NONVIOLENCE

Throughout the Pilgrimage we were witness to the multiple forms of violence that plague Honduras. We heard about assassinations and death threats to human rights workers; cultural violence against indigenous communities, women, and those who identify as LGBTQ; the structural violence perpetrated by security forces against communities protecting their land and water; the systemic violence of corruption, dehumanizing poverty, and deep economic injustice; gang violence; and more.

Just as importantly, we were privileged to witness creative nonviolent strategies employed by countless individuals and by almost every community and organization we met. Some standouts:

- Radio Progreso regularly and at great risk broadcasts the stories of people struggling for justice and lives of dignity—countering the violence of the state, powerful companies, and international interests.
- ERIC monitors human rights violations and accompanies threatened communities in a myriad of ways, spotlighting rights and working to prevent more killings.
- Organized communities like Pueblo San Isidro and Colonia Alemania are pursuing every legal route possible to stay on their land.
- Women, the backbone of almost every movement for justice in Honduras, run effective networks, including the Women's Forum, defending one another and pursuing practical solutions.
- Everywhere we went, we saw people drawing on art, symbols, and stories to honor the ongoing struggles and remember, as a source of inspiration and motivation, those who gave their lives in that struggle.

- Tejedores de Sueños (Dream Weavers) nurtures the self-esteem of women as they claim their basic right to dignity and respect, pushing back against intimate as well as public violence.
- An active LGBTQ network has formed to make those who identify as LGBTQ more visible in Honduran society, and thus less vulnerable to threats or assassination.
- The Alternatives to Violence program was introduced into the prisons in San Pedro Sula and prisoners themselves are trained to facilitate the program.
- Sisters of Mercy, School Sisters of Notre Dame, and their co-workers put so much love into helping to heal the trauma of children and protect against the violence that threatens to overwhelm.

Honduran communities living with unimaginable danger show the creative imagination and the courage to believe in the power of nonviolent action. They exemplify hope for a future that bends toward justice.



Photo: Mark Coplan

Paso a Paso.

TEGUCIGALPA

U.S. COMPLICITY /
IMPUNITY /
DRUG TRAFFICKERS /
HUMAN RIGHTS /
GANGS /
SECURITY FORCES /
PROTESTS /
GOVERNANCE

Delegates and local organizers make peaceful declaration of protest on the steps of the U.S. Embassy to a gathering of the press and the public.





Photo: Theo Rigby



Photo: Mark Coplan



Photo: Theo Rigby

In Tegucigalpa, the three groups of delegates (Santa Bárbara, Bajo Aguán, and San Pedro Sula) reconvened to continue our pilgrimage in Tegucigalpa. Most of us arrived in time to respond to a call to join a rally at the U.S. Embassy, to add our voices to those calling for a new U.S. foreign policy in Honduras, and an end to the horrific abuses the current system supports.

The following morning, small groups of delegates met with other groups in Tegucigalpa. One was the United Nations human rights office.⁴ The UN team was pleased to hear about the delegation, and eager to meet with us. There was great interest in planning a much more extensive meeting with future delegations. The office has been in existence since May 2015, but has had difficulty making inroads within the country, due, they say, to the attitudes of the government to human rights.

Another working meeting brought together people from eight NGOs within Honduras that serve migrants in many different capacities. There are only 15 national-level organizations that do this work, and they are stretched thin trying to meet the scale of the crisis.

High on their list of the concerns they wanted to convey was the media blackout on migration and any mention of the caravans. They told us there was virtually no mainstream media coverage, and only false narratives that obscured the real causes of migration. The mainstream media maintains the narrative generated by the government and corporate elite.

4 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/LACRegion/Pages/HNHRAviser.aspx>

Almost all of the NGO workers we spoke with, some of whom were simply providing resources to deportees or migrants passing through, face personal indictments that threaten many years in jail. The people doing this work do it at tremendous personal risk.

Delegates had the opportunity to meet with Heide Fulton, Chargé d’Affaires (pictured in front of Honduran flag), at the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa.

We invited two land and water defenders from the Bajo Aguán region, Juana Esquivel and Juan Lopez, to join the meeting and present their argument. Initially, they were refused entry into

the embassy. When the delegation pushed back, Juana was granted entry, but not Juan.

he entire delegation then refused to enter the embassy, and suggested that Heide Fulton talk with the delegates outside. Juan was then granted entry, and he and Juana were able to present their stories and perspectives on the Bajo Aguán region to the Chargé d’Affaires.

It should be noted that both Juana and Juan have received numerous threats because of their activism. Due to these threats, they have been forced to stay away from their homes and communities.



JUAN LOPEZ

From Juan's presentation to the Chargé d'Affaires:

"Throughout the history of the region, the control of the land by the wealthy and their corporate interests has created an environment of social instability and the expulsion of the people. We have protested, because protest is intrinsic to our human nature. The state produces the conflict by manipulating the law. The people protest. Then the state uses other institutions to repress the protest. The Aguán region has suffered from a military presence with a very defined objective: to subdue the people and protect the economic interests of the wealthy.

"The conflict in the Aguán region, and our country, is structural in nature and is undergirded by administrative corruption. Data from the Economic Commission for Latin America [CEPAL] explains the situation: According to CEPAL, Honduras has a 68% poverty rate, with 44% in extreme destitution. This is the matrix that produces the caravans!

"...the relations between the Honduran State and the United States should be profoundly revised. The foreign policy of the government of the United States in terms of economic, political and military matters over Honduras produces enormous social inequality that diminishes the possibilities of one day having justice and peace."



At the end of the meeting, Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, of our delegation, presented Heide Fulton with sacred water from the Guapinol River. She poured it into an empty tear gas canister that was produced in Homer City, Pennsylvania, and collected from the streets of Tegucigalpa.

Before leaving Tegucigalpa, delegates gathered with Lenca protesters outside the Taiwan Embassy. Eleven members of the Lenca community of Las Tierras del Padre had been inside the embassy for five days, seeking help and intervention for their community.

An indigenous community, they've held title to their lands dating back to 1736, under Spanish rule. They face forced eviction by a member of congress, Mario Facusse Handal, of a powerful

landowning family of Honduras. In 2013, Facusse Handal claimed that he owned this Lenca community's land, and was removing them to build a housing development project. Two members of the Las Tierras del Padre community had already been killed by hitmen hired by the landowner. Four of the 11 inside the embassy were being politically persecuted by the Honduran government, with charges levied against them. The group was seeking protection and political asylum.

The situation is still dire. Ten other community members are charged and warrants issued for their arrest, and the community was ordered to be displaced April 10th. (However, as of August, 2019, we believe they are still in their homes.)



Photo: Peg Hunter



Photo: Peg Hunter

EL PROGRESO / RADIO PROGRESO THE RADIO STATION

“LA VOZ QUE ESTÁ CON VOS”

CHALLENGING GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF MEDIA /
BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER /
FIGHTING REPRESSION /
SHINING A LIGHT ON ABUSES AND ISSUES OF
CONCERN TO COMMUNITIES



Radio Progreso was our in-country host; Radio Progreso journalists are the people who introduced us to communities and provided guidance in our pilgrimages to Santa Barbara, Bajo Aguán, and the neighborhoods of San Pedro Sula. Now, we heard their stories and joined them on their home turf. The delegation toured the busy radio station, and participated in forums on migration and a celebration of Saint Oscar Romero.

Honduras has the dubious distinction of being one of the most unequal and violent countries in the world. The Honduran government suppresses a free press, criminalizes human rights defenders, and uses state money and funding from countries like the U.S. to build

a powerful security network—one that works to protect the country's elite and multinational interests, and take land, security, and prospects for the future from its own people. In this climate, the independent Jesuit radio station Radio Progreso and research center ERIC (Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación y Comunicación) are beacons of hope for the Honduran people, the importance of which cannot be overstated. The people of Radio Progreso bring the stories, struggles, and experiences of the communities to the radio and the attention of the world.



All Photos on This Page: Peg Hunter





Photo: Theo Rigby

Padre Melo speaks in Tegucigalpa.

The station and ERIC have three main areas of focus...

Human Rights: They work with individuals and communities who are under threat for their work as environmental and land defenders.

Deep Investigation: They are involved in a deep analysis and investigation into the current state of affairs in Honduras.

Immigration: They work with people who are leaving the country and they work with people who are being internally displaced. They analyze why displacement is happening and bring their findings to different audiences - International human rights forums, the U.N., etc.

As a result of their work, 19 correspondents and five team members are under death threat; some have required protection through UN International Human Rights mechanisms, and two have had to flee the country. A heavy campaign of false accusations, criminalization, and threats is being waged against Padre Melo.

Padre Melo notes, “It is the alliances between oligarchic business, political elites, and transnational capital, backed by the U.S. Embassy, the armed forces, and people from organized crime, that create the caravans.”

EL PROGRESO / RADIO PROGRESO AND ERIC THE PRESENTATIONS

REFLECTION FORUM /
SAINT ROMERO PERSPECTIVES /
CARAVAN STORIES /
CULTURAL NIGHT

The final days of the Pilgrimage provided access to some of the most creative journalists, activists, and social service workers in Honduras. In recognition of the anniversary of Saint Oscar Arnulfo Romero's assassination, a panel of leaders who had worked with Romero, and studied his works, shared personal stories and invited broad discussion.

A journalist told stories that brought the group along with her for the days she had spent following the 2018 caravan. Another family brought a very personal perspective, a tragic story focused on their son and grandson, Jorge. Along with his friend Juan, Jorge was murdered in Tijuana just as the two were waiting to cross the border.

Jorge grew up living with his grandmother, Amalia, in San Pedro Sula. They lived with poverty and violence, but Jorge had a dream and at age 17 joined a caravan. Amalia heard from him of the hard conditions on the way until he reached Tijuana, where he planned to cross the border and ask for asylum.

Jorge and two other Honduran boys had been waiting there two weeks when they left the YMCA shelter to try to earn a little money—but they were tricked, abducted, and tortured, and Jorge and one friend were killed.

By extraordinary coincidence, two of our delegates had known the young men well—had helped them in Tijuana as part of CARECEN-LA—and in a moment that epitomized how all our hearts had been broken in Honduras, they told their own stories.

We are all complicit in his death: The government of Honduras that could not offer him a future. The government of Mexico, that did not protect him. The government of the United States, that would not honor his right to seek asylum.

Padre Melo concluded by reprising his opening discussion, asking, "To which country have you come?"



Photo: Theo Rigby



Photo: Mark Coplan



Photo: Mark Coplan



Photo: Peg Hunter



Photo: Mark Coplan



Photo: Mark Coplan



Photo: Theo Rigby

EL PROGRESO / IN THE STREETS

RESILIENCE/
COURAGE/
DIGNITY AND RESPECT/
PROTECT PEOPLE/
PROTECT LAND

Children march through the streets of El Progreso in the Stations of the Crisis protest, holding signs honoring Padre Guadalupe Carney and Berta Cáceres, and decrying rampant femicide, March 24, 2019.



THE MARCH OF TORCHES

Starting from Radio Progreso, delegates joined the weekly march to downtown El Progreso where they met up with community members lighting up torches and carrying signs calling for protection of water, land, and health, freedom for political prisoners, and the ouster of President Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH). Many people passing in cars, on motorcycles and from buses and storefronts yelled the single phrase “FUERA JOH!”

STATIONS OF THE CRISIS

On Sunday, our last full day in Honduras, the delegation joined a large march through the streets of El Progreso to remember Saint Oscar Romero on the 39th anniversary of his assassination. Modeled on the Christian tradition of “Stations of the Cross,” in which moments of the crucifixion of Jesus are recalled, the march was named “Stations of the Crisis,” to consider the many faces of the crisis of poverty and violence that engulfs the people of Honduras. The march ended with mass at Saint Ignatius Paris



Many thanks to the extraordinary crew of Radio Progreso and ERIC.

It is through their work with under-represented Honduran communities that much of what our delegation experienced was made possible.

They work to understand the stories and realities of the Honduran experience, and then look for ways, often at great personal risk, to amplify the many voices that would otherwise go unheard.

As international delegates, we were introduced to these amazing communities and got a glimpse of their realities. Now it is part of our task to find ways to be active partners in the work of amplification.



Photo: Peg Hunter



Photo: Theo Rigby



Photo: Theo Rigby



Photo: Peg Hunter



Photo: Theo Rigby



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- 4a. Fact Sheet: U.S. Weapons Sales to Honduras **57**
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FACTS & FIGURES

4A. FACT SHEET: U.S. WEAPONS SALES TO HONDURAS

U.S. guns in Honduras—in the hands of both state forces and gangs—brutalize communities and families, making continued life in the country unsustainable. We must act to stop the weapons trade from the United States to Honduras.

The United States administers military and police assistance to Honduras, which includes equipment and training, but it also transfers weapons to Honduras through arms sales. In addition, many weapons in Honduras come from the United States through illegal trafficking.

In Honduras, La Armería, run by the military, controls domestic gun sales to police, to individuals, and to more than 1,000 unregulated private security companies. The lack of transparency and controls in both government arsenals and gun sales, and the common involvement of Honduran military and police in private security companies, make for a large grey area blurring the line between weapons that are legally sold and illegal gun markets.

Honduras has one of the highest murder rates in the world—and more than 70% of homicides in Honduras are committed with firearms (2018

data).¹ The number of civilian-held guns in the country is estimated to be anywhere between 420,000 and 1.2 million—most of which are illegal.²

Both the proposed Berta Cáceres Act (H.R. 1945) and Trump's proposed aid cut-off will (or would) affect military and police assistance (which rarely includes firearms), but wouldn't affect weapons sales from U.S. companies, which are currently licensed by the State Department. (The Trump Administration is attempting to shift oversight to the Dept. of Commerce, which has much looser regulations, and to lessen the oversight authority of Congress. H.R. 1134 and S. 459 would stop this transfer of authority, and maintain Congressional oversight.)

1 Boletín, Instituto Universitario en Democracia, Paz y Seguridad, UNAH, 2018. <https://iudpas.unah.edu.hn/observatorio-de-la-violencia/boletines-del-observatorio-2/boletines-nacionales/>

2 InSight Crime, Firearms Trafficking in Honduras, 2017, p. 8. <https://www.insightcrime.org/images/PDFs/2017/Firearms-Trafficking-Honduras.pdf>

U.S WEAPONS EXPORTS TO HONDURAS

Honduran police frequently attack nonviolent protests with CS tear gas manufactured by Nonlethal Technologies in Homer City, Pennsylvania. From the Guapinol to Tegucigalpa, these canisters are everywhere.

Honduras has also purchased millions of dollars' worth of bullets from Illinois producers—more than \$3.7 million in the last five years.³

Exporters in Florida have exported more than \$3 million of guns and ammunition to Honduras since the 2009 coup.

From a Wyoming company, Honduras imported more than \$1.3 million worth of military explosives in 2018, plus military firearms.⁴ The exporter was most likely Safariland, based in Casper, Wyoming, a company that manufactures munitions and launchers.

Colt Manufacturing, based in Hartford, Connecticut, exported the machine guns to Honduras that were used by military police to fire on citizens protesting electoral fraud in 2017.

Colt shipped 1,714 machine guns to Honduras in 2015, 350 in 2016, and 1,000 in 2017, all together valued at \$3,558,686.

GUNS ILLEGALLY TRAFFICKED FROM THE UNITED STATES TO HONDURAS

Nearly half of illegal guns in Honduras—or likely more than half—came from the United States.⁵ Data from the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) shows that, of all guns recovered in Honduras in 2017 that they attempted to trace, more than 36% were purchased in and trafficked from the United States.⁶ But since the source country for all other guns in Honduras traced by ATF could not be identified, it is likely that, in fact, many more than that originated in the United States... including what remain of the large volume of U.S. weapons sent for wars in Central America in the 1980s. Leakage from militaries in the region also remains a major source of guns in Honduras.⁷



Photo: Mark Coplan

Empty canisters of U.S.-made Nonlethal Technologies tear gas used against Honduran protesters.

³ U.S. Census Bureau data at usatrade.census.gov.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau data at usatrade.census.gov.

⁵ InSight Crime, *Firearms Trafficking in Honduras*, p. 18.

⁶ <https://www.atf.gov/file/130471/download>

⁷ InSight Crime, *Firearms Trafficking in Honduras*, p. 24.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Urge Members of Congress to take these actions (and recruit others to urge on their representatives as well):
 - » Co-sponsor H.R. 1945, the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act. Though it doesn't stop gun sales, it does re-orient U.S. foreign policy regarding the Honduran military and police. (It would "suspend United States security assistance with Honduras until such time as human rights violations by Honduran security forces cease and their perpetrators are brought to justice," per specific conditions spelled out in the bill.)
 - » Publicly oppose arms sales to Honduras (especially if they are members of the Foreign Affairs Committee).
 - » Support H.R. 1134 and S. 459, companion bills which would stop the transfer of gun export licensing authority from the State Department to the Commerce Department, and maintain Congressional oversight.
- Visit Honduras on a human rights delegation.



Photo: Mark Coplan

Honduran military and police use automatic assault weapons. They often cover their faces, especially when policing their own communities.

FURTHER READING

- Sarah Blaskey, "They're Killing Us in Honduras with U.S.-made Guns, Some in Caravan Say," Miami Herald, November 23, 2018.
- InSight Crime and Asociación por una Sociedad Más Justa, Firearms Trafficking in Honduras, 2017.
- Small Arms Survey, Measuring Illicit Arms Flows: Honduras, November 2016.
- Alex Yablon, "Trump is Sending Guns South as Migrants Flee North," Foreign Policy, March 8, 2019.
- John Lindsay-Poland, "How U.S. Guns Push Central Americans to Flee," March 2019, at: <https://stopusarmstomexico.org/guns-and-forced-migration/>.
- Further information can be found at Global Exchange, the fiscal sponsor of Stop US arms to Mexico (www.Stopusarmstomexico.org).
- "Casi un millón de armas circulan ilegalmente en Honduras," Presencia Universitaria, 22 sept. 2015.

DATA SOURCES (USED BROADLY IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS ARTICLE)

- Security Assistance Monitor: www.securityassistance.org
- United Nations Comtrade: <https://comtrade.un.org/data/>
- U.S. Census Bureau: usatrade.census.gov
- U.S. International Trade Commission: <https://dataweb.usitc.gov/>

4B. CONTEMPORARY HONDURAS, U.S. FOREIGN POLICY, AND THE ROOTS OF THE EXODUS

U.S. policy towards Honduras perpetuates a regime that quashes dissent, reinforces and rewards bad governance and corruption, and disregards human rights—creating unlivable conditions and decimating the institutions of civil society, directly driving the exodus. Honduras, after a decade of large-scale forced migration, is the country of caravans: the diaspora now comprises 2 million Hondurans living

outside the country—roughly 22% of the total population.¹ The root causes of migration are myriad and intermingled: an extractive economic model causing displacement, environmental degradation, and worker exploitation; militarization of society; arms proliferation; land theft; and corruption of state institutions. The United States—our government, corporations, and citizens—bears significant responsibility for these precipitating conditions (all of which are worsened by the staggering proliferation of arms throughout Honduran society).

U.S. foreign policy in Honduras—including military and security aid, repeated political intervention, and economic control—is the most significant contributor to the unlivable conditions and dangerous destabilization in Honduras and throughout the region.



Condos loom over the community of Pedregal.

¹ Padre Ismail Moreno (“Padre Melo”), director of Radio Progreso and ERIC (Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación, y Comunicación), and national leader in defense of human rights.

U.S. MILITARY AND SECURITY AID

The United States has a long history of military presence and intervention in Honduras. In 1980-81, the U.S. established a military foothold in the country with Soto Cano Air Base, its first joint-command military base in the region. Soto Cano became a pivotal launching pad from which the U.S. would enforce its regional and global foreign policy objectives. As revolutionary movements broke out in neighboring countries—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua—the U.S. used Honduras as its staging ground for operations in Central America.

The United States trained and equipped right-wing militia, including death squads, that went on to commit horrific (and well-documented) human rights violations. Some of these militia were responsible for the genocide against Mayan communities in Guatemala, where more than 200,000 indigenous people perished. In El Salvador, they murdered more than 75,000 people, and many thousands more were ‘disappeared.’ The CIA covertly channeled money and arms to Contra rebels in Nicaragua to subvert and bring down the Sandinistas, who had deposed a dictator friendly to the U.S.²

After peace accords were signed in the countries that saw armed conflict, the U.S.’ pursuit of its economic and security interests in the region evolved and adapted. Throughout the 2000s, the U.S. once again steadily increased its presence in and aid to the region, this time fighting the drug war.

Now, aid to Central America, and specifically Honduras, is almost entirely used for militarization, security, and law enforcement. U.S. security assistance funds the militarization of police and security forces, and buys weapons, technology, and surveillance equipment (often manufactured by U.S. companies).³ In just the last three years, the U.S. government has appropriated roughly \$2.1 billion to Central America through security and aid initiatives, such as the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). Roughly half of this money has gone to fund security and military projects.⁴ (In theory, at least; our hosts explained that much of the money earmarked for humanitarian assistance is diverted—often appropriated for further militarization.)⁵

CARSI was established in 2008 to provide Central American nations with equipment, training, and technical assistance to support law enforcement operations. Between 2008 and 2016, appropriations through CARSI included at least \$431 million for Honduras.⁶

U.S. money continues to fund the militarization of police and security forces, and buys weapons, technology, and surveillance equipment manufactured by U.S. companies. According to Reuters (March 30, 2019), the U.S. provided about \$98 million to Honduras in 2016 alone. In FY2017, Honduras received more than \$65.5 million in military and security aid.⁷

2 <https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-cias-dirty-war-in-nicaragua/5629008>

3 Refer to *Fact Sheet on U.S. Weapons Sales to Honduras*, in this report.

4 <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44812.pdf> U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress, Updated June 12, 2019. Congressional Research Service <https://crsreports.congress.gov/R44812>

5 [Reference to come]

6 Meyer, P.J., and C.R. Seelke. 2015. *Central American Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

7 <https://www.wola.org/monitoring-assistance-central-america/>

Although these “security initiatives” were supposed to stop the flow of people, families, unaccompanied children, women, and men have continued to flee the region. Illogically, the United States hasn’t wavered from this failed strategy, one which ignores or compounds the root causes of mass migration.

Despite the level of state repression and corruption in Honduras, and in the face of evidence⁸ of continuous complicity and collusion between organized crime and state authorities, U.S. military and security aid to the country has grown. This has led to a highly militarized Honduran society—one that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights called “the

most hostile and dangerous for human rights defenders” in the Americas.”⁹ Since the coup in 2009, there have been thousands of killings of human rights defenders, activists, journalists, clergy, lawyers and indigenous people.

According to the U.S. State Department, “Corruption, intimidation, and institutional weakness of the justice system leading to widespread impunity; [and] unlawful and arbitrary killings and other criminal activities by members of the security forces” are among the most serious human rights violations in Honduras.¹⁰ Ninety-five percent of crimes committed by state forces against human rights defenders remain unsolved.¹¹



8 <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/experiential/clinics/international-human-rights-law-clinic/independent-investigation-of-the-murder-of-berta-caceres/>

9 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), *Situation of Human Rights in Honduras*, 31 December 2015, OEA/Ser.L/V/II. Doc.42/15

10 United States Department of State, *2015 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices—Honduras*, 13 April 2016, <https://www.refworld.org/country,,USDOS,,HND,,5716125dc,0.html>

11 OHCHR, *End of Mission Statement by Michel Forst, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders on his Visit to Honduras, 29 April to 12 May, May 11, 2018*.

POLITICAL INTERVENTION

The United States has not only maintained a heavy military presence and influence in Honduras; it has also directly intervened in the democratic process of its people. In 2009, the Honduran military forced democratically-elected president Manuel Zelaya out of Honduras in a military coup. (He was taken from his home one night, still in his pajamas, and flown out of the country, making a stop at a U.S. base on the way.) The coup was widely condemned by the Honduran people and by international entities such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the European Union. However, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the U.S. diplomatic apparatus pressured other countries to recognize Pepe Lobo from the National Party as the legitimate president. They moved quickly to increase security and military aid to Honduras, despite the coup d'état and its aftermath of pursuant widespread human rights violations.¹²

In November of 2013, Juan Orlando Hernandez of the National Party was declared the winner in a highly disputed election. Being barred from running for re-election by the Honduran constitution, Hernandez then had his hand-picked Supreme Court overturn the ban so he could run again.

On election day in November of 2017, the Electoral Tribunal, without explanation, stopped counting the votes when it appeared that the opposition candidate was polling in an insurmountable lead. When the Tribunal began counting again two days later, they announced Hernandez had won the elections. Widespread allegations of electoral fraud ensued,¹³ and the Honduran people took the streets to protest en masse.¹⁴ Thirty people died during the post-election crisis, at least 16 of those were killed by security forces.^{15, 16} Nonetheless, the U.S. recognized the result of the illegal elections.

Although supposedly a strong ally in the drug war, Honduras' top military, administration, and congressional officials are consistently implicated in drug-trafficking and organized crime. Pepe Lobo himself, his son, and many of those closest to Juan Orlando Hernandez—most recently his brother¹⁷—have all been incriminated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA),¹⁸ all without losing the support of the U.S.

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/31/hillary-clinton-honduras-violence-manuel-zelaya-berta-caceres>

13 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/18/honduras-election-president-juan-orlando-hernandez-declared-winner-amid-unrest>

14 Meyer, P.J. 2018. *Honduras: Background and US Relations*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

15 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/17/honduras-post-election-killings-families-wait-in-vain-for-justice>

16 https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/HN/2017ReportElectionsHRViolations_Honduras_EN.pdf

17 <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/27/671339362/honduran-presidents-brother-arrested-in-miami-on-drug-trafficking-charges>

18 <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/31/americas/honduras-juan-orlando-hernandez-dea-intl/index.html>

ECONOMIC CONTROL

Roughly 65% of Hondurans are living in poverty, and 42% in extreme poverty; the nation has the highest rate of economic inequality in Latin America.¹⁹ Wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of an elite set of intermarried families known as the ‘oligarchs,’ who control most of the economy.²⁰ Job opportunities are scarce, and abusive labor practices are commonplace. For every dollar in the Honduran economy, 96 cents ends up in the hands of the oligarchs. (For the sake of context, coffee alone brings in revenue of over \$300 million per year.)²¹

In 2005, the U.S.’ Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) eliminated most tariffs and other regional barriers to trade. This encouraged the displacement of small farmers and agricultural workers unable to compete with subsidized cheap grains. Since then, and especially after the 2009 coup, assembly manufacturing, sweatshop maquiladoras, and other cheap-labor industries have proliferated. Land grabs, often for monocrop plantations or hydroelectric projects (dams), have skyrocketed, and 144 new mining concessions granted to Canadian and U.S. companies since 2009. This upsurge in extractive industry and internal displacement was marked also by the novel granting of concessions in previously protected national park land.

Poverty wages are the norm at these large employers, and violations of workers’ rights are committed regularly and with impunity.²² The deteriorating economic conditions and persistent poverty, created in part by U.S. corporate interest



and control, fuels violence in the region and drives the diaspora.

Most of the population of Honduras suffers under the economic control of international and domestic corporations and the oligarchic families. Military and paramilitaries, funded and equipped by the U.S., are used to protect this control. They prioritize corporate interests and property over the rights and well-being of citizens, dismantle resistance, and displace vulnerable communities in the name of what the ownership class brands ‘progress.’

Honduras is a country rich in natural resources, and yet the vast majority of Honduran people are falling deeper into impoverishment. The roots of the poverty and violence, and the forced migration, are failed U.S. foreign policies toward Honduras, as well as corporate-driven economic policies imposed on the region, and corruption and abuses at all levels of government. Continued U.S. military and security assistance is making matters worse.

¹⁹ <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/multimedia/2016/honduras/honduras-en.html>

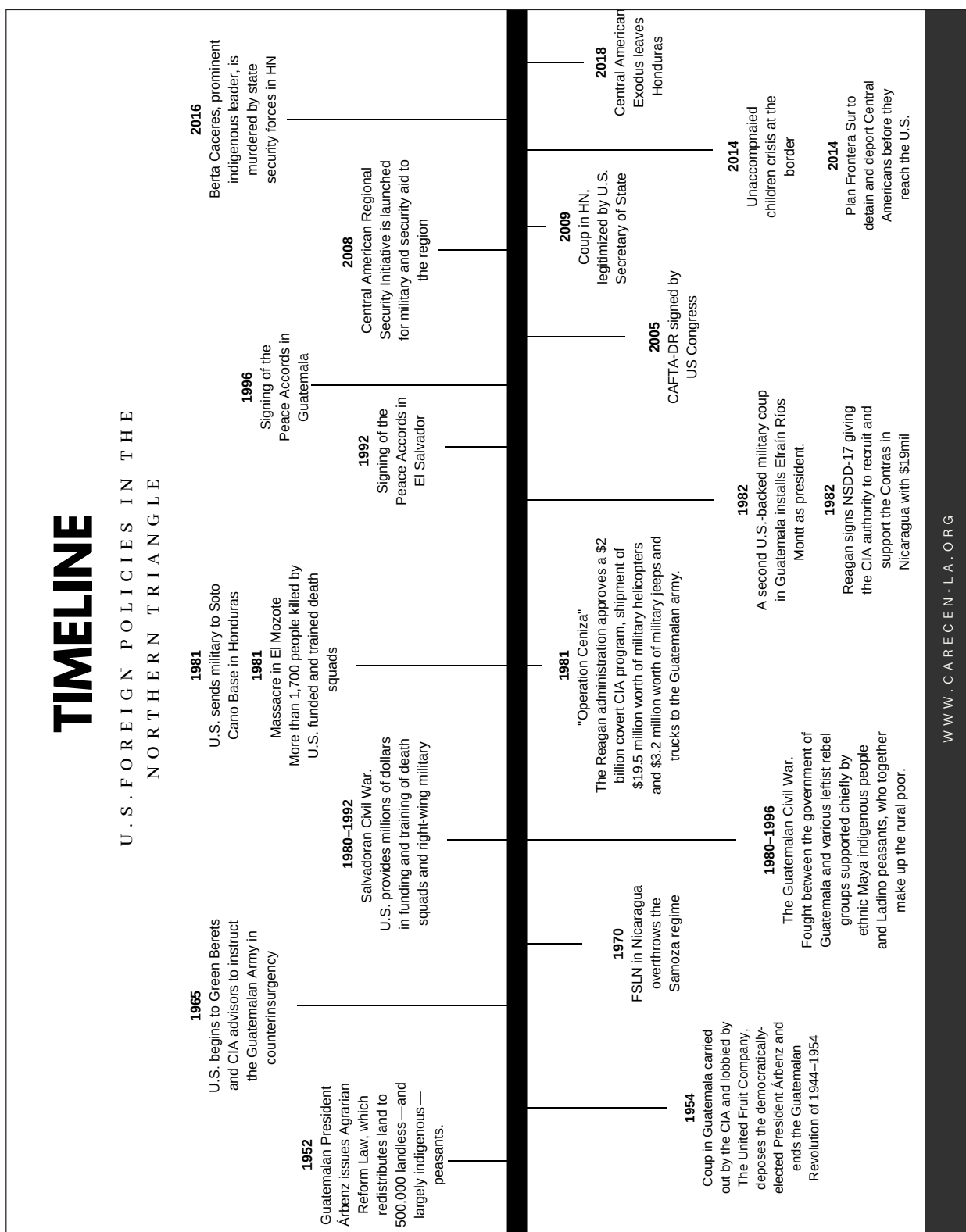
²⁰ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/30/when-corruption-is-operating-system-case-of-honduras-pub-69999>

²¹ Padre Ismail Moreno (“Padre Melo”), director of Radio Progreso and ERIC, 3/18/19.

²² Albrego, Leisy. *Central American Refugees Reveal the Crisis of the State*. The Oxford Handbook of Migration Crises. Sept. 2018.

4C. TIMELINE:

U.S.-C.A. RELATIONS, 1952 TO PRESENT

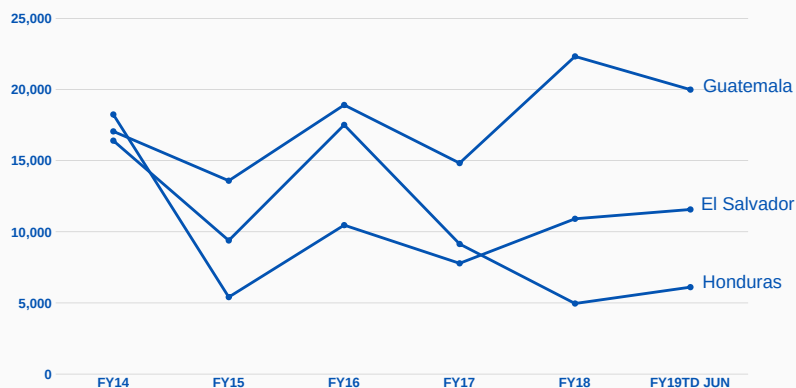


4D. MIGRATION FROM NORTHERN TRIANGLE TO U.S.

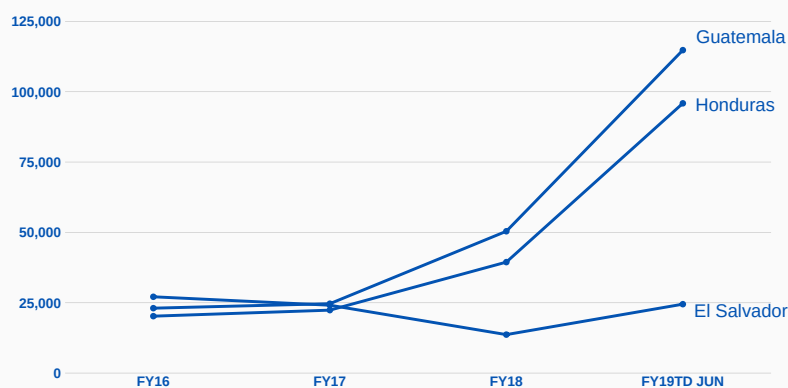
MIGRATION: The N. Triangle



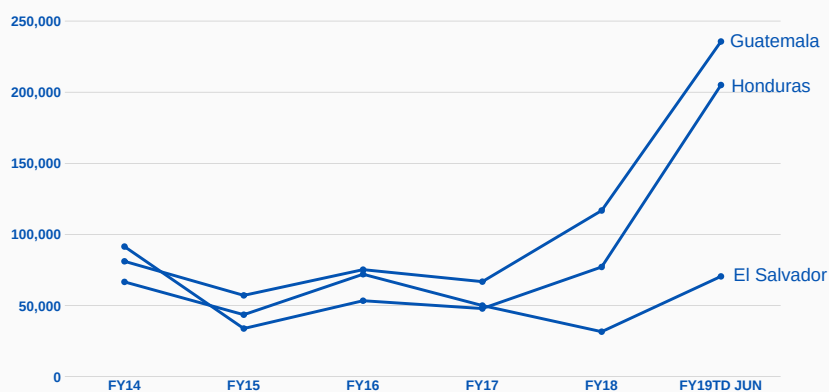
Unaccompanied Minors



Families



Total Number



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protections, Southwest Border Apprehensions Fiscal Year 2014-19
<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration>

4E. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF HONDURAS

To understand the historical relationship of Honduras and the U.S., one must view it through the oppressive frame of the Monroe Doctrine, enforced and normalized over many years, which regards Honduras—and all of the Americas—as rightfully under U.S. ‘protection’ and control. In this view, all of the lands and resources of the Americas are regarded to be ‘by rights’ in service of U.S. political and economic interests, and as the U.S.’s ‘back yard.’ In that sense, Honduras can be seen as an unofficially annexed U.S. province, under the influence of U.S. economic rapacity, which controlled and continues to control Honduras’ national destiny and political future. This situation did not arise out of the blue; there is much to say about the deep history of Honduras, and how it’s been influenced by outsiders of all kinds.

1500’S

Honduras was the home of many indigenous peoples when the Spanish arrived in the 16th century. The western-central part of Honduras was inhabited by the Lenca, the central north coast by the Tol, the area east and west of Trujillo by the Pech, Maya, and Sumo. These autonomous groups maintained commercial

relationships with each other and with other populations as distant as Panama and Mexico.¹

Christopher Columbus arrived at the Bay Islands in 1502, on his fourth voyage. He landed on the mainland near modern Trujillo. He called the country Honduras (“depths”) for the deep waters off its coast.

During the period leading up to the conquest of Honduras by the Spaniard Pedro de Alvarado, many indigenous people along the north coast of Honduras were captured and taken as slaves to work on Spain’s Caribbean plantations. In the 1500s, there were numerous indigenous revolts against the Spanish, the most renowned being those of the cacique² Lempira in 1537 and 1538. As the story goes, when the Spaniards arrived in Cerquin, Lempira was fighting against neighboring chiefs. But because of the Spanish threat, he unified the different Lenca tribes. He organized resistance against the Spanish troops, managing to gather an army of almost 30,000 soldiers from 200 villages. As a result, other groups also took up arms in the valleys of Comayagua and Olancho.³ Lempira is honored today by the name of the Honduran currency.

1700’S

Britain declared much of the area a protectorate in 1740, though they exercised little actual authority there. British colonization was particularly strong in the Bay Islands, and alliances between the British and the Miskito, as well as other locals, made this an area the Spanish could not easily control, and a haven for pirates.

¹ *U.S. Relations with Honduras*. U.S. Department of State. 9 April 2015. Retrieved 11 June 2016.

² Cacique is a term for the leader of an indigenous group.

³ <https://books.google.com/books?id=3amnMPTPP5MC&pg=PA217&dq=Alonso+de+Cáceres&hl=en#v=onepage&q=Alonso%20de%20>

1800'S

The first democratically elected president in Honduras was Dionisio de Herrera, a lawyer. His administration began in 1824, and established the first constitution. He was followed by Gen. Francisco Morazán, who held to an ideal of a federation of Central American nations. However, Honduras broke away from the Central American Federation in October, 1838, and became an independent and sovereign state.

1900'S

By 1899, the banana industry in Honduras was expanding rapidly. That year also marked the first time in decades that a peaceful and constitutional transition of presidency had taken place. By 1902, railroads had been built along the country's Caribbean coast to accommodate and serve the various banana companies. When that president (Sierra) refused to step down for the next elected president (Boquin) in 1903, the government was overthrown by Gen. Manuel Bonilla, supported by the U.S.

One of the United States' first military incursions into Honduras was in 1903. Very wary of the uncertain situation on the ground, as multiple independence movements grew in Central American countries, the U.S. was trying to protect its increasing operations there. Many U.S. businessmen, particularly from the New Orleans' shipping industry, had invested in the growing banana industry. The cultivation and shipping of bananas was expanding in Panama, Guatemala, and Honduras. Both United Fruit (now Chiquita Brands International) and Standard Fruit Company (now Dole Food Company) were

founded in 1899, and the economic domination of these companies throughout the region sparked a new era of foreign control.

Honduras had an export-oriented economy. United and Standard gained power in the region through investment in building and using railroads and telecommunications infrastructure; Honduras was too poor to build these itself. Because the country was effectively controlled by American fruit corporations, it was the original inspiration for the term "banana republic".⁴

In 1907, the president and dictator, Gen. Manuel Bonilla, a founder of the National party, was overthrown, in part through an internal rebellion from within the Honduran armed forces. He had been willing to sell off a lot of Honduran land to U.S. businessmen in exchange for U.S. support. A U.S. gunboat spirited him away to New Orleans after that ouster. The U.S. elites were worried about those who had toppled Bonilla. They also very much wanted to protect the region of the new Panama Canal, and to defend their increasingly important banana trade. This desire led to multiple military actions over the years; in the first decades of the 20th century, U.S. military incursions took place in 1903, 1907, 1911, 1912, 1919, 1924, and 1925.⁵

It was in 1911 that the U.S. deployed "peacekeeping forces" in the waters off the Atlantic. In this case, United Fruit supported the overthrow of the then-president and the insertion of someone else, whom the U.S. preferred. This is an example of the kind of control that the U.S. was able to exercise then—and now; the U.S. still has the ability to influence the outcomes of political elections and of legislation.

4 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/27/us-honduras-coup>

5 http://wais.stanford.edu/USA/us_supportforladictators8703.html

By 1912, three companies dominated the banana trade in Honduras: the Cuyamel Fruit Company, Vaccaro Brothers and Company (later Standard Fruit), and the United Fruit Company.⁶ They were what we now call ‘vertically integrated’—each had their own lands and railroad companies and shipping lines, and made vast profits on the backs of slaves and the cheap labor of indentured servants. U.S. fruit corporations chose rural agriculture lands in Northern Honduras for their proximity to major ports, the main access points for shipments to the United States and Europe, enabled by use of the expanding railroad system. Through land subsidies granted to the railroads, they soon came to control vast tracts of the best land along the Caribbean coast, often forcing out of business small holders who had been growing and exporting bananas on that land. Coastal cities such as La Ceiba, Tela, and Trujillo, and towns further inland such as El Progreso and La Lima, became virtual company towns.^{7a}

Giving a sense of the dramatic increase in amount of bananas being exported, “in the Atlantida, the Vaccaro Brothers (Standard Fruit) oversaw the construction of 155 kilometers of railroad between 1910 and 1915... [leading] to a concomitant rise in exports, from 2.7 million bunches in 1913 to 5.5 million in 1919.”⁸ This is how Wikipedia puts it: “After the first concessions in 1912, U.S. concerns achieved more or less complete control of the productive alluvial plains of Honduras’ Atlantic coast. The area around Puerto Cortés was dominated by the Cuyamel Fruit Company, the La Ceiba region

by Standard Fruit, and Tela and Trujillo were controlled by United Fruit’s subsidiaries, the Tela Railroad Company and the Trujillo Railroad Company. By 1929, the United Fruit Company operated in over 650,000 acres (2,600 km²) of the country and controlled the major ports.”⁹

The development of the banana industry contributed to the beginnings of organized labor movements in Honduras and to the first major strikes in the nation’s history. The first of these was in 1917, against the Cuyamel Fruit Company, and was suppressed by the Honduran military. The following year, additional labor disturbances occurred at the Standard Fruit Company’s holding in La Ceiba. In 1920, a general strike hit the Caribbean coast. In response, the U.S. sent a warship to the area, and the Honduran government began arresting labor leaders. When Standard Fruit offered a new wage, the strike ultimately collapsed. In 1929, “a record 29 million bunches left Honduran shores, a volume that exceeded the combined exports of Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Panama.”^{7b}

The years of the 1920s to 1950s also included several labor uprisings and electoral instability. During this period, the U.S. continued imposing economic controls on, and sometimes forcing agreements between, the countries of Central America—even going so far as to ask some elected leaders to ‘step aside.’

6 <http://laceiba.honduras.com/banana-trade/banana-history.html>

7a, b <http://countrystudies.us/honduras/16.htm>

8 Coleman, Kevin (2016). *A Camera in the Garden of Eden*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press. pp. 39–42, 51–52. ISBN 978-1-4773-0854-7. Pulled from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Fruit_Company, accessed June 16, 2019.

9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banana_production_in_Honduras

“The Fruit Company, Inc. reserved for itself the most succulent, the central coast of my own land, the delicate waist of America. It rechristened its territories as the ‘Banana Republics’ and over the sleeping dead, over the restless heroes who brought about the greatness, the liberty and the flags, it established the comic opera...”

— Pablo Neruda

In 1954, there was another banana workers’ strike. Over 50,000 banana workers challenged the Honduran government over its preference for the transnational corporations over the Honduran workers. Banana workers were advocating better working conditions, an 8-hour workday, the right to a break at work, a minimum wage, among other demands. The labor uprisings started in the city of El Progreso (where Radio Progreso is located). Unfortunately, with these uprisings, the criminalization of workers deepened, as still happens today. Labor struggles in this cold war era were deemed “communist,” and promotion of progressive policies was answered with military death squads and right-wing paramilitaries.

After the general strike in 1954, young military reformists staged a coup in October 1955 that installed a provisional junta. Following this, the ruling parties—the Liberal party and the National party—simply tended to alternate elections. There were land reforms initiated in some areas of the country over this period.

In the 70s, a political scandal arose that exemplifies the way US companies have worked to undermine the people and uphold corrupt governments throughout the region and the decades. As told by Wikipedia: The Union of Banana Exporting Countries (Spanish: Unión de Países Exportadores de Banano, or UPEB) was a cartel of Central and South American banana-exporting countries established in 1974, inspired by OPEC. Its aim was to achieve better remuneration from the North American banana trade oligopoly, which consisted of the three US companies. UPEB’s proposal of an export tax was undermined by the U.S. oligopoly bribing Honduran and Italian officials. The UPEB cartel collapsed when the bribes became public. Notably, and ironically, what is referred to as the ‘Bananagate’ scandal paved the way for the U.S. Congress to create the 1977 Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

From 1972 to 1983, Honduras was governed by the military, and the U.S.’ influence and control was so strong that the term “proconsul” was used to designate its ambassador. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration established a continuous military presence in Honduras. They built a modern port for U.S. ships, and the new Soto Cano air base (commonly called Palmerola)—which they used as a platform in the administration’s illegal campaigns against the Sandinista government of Nicaragua and the leftist guerrillas of El Salvador and Guatemala. Though Honduras was not wracked by a bloody civil war like its neighbors, the Honduran army waged a brisk campaign against Marxist/Leninist-leaning groups, trade unionists, and many non-militant civilians. Honduras was (and still is) used as one of the United States’ training grounds—a practice area for repression techniques used against peace and justice activists from other countries. It was a time of great uncertainty, and during those years, as now, many Hondurans were displaced from their homes.

In just the three years between 1981 and 1984, U.S. military assistance to Honduras increased from \$4 million to \$77.4 million. While noting internally that Honduran government forces commit “hundreds of human rights violations (...), most of them for political reasons,” the CIA still supported the death squads, i.e., a campaign of extrajudicial killings by government-backed units. In particular, Battalion 3-16 tortured, murdered, and/or ‘disappeared’ many trade unionists, academics, farmers and students. Subsequently declassified documents indicate that Ambassador John Negroponte personally intervened to prevent the disclosure of these state crimes, in order to avoid “creating human rights problems in Honduras.” (It is worth noting that Negroponte went on to have an illustrious career as a diplomat, eventually rising to U.S. Deputy Secretary of State under George W. Bush.)

Only recently (in the 1990s) was Honduras able to maintain governments that were not military juntas imposed by force. These were not always noticeably less repressive, however. One example was Ricardo Maduro, who ushered in the policies of The Iron Fist approach against the gangs, and an era of rising homicide rates.

Manuel (Mel) Zelaya was democratically elected in 2006. He was actually from one of the two traditional parties (Liberal), and from an upper class family, but surprisingly to many, he was willing to promote more progressive policies. His efforts included raising the minimum wage, and tackling systematic inequality and political corruption. He wanted to hold a plebiscite on the question of having a national constituent assembly, to update the constitution. This gave

the country’s kleptocratic elite¹⁰ the opportunity to allege that he was trying to get around constitutional limits on a term of office, which they used as an excuse to violently depose him.

He was overthrown in 2009 by the military. He was kidnapped from his home at night and flown out of the country in his pajamas, with a stop at U.S. air base Soto Cano—all done with at least the non-objection, if not the blessing, of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and with the U.S. embassy facilitating the “smooth” transition.¹¹

Overnight, there was a post-golpista (post-coup) regime ushered in, governed first by Portillo Lobo. Ironically, the current president, the staggeringly corrupt Juan Orlando Hernandez, DID illegally extend his term in office after his first fraudulent election, so he could (again fraudulently) ‘win’ another term in office. (See 4B. *Contemporary Honduras, U.S. Foreign Policy, and the Roots of the Exodus* for more on modern-day Honduras.)

¹⁰ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/30/when-corruption-is-operating-system-case-of-honduras-pub-69999>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/31/hillary-clinton-honduras-violence-manuel-zelaya-berta-caceres>



SOLIDARITY WORK

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FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

5A. PRACTICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The March, 2019, Root Causes Pilgrimage to Honduras was a heart-breaking learning experience, an adventure, and a physical, emotional, and spiritual challenge. As part of the group of pastors and members of religious denominations, congregations and communities, I doubt I was the only one with a deepening concern about what some public figures have now referred to as “the soul” of our nation, and of humanity.

Root causes of migration from Honduras to the U.S. include an increase in violence, greed, racism, natural disasters and devastating economic inequality throughout the world. They are not new, but living in an age of information technology, we are bombarded with an awareness that is unprecedented. It sometimes feels that a heaviness permeates even the efforts of activists and people of good will. What happens to my neighbor affects me.

Spiritual writers are beginning to explore what that might mean. I have found both comfort and challenge in learning about the phrase “shift in consciousness,” which is becoming widespread. I believe the most common aspect of the concept has to do with the interface of science and spirituality. We are learning that separation is an illusion, at so many levels. For example, Barbara Fiand, a retreat director, writer, and lecturer, notes that “scientific investigation and verification have shown us that what we do affects everything in the universe, just as every single event even in the farthest reaches

of the cosmos affects us. These insights can be frightening, especially since the changes they call for in our subsequent behavior seem to be making demands on us with unforeseen and unsettling speed.”

As we learn more about corporate and governmental meddling in developing countries over the years, Fiand’s comment seems to be echoed in the words of John Perkins in *New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*: “We are in this together. All of us. We must do what it takes to cultivate a life economy. Now. It is time to admit that we are not fighting a war against terrorists, corporations, or any other ‘them.’ We are part of a process that has failed us. We’ve bought into it; we’ve supported it; we’ve benefited from it. Now we must act to change it.”

Participants in the root causes pilgrimage recognize that what is happening in Honduras is not separate from us, our lifestyle and privilege. But that awareness, and sharing it with others, can evoke dismay, guilt, defensiveness, and the

desire to know “what to do.” As Beatrice Bruteau says, “The basic recommendation for the good life is not to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself, but to love your neighbor as actually being yourself. The fundamental perception of selfhood has to change before we can have the moral world we want.”

The heart changes as the mind begins to grasp the reality of our world today. “Their” suffering is ours. That insight calls for contemplation, which Elizabeth Johnson says is “a way of seeing that leads to communion.” She goes on to say, “Without knowledge of contemplation, which is akin to prayer, prophetic action ... will in the long run fall short of the wisdom needed.”

Considering prophetic action, I think of the words of a Honduran associate telling me that the Honduran “resistance” is not done, but realizing they need to examine their own part in what has happened to their country. She said “we blame the corporations, but we buy their products, drink their unhealthy drinks, work in their maquilas.” We in the U.S. must face our personal and national culpability, explore social movements that result in change, and reexamine our own habits, expectations, and entitlements. Hard work.

My way of seeing the world has changed so much as I’ve delved into the concept of oneness. From hearing years ago about Buddhist efforts to prove that focused meditation can lower violence in specific areas, and struggling to understand the effectiveness of prayer, I surprise myself when I share new ways of looking at God, inner strength, and love with detained immigrants who feel they’ve lost everything. They are not alone. I know this more deeply, but I still struggle to understand and articulate what it means.

We are in an exciting and challenging time of realization as humanity. Our pilgrimage is one of inner work, outer questioning and learning, and a commitment to bring more joy and peace into a struggling world.

WRITTEN AND SPOKEN ADVOCACY

5B. TALKING POINTS AND REBUTTALS

MAIN MESSAGE

- This interfaith delegation was a pilgrimage to accompany the people of Honduras in their struggles against internal displacement, poverty, and violence.
- 75 international delegates journeyed to the capitol, as well as to three key regions of Honduras experiencing heavy militarization, environmental displacement, and human rights abuses: Bajo Aguán Valley, Santa Bárbara and San Pedro Sula.
- National, regional, and local governments in Honduras participate in preserving immunity, perpetuating rampant corruption of political entities, protected by police and military forces.
- Human rights and environmental activists are criminalized for their work against transnational corporations, domestic corporations, and development projects that threaten their livelihoods and lands. Prominent leaders have been assassinated, such as Berta Cáceres, killed as planned by military intelligence for protecting the river of Gualcarque from a hydroelectric project in the Agua Zarca region.
- The United States government has funneled 1.2 billion dollars to the Northern Triangle region through the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) to fund security and military projects. In Honduras, the money funds the militarization of police and security forces, and buys weapons, technology and surveillance equipment manufactured by companies in the US and other allied nations.
- Thousands of migrants have left Honduras in a massive exodus to seek asylum, pinning their hopes on a better life—or simply a chance at survival—in Mexico and/or the United States. Our travels to Honduras let us bear witness, walk with the people for a time, and learn firsthand of their day-to-day experiences and the deep-rooted corruption of the Honduran government, supported by the United States.

REBUTTALS

- *We are in the midst of an ongoing frenzy of anti-immigrant rhetoric. Hate speech is on the rise. If someone is a racist, shouldn't I call him that?* We won't participate in a politics of division and fear. We are intent on delivering a solution that reflects our nation's best values, and calling those values forth on one another. We will attack racism but not people. We will not stoop to their level—we will emulate Michelle Obama, and when they go low, we will go high. We will look to connect with who they are, so they'll hear us better.
- *They might say, 'But what about the needy here at home? Why should we care about people so far away?'* We should never be forced to decide which vulnerable community is worthy of support. They are all worthy. We must examine the intersection of immigration and houselessness, for example, as similar forms of displacements that disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable, as well as indigenous populations and people of color.
- *Build a wall. Hateful; won't work, anyway. Lock up asylum seekers, or turn them away. Separate families at the border, and house innocent children in freezing cold or boiling hot prison camps. Illegal and immoral. This will slow the flow of migrants.* Deterrence isn't accomplished by separating families, punishing children, or undermining our democratic norms and international law. We need to address the needs of asylum-seekers entering our country, as well as advocate on the issue of forced displacement from respective countries of origins. And we need to face up to and address our own culpability in driving these people from their homes.

5C. CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT LOBBYING VISITS: BEST PRACTICES

A face-to-face meeting with your Member of Congress, or a key member of their staff, is the most effective way to lobby your views. Taking the time to make a personal visit provides legislators with solid, real life evidence of the importance of a particular issue to their constituents. Moreover, discussions about pending legislation can educate and, ideally, influence their position.

Fortunately, you need not travel all the way to Washington, DC to take advantage of this opportunity! Every Member of Congress has a local office not far from you. You can meet with staff there year-round or arrange a visit with the actual Member during one of the District Work Periods scheduled throughout the year.

Don't feel you are imposing: legislators meet with constituents daily. If you feel intimidated at first, remember that legislators depend on people like you who have personal experience and understanding to share. After all, who else will give them the perspective of the most vulnerable members of our society?

ARRANGING THE VISIT

Find the Congressperson's district office nearest you by visiting Good Shepherds' action website, at <http://www.congressweb.com/gsnac/legislators/> (enter your address and zip code for a list of your legislators, click the person's name, and scroll for district office information).

Contact the scheduler in the district office to ask for an appointment with the Member of Congress or the aide who handles your issue.

Tell the scheduler the dates you are available, the issue you will discuss, and who will be attending— ideally, a small group of constituents representing different experiences and backgrounds. (They may ask you to send this information by email.)

WHAT TO EXPECT

Twenty to thirty minutes is usually the most time you can expect for a meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, ask how much time you have. Be sure to allow time for questions and responses. Be a good listener.

Do not expect your audience to be experts on your issue—they will more likely know very little. The Members themselves tend to be interested mainly in the basic story. Staffers tend to be more knowledgeable and interested in more detail.

Do not underestimate the importance of staffers. They have the trust of the Member, so persuading them is just as effective as persuading the Member directly.

PREPARE FOR THE VISIT

Review background on the issue and current legislation relating to it.

Know something about your audience. For example: What votes or statements has the Member made on the issue in the past? Is s/he a member of any committees related to the issue? What is the significance of her/his place in the political spectrum, past work experience or education, or the nature of the district? Some good places to start are the Member's webpage.

Gather materials to leave with your Member of Congress, such as a brochure about your agency and a one-page summary of your position on the issue and how people are affected.

Make a plan for the visit:

- Choose a spokesperson to begin the visit and bring it to a close.
- Decide who will say what.
- Think of questions and counterpoints your Congressperson may bring up, and plan concise responses.
- Practice the visit.

MAKING THE VISIT

- First, it's OK if not everything goes perfectly. The effort you put forth just to be there will be noticed and will make a difference, even if it only makes them advocate less strongly against your position!
- At the start of the meeting, identify yourself and the purpose of your visit.
- Ask how much time you have.
- If possible, thank the Congressperson for a vote or issue position you appreciate to set a positive tone.

- Be clear and concise, polite but firm, and constructive rather than overly critical.
- Use examples from personal experience, along with supporting facts and statistics.
- Bring the conversation back to your message if it goes off track.
- If there are any questions you cannot answer, make a note of them and volunteer to find the information and get back to your Member of Congress.
- Record other key points of the conversation for future reference.
- Make your request for the Member as specific as possible (e.g. 'Vote Yes on H.R. 1945').
- Get feedback: ask for the Member's position on the issue. If the staffer does not know, request that they provide a specific date by which they will get back to you.
- Remember to leave the printed materials you brought for your Member of Congress!

FOLLOW UP TO THE VISIT

Write a thank you note to your Congressperson to thank them for their time and re-emphasize key points in your conversation. This is important for building a relationship. Send the answers to any questions you said you'd research.

Keep the line of communication open through emails, phone calls, town hall meetings, etc. as there are further developments on your issue. Now that you have established a relationship with a staff member, you may feel comfortable asking for them by name on the phone or contacting them via their personal email.

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd / gsadvocacy.org

5D. LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (AND OTHERS)

The impact of writing letters to the editor, or any other ‘influencer,’ comes from care, content, and persuasiveness. In writing one, we are showing care not just for our work and beliefs and allies, but also for our own civil life and liberty—exercising a freedom that not all people enjoy (and some take for granted), and contributing to civic discourse.

Effective letters combine feelings, facts, personal stories, current and historical through-lines, and references to articles in that paper or other particular catalysts for writing. Convincing letters are factual, brief, clear, and specific, and use compassionate language (no sarcasm; no name-calling). Letters should be short and tight, rarely longer than 300 words.

A few carefully placed letters can generate community discussion and keep our issues in the public eye, stimulating interest in and coverage of Honduras & forced migration, and garnering support for legislation and other actions. A letter to the editor can also be brought to the attention of local public officials & other office holders, to educate and/or sway them.

DON'T WAIT!

Send a letter within 24 hours of an article's publication or an event, if possible. In this case, timeliness is next to Godliness!

SPECIFIC GUIDANCE

- 1. Open the letter with a simple salutation.** “To the Editor:” is sufficient.
- 2. Grab the reader's attention in the first sentences.** Bold language is appropriate; details come later. (No set-up—lay it out, then explain after, if needed.)
- 3. Get to what the letter is about at the start.** Don't make the editor or the newspaper reader wait... Make sure the most important takeaways are stated in the first paragraph. Editors may need to cut parts out, and they usually do so from the bottom up.
- 4. Explain why the issue is important.** Refer to a recent event in your community or to a recent article—make a connection, and make it relevant. Use local statistics and personal stories to better illustrate your point.
- 5. Give evidence for any praise or criticism.** (Cite an expert, or a respected person, group, or institution.)
- 6. State your opinion about what should be done.** (Be specific. Again, perhaps cite an expert, a pending bill, a recent assessment/recommendation from, say, the UN or OAS.)

- 7. Keep it brief, usually no longer than 300 words.** Shorter letters have a better chance of being published. (If there is a lot to say and it can't be easily made short, you might check with the editor to see if you could write a longer opinion feature or guest column, or perhaps submit an article for publication by a news outlet/aggregator such as the Huffington Post.)
- 8. Sign the letter.** Use your full name—and title, if relevant—and include your address, phone number, and e-mail address. Newspapers won't print anonymous letters, though in some cases they may withhold your name on request. They may also call to confirm that you wrote the letter before they publish it.

If your letter is not accepted the first time around, try again. Perhaps submit a revised version with a different angle on the issue at a later date, or very soon after something has just happened in the news to make Honduras and forced migration a visible topic again.

Letters are often published with multiple signers, a tack we might consider. Or, several people may write letters on the same topic, with the same or slightly different points, and submit them a few days apart, so that the issue stays on the Letters page for a longer period of time.

EXAMPLE LETTER:

Rev. Deb, in the New York Times, writing a timely response to a NYT article on violence in Honduras. She increased the odds of getting her letter printed by: grabbing the reader's attention with something personal; having a New York angle in the letter; citing statistics from the HCHR; and specifying one solution or action (HR1945) and what it would do. It is 183 words, including salutation and signoff.

To the Editor:

“Either They Kill Us or We Kill Them” (front page, May 5) tells the micro story of gangs and violence in a Honduran neighborhood.

I just returned from Honduras with 75 religious leaders, looking at the systemic economic and state violence that enables the gangs to thrive. The corruption and collusion between state actors and organized crime are stunning.

Tony Hernandez, a former Honduran congressman and brother of the president of Honduras, stands trial for large-scale drug trafficking and weapons charges in New York after being arrested by the Drug Enforcement Administration.

The latest report from the High Commissioner for Human Rights says organized crime has infiltrated Honduran government agencies and the broader political arena. This is why 53 members of the United States Congress are co-sponsors of H.R. 1945, the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act.

It would suspend United States security assistance to Honduras until human rights violations by Honduran security forces cease and their perpetrators are brought to justice.

(Rev.) Deborah Lee

Oakland, Calif.

The writer is executive director of the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY

5E. CONTENT FOR ADVOCATING H.R. 1945

IN THIS SECTION:

INTRO • QUICK LINKS • FACEBOOK FRAME • HASHTAGS • FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM POSTS • TWEETS • CONGRESSIONAL CALL-SCRIPT

This social media kit is adapted from materials prepared by CARECEN-LA (carecen-la.org).

INTRODUCTION TO H.R. 1945: BERTA CÁCERES HUMAN RIGHTS IN HONDURAS ACT

The importance of this bill cannot be overstated. H.R. 1945 was introduced (for the second time) by Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., on March 28, 2019.

The bill, once enacted, would “suspend U.S. security assistance to Honduras until such time as human rights violations by Honduran security forces cease and their perpetrators are brought to justice.” Importantly, both security assistance and loans from multi-lateral development banks extended to the Republic of Honduras would be suspended until certain conditions have been met—five specific criteria. (See 5F. H.R. 1945 1-pager for a summary of the bill and the conditions for resuming assistance to Honduras.)

Mobilization to Washington D.C. is not accessible to everyone, but supporters across the country can amplify the conversation and make a real difference by utilizing social media. This material is intended as both a guide and a resource for information in the push to get this bill across the finish line.

QUICK LINKS

Full text of bill:

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr1945/text>

Graphics folder:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10CfSGuy73w1dUAMZ-SKtR57tFLdYGkFr?usp=sharing>

Bill-tracker widget:

Embed a widget showing the current status of this bill on your website!

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr1945/widget>

FACEBOOK FRAME

Show your support for H.R. 1945 by adding a solidarity frame to your Facebook profile picture:

www.facebook.com/profilepicframes/?selected_overlay_id=452730885527257

HASHTAGS

Include at least one, if not all, of these hashtags in all your posts and tweets for added visibility and to help the topics trend:

#CaravanRootCauses #BertaCaceresAct
#Justice4Migrants #HR1945
#Justice4Berta #BertaVive

SAMPLE FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM POSTS

(each paragraph is a separate post)

Honduras, now known as the country of caravans, has been experiencing an increase in forced migration over the past decade. U.S. foreign policy including military and security aid, political intervention and external economic control have been at the root of destabilization in the region.

We must urge U.S. members of congress to sign on H.R 1945 and suspend all security assistance to Honduras from United States agencies until human rights violations by Honduran security forces are brought to justice!

From 2012- 2019 The Inter-American Development Bank has lent \$60,000,000 to Honduran police, with United States approval. Honduran Police is responsible for numerous counts of human rights abuses, including torture, rape, illegal detention, and murder. Is this what your hard-earned taxes should be financing? Call your member of congress today and ask them to support the Berta Cáceres Human Rights Bill.

Minimal progress has been made in prosecuting police involved in corruption and human rights abuses in Honduras. It's important that these cases be investigated! Call your member of congress today and ask them to support the Berta Cáceres Human Rights Bill.

While much is discussed about "Caravans" and crisis at the U.S./Mexico border, very little addresses the root causes of forced migration. The human rights abuses by Honduran security forces are central to violence in Honduras. Call your member of congress and demand they support the Berta Cáceres Human Rights Act.

The murderers of environmentalists and human rights leaders like Berta Cáceres must be brought to justice. We must suspend all security aid to Honduras until all perpetrators have been brought to trial. #Justice4Berta #BertaVive

The United States suffers a historical amnesia when it comes to foreign policy in Central America. As Central American families and unaccompanied migrant children continue to arrive at the U.S. border, we conveniently forget the role our government has played in destabilizing the Central American region.

SAMPLE TWEETS

(each paragraph is a separate tweet)

#Honduras, now known as the country of caravans, has been experiencing an increase in forced migration over the past decade. U.S. foreign policy including military & security aid, political intervention & economic control have been at the root of destabilization in the region #HR1945

We must urge our members of congress to sign on #HR1945 & suspend all security assistance to #Honduras from the United States agencies until human rights violations by Honduran security forces and our brought to justice! #Justice4Honduras #Justice4Berta

Minimal progress has been made in prosecuting police involved in corruption & human rights abuses in #Honduras. It's important that these cases be investigated! Call your member of congress today and ask them to support the #BertaCaceres Human Rights Bill. #Justice4Berta #HR1945

Your tax dollars have been linked to the murder of environmentalist & human rights leaders like #BertaCaceres! We must suspend all security aid to #Honduras until all perpetrators have been brought to trial. #Justice4Berta #BertaVive

So much is talked about in terms of “Caravans” & crisis at the U.S./Mexico border, but very little is talked about what is the root causes of this mass forced migration. Suspend all security aid to #Honduras #HR1945 #Justice4Honduras

@rephankjohnson (GA-04) introduced the Berta Caceres Human Rights in Honduras Act to order to suspend U.S. funding to Honduran security and military forces until the Honduran Government investigates and prosecutes those who have carried out human rights violations. #Honduras #HR1945 #Justice4Honduras

The United States suffers a historical amnesia when it comes to foreign policy in #CentralAmerica. As Central American families and unaccompanied migrant children continue to arrive at the U.S border, we conveniently forget the role our government has played in destabilizing the Central American region.

INCLUDE GRAPHICS IN YOUR TWEETS AND POSTS!

Use the graphics in the folder below (password-protected; accessible to delegates only) to help spread the word about #HR1945:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZH77qZUrAFBYBk9fliW4iRBkgDEUCaSB/view?usp=sharing>



<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10CfSGuy73w1dUAMZ-SKtR57tFLdYGkFr?usp=sharing>



PETITIONS

Start or sign a petition to demand an end to U.S. military intervention and funding, and let your member of Congress know you stand with the people of Honduras!

CONGRESSIONAL CALL-SCRIPT

Call the switchboard and ask for your representative:

202-224-3121

1. When you call your Representative's office, ask to speak to the foreign policy aide. Use the script below in speaking with the aide.
2. If the aide has not seen the bill, ask for the aide's email address so that you can forward a copy of the bill, and follow through right away, after you hang up.
3. If the foreign policy aide is not available, ask to leave a message on their voicemail.
4. Be sure to get the name of the foreign policy staffer so you can follow up.

Script:

"My name is _____. I am a constituent from [_your town/city_, _your state_]. I am calling to ask Rep. _____ to co-sponsor H.R. 1945, The Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, calling for a suspension of U.S. security aid to Honduras until human rights violations committed by the Honduran security forces cease.

[State your personal reasons for calling.]

Has Rep. _____ seen this bill?

[If no, get the aide's email so you can send it over yourself, and ask them to put it in front of the Rep.]

Can I count on him/her to sign on?

[YES: *That's great! Thank you!* OR

UNDECIDED: *I'd like to help him/her/you make an informed decision; happy to send over some materials.* OR

NO: *May I ask why not? Can I send you some literature that I believe may change his/her mind?*]

Please call me this week at (_your phone number_) to let me know that you have seen the bill, and whether Rep. _____ will sign it."

In your conversation, please highlight why this bill is important to you personally. Your links or connections to Honduras or Central America; the impact that the caravans have had on you; your concerns, experiences, or witness of human rights abuses; your dedication to the earth—whatever it is, getting personal will help you make a connection.

Be friendly, firm, and clear. Practicing beforehand helps. Follow through as soon as possible on whatever you say you'll do. Finally, don't forget to say thank you! Staffers are busy, and often abused, and the merest expression of gratitude for their time goes a long way.

Co-sponsors of H.R. 1945 are listed here:

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr1945/details>

If your representative isn't on this list, you know what to do!

RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED USE

5F. H.R. 1945 1-PAGER

ACT H.R. 1945

THE BERTA CACERES HUMAN RIGHTS IN HONDURAS ACT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

March 28, 2019

Introduced by Mr. Johnson of Georgia

To suspend security assistance to Honduras from United States agencies and loans from multilateral development banks to police or military until such time as human rights violations by Honduran security forces cease and their perpetrators are brought to justice.

Amount of Funding

- FY2017 United States agencies allocated approximately **\$39 million**
- FY2012-18 The Inter-American Development Bank lent **\$60,000,000** to Honduran police, with United States approval.

Congressional Findings on Honduran Police, Military and Judicial System:

- Police commit human rights abuses, including torture, rape, illegal detention, and murder, with impunity.
- Individuals with records of gross human rights violations are in top positions within the police
- Minimal progress has been made in prosecuting police involved in corruption and human rights abuses.
- Unconstitutional creation of units of military police
- Corrupt judicial system and evidence of officials interconnected with organized crime and drug traffickers.
- Trade unionists, journalists, lawyers, afro-indigenous, indigenous, small farmers, LGBTI activists, human rights defenders and critics of the government remain at severe risks

Conditions for lifting suspensions and restrictions:

The Secretary of State determines and certifies that the Government of Honduras has—

- (1) Pursued all legal avenues to bring to trial and obtain a verdict of all those who ordered and carried out the murder of:
 - Berta Cáceres;
 - 100 small-farmer activists in the Aguán Valley;
 - 22 people and forced disappearance of 1 person in the context of the 2017 post electoral crisis;
 - armed attack on Félix Molina
 - shooting of Geovanny Sierra.
- (2) Prosecuted members of military and police forces who have violated human rights;
- (3) Withdrawn the military from domestic policing, in accordance with the Honduran Constitution, and ensured that all domestic police functions are separated from the command and control of the Armed Forces of Honduras and are instead directly responsible to civilian authority;
- (4) Established that it protects the rights of trade unionists, journalists, human rights defenders, the Indigenous, the Afro-Indigenous, small-farmers, LGBTI activists, critics of the government, and other civil society activists to operate without interference; and
- (5) Guarantee a judicial system that is capable of investigating, prosecuting, and bringing to justice members of the police and military who have committed human rights abuses.

5G. “TO WHAT COUNTRY HAVE YOU COME?” (PADRE ISMAEL MORENO, 23 MARCH 2019)

ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION, HONDURAS
2019 PILGRIMAGE

<https://vimeo.com/328913467> (Mark Coplan's video recorded at Radio Progreso)

Transcript of speech in English translation, using both the voiced translation provided at the time, and additional interpretive research.

Good morning brothers and sisters.

The idea is to give you some context for the country into which you have landed. I'd like to make it very simple, but that doesn't mean that the issues aren't deep.

To What Country Have You Come?

First, it's very rich in biodiversity. You will see it when you start driving inside the country. Beautiful mountains, the valleys, the rivers that we still have, the clear water that we still have in many parts of Honduras. Flora and fauna that is very rich. You are arriving to a country where we still have natural reserves. And we have so much that we can share with the present and the future generations. But, we will see... the way we are moving, in 50 years these reserves will be exhausted. We have borders with the Caribbean, the Pacific, with Guatemala, with El Salvador and with Nicaragua. We are geographically privileged.

To what country have you come? We are a country very rich in human resources. We are 9 million Hondurans in a territory of 112 square miles. We could fit 7 times in Chile, 9 times in Colombia, 17 times in Mexico, 75 times in Brazil and 87 times in the US. So, we are a small country. But we are 5 times bigger than El Salvador. (Laughter) After Nicaragua, we are the largest country in Central America. It's all relative.

To what country have you come? You are coming to a mestizo country. We have 9 original peoples with a long history of migration. Now we are known as the country of the caravans. Many times people are migrating within the territory. For example, the group that we visited in Bajo Aguan (Orbelina can testify to this) with people from all over the country in the Bajo Aguan. And many will not tell you, but they are from Guatemala or El Salvador. So, we have a long history of migration. We are not afraid of migration. What is a worry is that now there is more and more force (to migrate). You are right now in a city called El Progreso. Over 50% of the ones who live here, including myself, we have origins in El Salvador. We arrived over 100 years ago for the 'banana fever'. So, we have a beautiful migration experience. What we don't accept is that they are forcing us to migrate. But nobody is going to stop us from migrating. It doesn't matter how tall the walls are.

To what country have you come? You are coming to a country where the 9 million Hondurans, men and women, about 2 million are now living outside of Honduras, mainly in the US, in the east and west coasts of the US from Miami to New Jersey to Los Angeles. Many also live in Spain. Of those 7 million living here, 4.2 million would be considered economically active but over 3 million are unemployed. They are in the valleys of the informal economy. 2.2 million have some stable income. They work in the agro industry, sugar cane, melon, African palm, coffee. 140,000 work in the maquilas and many in service industries. About 1 million work in public offices. 10,000 people control the state. That's the political bureaucracy. About 500 families are millionaires. 150 are mega-millionaires. 5 people have a fortune that is equivalent to the salary of over 2 million Hondurans. These 5 families are the elite that controls the country. For every Lempira that is in the economy, 96 cents ends up in the hands of 150 families.

To what country have you come? You have come to a country that, over the past 100 years, has been under the foot of the US. Since 1905 we have been called the typical banana republic. It means that the US and multinational corporations, they see us and they relate to us under a basis where they consider us inferior. We provide them material for their economy and also material for their dessert. They have developed a conscience where we live so that people from outside tell us what to do. In 120 years we have developed a culture of underdevelopment.

To what country have you come? It's a country in which the state is driven by a 3 party alliance. 1- A political and corrupt bureaucracy. 2- The oligarchy represented by these 150 people. 3- The multinationals. This is the triple alliance. They are the ones in charge, independent of who is president or who is in congress. This triple alliance has support from 3 sources. The

government of the US has an impressive control and influence in the state. 2nd, the military. They are the ones who by force implement things. And 3rd is organized crime. You have arrived to a country that is directed by criminals starting with the coup 10 years ago.

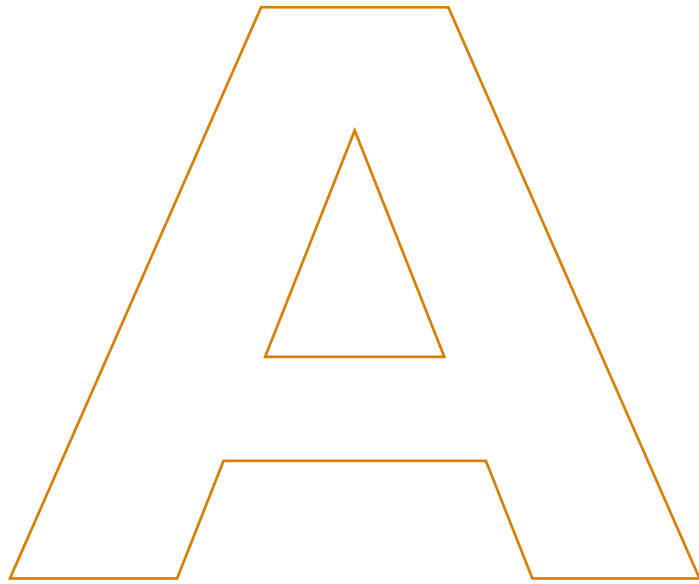
But also, the country you have come to... you will be meeting with people who are simple but with dignity, with a long migration history, but also people who have struggled and are resisting. Since 1536, with the symbol of the Lempira, to Berta Caceres, who was assassinated on March 2nd, 3 years ago. In 1954 we had a historic banana strike which was initiated right here in this town of El Progreso. Also, the historical student struggles, the resistance of women. [couldn't understand this section] Also a struggle from the christian based communities of faith. These communities are driven by very simple people that have a deep faith. In 1966 there was a movement of the delegates of the word of god. We have organized 100s of walks, 100s of campaigns driven by the god of life, animated by father Guadalupe [?] and the thousands of delegates, men and women... they have been committed, with their communities, without earning one penny.

To what country have you arrived, dear brothers and sisters? A country in which we are making an effort to recuperate the lost state and to advance a proposal of development. The proposal is called Sovereignty 2021. In 2021, in 2 years, we will be celebrating 200 years from the signing of independence from Spain. [couldn't understand this section] This signed document, coming from the Criollos, the land holders, the bureaucrats, the commerce sector and the oligarchs has controlled the state and all the decisions over the last 200 years. So, this project for 2021 is a proposal that would implement a new project from a new leadership team that would include the civil sector and

the popular sector and would have respectful relations with the international community. We will leave 200 years of a policy of prevention where the elite have been in this relationship with the people. And that has the elite very worried about a proposal coming from the people. Out of this concern, the elite hold tight control over their power. For over 200 years they have not trusted the people. The identity of this culture of the elite explains the domination that infiltrates through the society. It has an oppression with 3 emphasis. 1- Class oppression - the people at the top against the people at the bottom. 2- Racist oppression - criollos against the mestizos, black against white, white against mestizos. 3- Sexist oppression - the patriarchy. The domination of men against women. The proposal for 2021 projects a new concept of sovereignty based on the trust that the people have the capacity to make their own decisions. That the decisions will not come from the north, the US, that the decisions will not come from the multinationals, that the decisions do not come from the oligarchy, they don't come from the top. A new concept in which the people, through their organizations acquire the power to make their own decisions over their family, over their land, decisions over their rivers, their forests, decisions related to education and health, decisions over their freeways, and all their possessions. All the decisions a state must make vis-à-vis their people.

That is the country you have come to, and you are very welcome... all of you.

— **Father Ismael Moreno,**
Director of Radio Progreso and ERIC



APPENDIX

ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION,
HONDURAS 2019 PILGRIMAGE BRIEF:

U.S. Responsibility and Roadmap for Change

03 July 2019



Root Causes of Migration, Honduras 2019 Pilgrimage Brief: **U.S. Responsibility and Roadmap for Change**

An international delegation of 75 faith leaders involved with issues of social justice and immigration traveled to Honduras from March 18th to 25th, 2019, led by the SHARE Foundation, Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Justice Team. We went to listen, learn, and witness. Our objectives were to bring back to the U.S. a better understanding of what is at the root of the flow of migrants, especially youth and families, from Central America (and particularly Honduras), and to act in solidarity with people striving for freedom, safety, and justice under law. Now, we are working to turn what we learned into concrete action.

The findings and stories in this brief are very personal and important to us. We listened to and conferred with hundreds of Hondurans, and have seen the truth of their struggle. We bring you an account of daunting problems, tempered by the determination to face them squarely, as the people we met do every day—with bravery, hope, and compassion.

The root causes of migration

are myriad and intermingled: an extractive economic model causing displacement, environmental degradation, and worker exploitation; militarization of society; arms proliferation; land theft; and corruption of state institutions. These underlying root causes are interrelated with pervasive violence and murder, especially of women, and, for all these, the near-total impunity of transgressors. The United States—our government, corporations, and citizens—bears significant responsibility for these precipitating conditions. Fortunately, that means we have the power to effect significant change for the better. Most immediately, we ask for support of H.R. 1945, the Berta

Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, suspending security assistance to Honduras until human rights violations cease and the rule of law and due process are restored.¹

U.S. policy towards Honduras perpetuates a regime that quashes dissent, reinforces and rewards bad governance and corruption, and disregards human rights—creating unlivable conditions and decimating the institutions of civil society, directly driving the exodus. Honduras, after a decade of large-scale forced migration, is the country of caravans: the diaspora now comprises 2 million Hondurans living outside the country—roughly 22% of the total population.²

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1945>

² Padre Ismail Moreno (“Padre Melo”), director of Radio Progreso and ERIC.

As these migrants reach the U.S., they face enormous hurdles to safety and asylum. We believe that our moral standing as a society is measured by our actions toward those most vulnerable among us—those newly arriving at the U.S./Mexico border as well as those struggling for justice in order to be able to stay in their countries of origin.

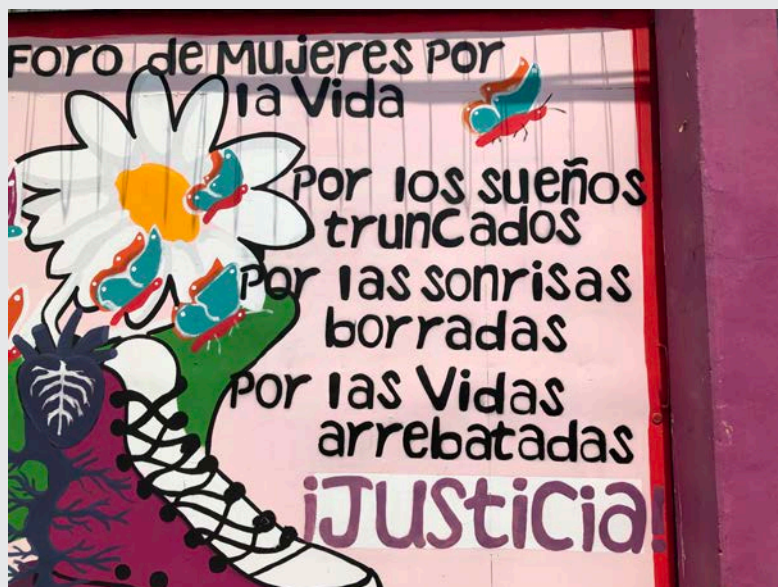
With the guidance of Radio Progreso, a Jesuit-run, independent media institution, we investigated the situation on the ground in a number of rural and urban communities. We saw that Honduras is a country rich in natural resources, and yet the vast majority of Honduran people are falling deeper into impoverishment. We learned that the roots of the poverty and violence, and the forced migration, are failed U.S. foreign policies toward Honduras, as well as corporate-driven economic policies imposed on the region. Continued U.S. military and security assistance is making matters worse.

Our immersion in Hondurans' struggle for dignity and justice

began with an invitation from Father Ismael “Padre Melo” Moreno to make the pilgrimage. Padre Melo, a leader in defense of human rights, is the director

of Radio Progreso and ERIC (Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación y Comunicación). Through those connections and others, the delegation met with numerous local organizations, community leaders, environmental and human rights defenders, journalists and brave ordinary citizens, Honduran government officials, the Office of the U.N. High Commission for Human Rights in Honduras, and the U.S. Embassy's Charge d'Affaires.

In the rural Bajo Aguán Valley and Santa Barbara, as well as the urban areas of San Pedro Sula and El Progreso—key regions experiencing a heavy presence of the military, displacement, and human rights abuses—we learned firsthand of day-to-day life. We met with organizations fighting the underlying causes of migration, communities of subsistence farmers, and the indigenous Lenca and Garifuna communities, who are challenging the theft of their lands and extraction of their natural resources. In response to peaceful protest and resistance, they face targeted threats and assassinations of their leaders. We listened to the powerful voices and stories of strong women, who are fighting against impunity for the murders of more than 400 women annually, leading land-rights battles, starting businesses, and helping each other. We heard from those caring for children



Women's Forum
for life
for the dreams
cut short
for the smiles
erased
for the lives
snatched away
Justice!



Meeting the Lenca Community: Betty Vasquez

Activist and leader of the Lenca community, Vasquez calls herself a feminist environmentalist... then smiles and says that makes her a double criminal in Honduras! “I had to move from San Pedro Sula to Santa Barbara when gang members literally moved in and took over my house.” Now, due to her efforts to stop the destruction of land and rivers by hydroelectric corporations, she has received death threats.

with HIV, and those fighting for the survival of their towns; teachers and students; faith leaders, journalists, organizers, and ordinary citizens.

We witnessed steadfast determination in the people we met: their multifaceted resistance, embrace of difference, and willingness to step in where services of government have been criminally withdrawn and withheld. We wrestled with our country’s own culpability in shaping the harsh realities facing many Hondurans, and the forces that contribute to the decision to leave their homes and communities. We got a glimpse into the incredible battles being waged by people, often at great personal risk, to provide a secure future for themselves, their families, and their communities, there, in the country they love. We heard repeatedly that they emigrate only under great duress.

Gangs are lethal and prevalent, but they don’t exist in a vacuum. The power of the gangs is predicated on the climate of impunity and corruption that flows from the top. Legal and illegal arms are everywhere, and gangs commonly brandish military weapons. Many are the foot soldiers of the drug cartels that have infiltrated, corrupted, and now operate in concert with the highest levels of the Honduran government and economic elites. A full perspective makes clear that gangs and extortion are not stand-alone root causes of migration, belying the disingenuous

narrative put forward by the U.S. administration. Gangs, like the migration overall, are the result of the systemic gutting of the rule of law in Honduras.

Frustration and disillusionment among Hondurans followed the June 2009 coup d’état, which the United States did not challenge. Instead, the U.S. quickly recognized the subsequent government—for which we need to recognize our complicity. The aftermath included the removal of checks and balances, the stacking of the courts with regime loyalists, and an epidemic of corruption. Add to this, irregularities and fraud in every election since then; deepening inequality and worsening unemployment; assassinations and threats made against human rights defenders and community leaders, with near total impunity for the perpetrators; and the giveaways of nearly one third of the country’s land to mining and extractive industries, with reckless disregard for human and environmental health.

Another key event that unmasked the nation’s corruption and led to massive popular disillusionment was the November 2017 presidential election, in which Juan Orlando Hernandez was declared the winner for a second term. This violated the Honduran constitution, which prohibits re-election, and moreover, the election process was considered so fraudulent that the Organization of American States called for a new election.

That did not happen; instead, the U.S. quickly recognized Hernandez once more. Massive protests broke out across the country, met with massive repression by the Honduran security forces.

As reported by the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, there has been practically no investigation of the murder of at least 22 people who were killed protesting the last election,³ never mind convictions, while thousands of people are under indictment on charges stemming from engagement in legal peaceful protests.⁴

The economic development model in Honduras includes mono-cropping, mining, and other extractive industries, resulting in the contamination of the environment and displacement of large numbers of people. These industries are protected by a militarized police force, in which military troops have been commonly deployed domestically. Human rights and environmental activists are criminalized for their work against transnational and domestic corporations, and development projects, that threaten their livelihoods and lands. Prominent leaders have been assassinated, including indigenous environmentalist Berta Cáceres, killed while protecting the river of Gualcarque from a hydroelectric project (according to independent, expert investigation⁵) by sicarios—a death squad—with logistical support from organized crime and military officers.

In just the last three years, the U.S. government has appropriated roughly \$2.1 billion to Central America through security and aid initiatives, such as the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI). Roughly half of this money has gone to fund security and military projects.⁶ (In theory, at least; our hosts explained that much of the money earmarked for

humanitarian assistance is diverted—often appropriated for further militarization.)

According to Reuters (March 30, 2019), the U.S. provided about \$98 million to Honduras in 2016 alone (the latest year on which they have reported). U.S. money continues to fund the militarization of police and security forces, and buys weapons, technology, and surveillance equipment manufactured by U.S. companies.



Spent canisters of U.S.-made tear gas used against people protesting alarming irregularities in the 2017 election.

Clearly, the United States' current response to forced migration, focused on border walls, detention, and deportation, has little to do with addressing why people are fleeing for their lives. What's more, U.S. support for the Honduran government, and for economic policies that mostly enrich the elite, actually precipitates and exacerbates the 'push factors'—impoverishment, displacement, crime, violence, and impunity—at the root of mass migration. Concrete action is required now to address these root causes and change the situation on the ground in Honduras.

3 https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/HN/2017ReportElectionsHRViolations_Honduras_EN.pdf

4 <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/multimedia/2016/honduras/honduras-en.html>

5 Grupo Asesor Internacional de Personas Expertas. <https://gaipe.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/GAYPE-Report-English.pdf>

6 <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44812.pdf> U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress, Updated June 12, 2019. Congressional Research Service <https://crsreports.congress.gov/R44812>

Root Causes of Migration from Honduras

1 Environmental Degradation: Significant environmental damage, and natural resource lands taken, in pursuit of mega-projects like dams, mining, tourist resorts, plantations, and highways. Harm to human health, loss of subsistence ability, and often forced displacement of whole communities of small farmers and indigenous populations. Breaking of national and international law protecting national parks and wilderness, and assuring free, prior, and informed consent to indigenous communities anticipating natural resources impacts.

Strategic Action: A, C, D1, D2

2 Fear and Violence: Systemic and state-sponsored violence, which permits gang violence, street crime, domestic violence, and an epidemic of femicide—on average, more than 400 murders of women each year.⁷

Strategic Actions: A, B, D2, D3

3 Lack of Jobs: Widespread unemployment, unfair wages, and illegal employment practices (like rampant age discrimination and union-busting) by international companies and sweatshop owners.

Strategic Actions: A, D

4 Repression and Criminalization: Repression of peaceful, constitutionally protected civil protest through use of military force, private security services, and gangs, and a campaign of criminalization (false allegations used to round up dissenters, and illegal arrests of people peacefully protesting) waged against land defenders, journalists, and union leaders.

Strategic Actions: A, C, D

5 Extreme Poverty and Inequality: An estimated 65% of Hondurans live in poverty.⁸ Local, national, and global economic and political systems promote an economy of extraction, privatization, and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the very few.⁹

Strategic Action: A, D

6 Public and Private Corruption: Widespread corruption and blatant complicity of police, military, corporations, and Honduran elite in drug trafficking and the resulting violence, as well as in forced displacement, suppression of journalists, and misappropriation of aid funds.

Strategic Actions: B, C, D

7 Weapons Proliferation: The uncontrolled proliferation of legal and illegal small arms throughout every level of society. Many if not most of these firearms are manufactured in the U.S.¹⁰

Strategic Actions: B, D1, D3

8 Militarization by U.S.: U.S. military and police aid, weapons sales, and security assistance that amplify militarization of Honduran domestic forces, equipping and underwriting the escalating violations of human rights.¹¹

Strategic Actions: B, D1, D3

9 Impunity: Roughly 95% of violent crimes in Honduras go unsolved.¹² The experiences of those we met show that looking to law enforcement for help is as likely to lead to persecution as to a remedy. Public officials seldom, if ever, face serious investigations for violations. This culture of impunity, where murderers walk free, enables and exacerbates all of the other root causes.

Strategic Action: A, C, D1, D2

⁷ <https://iudpas.unah.edu.hn/dmsdocument/6970-muerte-violenta-de-mujeres-y-femicidios-nacional-enero-diciembre-2017-ed-13>

⁸ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/countries/honduras>

⁹ <http://cepr.net/documents/publications/Honduras-2013-11-final.pdf>

¹⁰ The delegation has a fact sheet on arms sales and trafficking, citing sources, available upon request.

¹¹ <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R44812.pdf> U.S. Strategy for Engagement in Central America: Policy Issues for Congress, Updated June 12, 2019. Congressional Research Service <https://crsreports.congress.gov> R44812

¹² <https://www.cfr.org/background/central-americas-violent-northern-triangle>

Strategic Actions to Address Root Causes

Understanding what is at the root of the flow of migrants requires us to act in solidarity with people striving for freedom, safety, and justice under law, and take concrete action.

The U.S.' deterrence and enforcement-only strategy is having chaotic and devastating impacts on arriving asylum seekers and is, in many ways, actually fueling the very migration it seeks to reduce. People of conscience are stepping into this void, providing accompaniment, direct services, legal services, and humanitarian aid to vulnerable migrants, and advocating for fundamental policy changes. Action and advocacy aimed at eliminating the root causes of forced migration from Honduras requires similar strategic multifaceted work.

We call on members of Congress to recognize the U.S.' role in worsening the poverty and violence that force people to migrate, and to take the following necessary measures:

- A.** Co-sponsor—and then pass—**H.R. 1945, the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act**: the suspension of U.S. security assistance to Honduras until human rights violations by security forces cease, perpetrators are brought to justice, and the rule of law is restored.¹³
- B.** Support **Senate Bill 459 (Menendez), the Stopping the Traffic in Overseas Proliferation of Ghost Guns Act** and companion bill **H.R. 1134, the Prevent Crime and Terrorism Act of 2019**. Keep arms trade oversight authority with the State Department and Congress, not the Commerce Department.
- C.** Contact the State Department ASAP, and urge that the U.S. Embassy in Honduras speak out against the repression of protestors by state security forces. Post on social media calling for human rights protections in Honduras.
- D.** End support for the current central government of Honduras and the illegitimate presidency of Juan Orlando Hernandez.
 - 1. Publicly denounce human rights abuses and repression of peaceful public protest: the use of live ammunition and tear gas against protesters and against civilians in their homes; the illegal search, seizure, and prosecution of peaceful protesters; and the criminalization of human rights defenders and environmental activists.
 - 2. Publicly call for investigations and judicial accountability for those responsible for the assassinations of protestors since November 27, 2017.
 - 3. Stop training Hondurans at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) (formerly the School of the Americas) and elsewhere. Stop the flow of U.S. weapons to the military and private security forces. Stop excusing the illegal role of Honduras' military/paramilitaries in domestic police functions.
- E.** *(Immigration Policy Reform and the Border Crisis)* Pass meaningful reforms that prioritize human rights. Uphold access to asylum in the U.S., in a manner that offers a genuine humanitarian response, as required under both U.S. and international law.
 - 1. End family separation immediately.
 - 2. Provide decent, humane accommodations and access to legal services for all those in detention. Demand accountability from contractors and agencies responsible.
 - 3. End the Migration Protection Protocols (a.k.a. 'Remain in Mexico') policy, which puts asylum seekers at risk as they wait in what are often dangerous situations.¹⁴
 - 4. Safeguard the DACA program and TPS protections. Create a permanent pathway to citizenship.

¹³ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1945>

¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/26/us/asylum-officers-trump-migrants.html>

For More Information:



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Leadership Conference of Women Religious

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