

HONDURAS ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT – PROAH

SUMMARY OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND EVENTS IN HONDURAS JUNE 2014

June 28 marked the fifth anniversary of the coup. This month **children and young people once again dominated the headlines with the surge in young migrants arriving in the US** (see P.2), their sheer number for many a stark illustration of the dramatic deterioration in the security and general human rights situation in Honduras over the past five years.¹ This follows the spate of horrific murders of youngsters in May and the persecution of Guadalupe Ruelas, the Casa Alianza director, a prominent advocate for minors, who has been vocal in his criticism of the government in the light of the general increase in the violent deaths of children and young people (see our [May](#) summary).

In the reflections on the anniversary of the coup, **militarization has been repeatedly mentioned as one of the defining characteristics of the post-coup era, along with impunity.**² June in this respect has unfortunately been typical. It saw the murder of a Lenca indigenous leader by soldiers in an unprovoked attack (P.3), as well as fresh concerns expressed about the Guardians of the Fatherland program (P.15). There have also been new cases of criminalization of legitimate social protest, while the perpetrators of crimes against the protesters remain at large (see the cases of San Francisco de Opalaca (P.3) and El Tránsito (P.6)). Although the murders of campesinos in the Bajo Aguán are finally being investigated, there are concerns about the transparency of the process (P.7), while the killings of the three Locomapa indigenous people remain in impunity and the persecution of those defending the community's natural resources continues (P.5). Two more journalists were murdered, and in at least one case, the killing could be politically motivated, and there were further cases where journalists have been intimidated or dismissed because of their editorial line (P.9 and 10). Further intimidation of human rights defenders has included surveillance of the offices of COFADEH, and (possibly) the temporary abduction and beating of one of its staff (P.3).

The **government's reaction** has also been consistent – in blaming the messenger. Following the letter sent in May to the US Secretary of State, [signed by 108 US Congress members](#), outlining the deteriorating human rights situation in Honduras, President Juan Orlando Hernández [announced](#) that he would use his visit to the States in June to speak to officials and contradict the reports that 'bad Hondurans' were spreading abroad and which were damaging the country's reputation.

ACI-Participa released its report for 2013 on the situation for human rights defenders – [Impunity and Defenselessness](#) (in Spanish) – a useful, if depressing, round-up of the year, which deals with the legal and institutional framework (or lack thereof) for the defense of human rights, as well as listing the attacks on the most vulnerable human rights defenders - campesinos, opponents of economic projects (most notably La Nueva Esperanza, Rio Blanco and Locomapa), members of the LGBTI community, journalists and lawyers. It recommends a new social contract on human rights and security, with wide participation of civil society.

¹ See for example, Dan Beeton's article for Al Jazeera [The legacy children of the Honduran coup](#) and John Perry's article for the London Review of Books [The Nicaraguan Model](#)

² See, for example, Radio Progreso and ERIC [Impunidad y militarismo prevalecen a 5 años del golpe de Estado](#)

CHILD MIGRANTS

UNICEF and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACtHR) expressed deep concern at the number of unaccompanied child migrants arriving at the US's southwest border, with a record number of 52,193 apprehended by the US Border Patrol so far in the 2014 fiscal year (October 1, 2013 to June 15, 2014), double the number for the same period last year. Of the children apprehended so far in the 2014 fiscal year, the vast majority (51,279 or 98%) are from four countries - Honduras (15,027), Guatemala (12,670), Mexico (12,146), and El Salvador (11,436). While the numbers from Mexico have tended to fluctuate over the past six years, the increase from the other three countries since 2011, when the US first registered the 'surge', has been relentless and dramatic, particularly for El Salvador and Honduras, with the number from Honduras more than doubling annually (974 in 2011, 2,997 in 2012, 6,747 in 2013, and 15,027 in 2014, with three-and-a-half months still to go before the end of the fiscal year).³

The report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Children on the Run, published in March, found that the reasons for leaving were complex and multi-faceted. It was based on a survey of child migrants from Mexico and Central America who had been apprehended. Of the children from Honduras interviewed, 80% mentioned hopes for family reunification, better opportunities to work or study, or to help their families, but very few gave one of these as the only reason. A total of 57% of the children cited serious harm as a reason for leaving,⁴ with 44% threatened with or the victims of violence by organized armed criminal actors, 24% reporting abuse in the home, and 11% the victims of violence both in society and at home. 21% mentioned deprivation as a reason for leaving.

The IACtHR expressed concern at **the conditions in which the children are held** by the US authorities, with many kept in Customs and Border Protection detention for longer than the established 72-hour maximum. In addition, it had received reports from human rights organizations about abuses suffered by children while in detention, including insufficient food and water; overcrowded and unsanitary holding cells and facilities; and a lack of blankets, mattresses, and clean bedding provisions, as well as over 100 reports of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse by agents towards children filed in a complaint by NGOs against the US Department of Homeland Security.⁵ As well as calling for the root causes of the child migration to be addressed, the IACtHR and the UNHCR in its report requested that the migrants to be treated as children first and foremost. They also called for their rights to be protected, including **screening of the children to establish whether they should be given refugee status or other forms of international protection** – potential grounds being if the child suffered violence in society, abuse in the home, or deprivation of basic survival necessities.⁶

At the moment, it appears that the main response on the part of the US government has been to press for quicker deportation processes, and to request a \$3.7 billion dollar funding package for militarized border "security" and for state security forces in the Northern Triangle and Mexico, which are responsible for human rights abuses.⁷

³ US Customs and Border Protection Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children

⁴ Other studies come up with comparable figures – see for example, Insight Crime 'No place for children': Central America's Youth Exodus

⁵ See also Democracy Now program Children on the Run

⁶ UNHCR P. 44 Children on the Run and Guidance Note on Refugee Claims Relating to Victims of Organized Gangs

⁷ There are a number of thoughtful articles on the US government and media response to the crisis, as well as its root causes – see, for example, Steve Rendall on FAIR blog All They Will Call You Will Be Detainees, and Dana Frank in the Huffington Post Who's Responsible for the Flight of Honduran Children?

COFADEH: SURVEILLANCE AND ATTACKS

On June 18, Amnesty International issued an [urgent action](#) on behalf of COFADEH (Committee of the Families of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras), whose staff had reported being the subject of surveillance and attacks since May 13. They had seen the same red car with tinted windows parked near the entrance of their office at the same time every morning, when they arrived at work. At the end of May, one man was seen taking pictures of the building, and another was spotted standing near it with a gun. On 4 June a member of staff was kidnapped for two hours, after getting into a shared taxi. Two women and a man inside severely beat her on her face with the butt of a gun, stabbed her leg, neck and hand with a pencil, and tried to strangle her with a cable. She was held for two hours, robbed and then released. On 15 June, the same member of staff was mugged in the street near COFADEH's office. Amnesty is calling on the Honduran authorities to implement the precautionary measures ordered by the IACtHR in November 2009 for members of COFADEH and their immediate families, including regular police patrolling near the office as previously agreed, but which had not been carried out for the previous two months.

LENCA PEOPLE

Murder of community leader by army in Intibucá

On June 6, Radio Progreso published an [article](#) on the impunity surrounding the murders of indigenous people, which included nine Lencas murdered since 2012. This figure rose to 10 on June 18, with the [killing of José Husbaldo Guzmán Argueta](#), aged 62, a well-respected community leader and member of COPINH. He was in the center of Colomoncagua, a town near the Salvadoran border, sorting out the arrangements for a drinking water project when he was attacked by four soldiers from the 10th Batallion and a policeman, under the command of the sergeant responsible for the area. He was beaten up and then, while he was on the ground, one of the soldiers shot him in the face with an M-16 rifle, killing him instantly.

Colomoncagua was the site of a refugee camp during the 1980s where in 1985, the 10th Batallion killed two Salvadorans and wounded 50 others, in a [case](#) taken up by the IACtHR. The Batallion was also involved in the [disappearance of Juan Humberto Sánchez](#) in 1992, and more recently it has been responsible for harrassing young people known to be members of COPINH, including an [incident](#) in 2011 when a young man was stabbed in the back by an off-duty soldier.

San Francisco de Opalaca – community leaders and journalists tried for sedition

On 24 June, 36 people, most members of COPINH, [appeared before the court](#) in La Esperanza, Intibucá, accused of 'sedition detrimental to the internal security of the State of Honduras and usurpation of functions'. The charges are in response to the establishment of an Indigenous Government in San Francisco de Opalaca municipality, set up as an alternative by the Lenca people to the administration headed by Socorro Sánchez, the National Party mayor who they consider to have been elected fraudulently in November. They had effectively prevented him from taking office since January 25 through a 24-hour blockade and vigil at the town hall. At the hearing, the accused were ordered to sign at the court-house in Opalaca every two weeks and banned from entering the town hall. The next hearing is scheduled for July 22.

The people charged include Entimo Vásquez, the mayor appointed via the Indigenous Government, his town councillors, Jesús Rodríguez, COPINH's Land, Territory and Environment Coordinator, leaders of other organizations such as ADRO (Western Region Rural Development Association), COCAOPAL Cooperative, as well as a reporter from ERIC and Radio Progreso (see P.10) and from Radio Puca

Opalaca. (In a [press release](#), COPINH accused the local National Party of damaging the latter Radio's aerial on May 30).

The court at La Esperanza had been the scene of the judicial persecution of three members of COPINH's leadership last year, including the order of imprisonment against Berta Cáceres, its coordinator, in September (see P.1 of our [summary for July to September 2013](#)), because of their support for the Rio Blanco community in its opposition to the Agua Zarca dam project. At the time, Amnesty International stated that it would consider the three **prisoners of conscience** if they were imprisoned.⁸ The case of San Francisco of Opalaca has other parallels with Rio Blanco's – while the state is keen to criminalize legitimate social protest, it is content to leave the murders of protesters in impunity. Although a soldier has been charged with the killing on July 15, 2013, of [Tomás García](#), a community leader of Río Blanco, he has still not been sentenced, a year on. In Opalaca, **despite the killers' identities being known in both cases, there has been no apparent effort to bring charges against them** for the murder of Entimo Vásquez's brother, Justiniano, on February 21, nor of Irene Meza, killed by employees of the 'official' mayor in a brazen attack on May 25 (see our [summary for May](#)).

A couple of weeks before the hearing, the community held an [assembly](#) at which they demanded indigenous sovereignty and Berta Cáceres argued that one of the main reasons for the government wishing to impose its National Party candidate as mayor was because it wished to exploit their natural resources, with **the building of a possible model city in the Azacualpa Valley and a military base in the San Antonio Valleys in Erandique**.

Jesús de Otoro – Illegal Seizure of Communal Land

The Lenca organization CINPH (Honduras Indigenous People Power Coordinating Body) [reported](#) that early June, the territory of five communities in this municipality had been seized by armed, masked men, apparently acting on behalf of PROINTER (International Suppliers), a hydroelectric company. According to CINPH, the takeover was authorized by SERNA (Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment) despite the fact that the communities have full legal title to the land. The communities have reported the takeover to the Public Prosecution Service, but with no response so far. Meanwhile the indigenous communities' farms and crops are being destroyed.

In January, the Lenca leader and human rights defender, [Justo Sorto Sorto, was murdered](#) in the municipality, it is believed due to his opposition to hydroelectric schemes there.

LA MOSKITIA: DRUGS TRADE THREAT TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

An [article by Al-Jazeera](#) highlights the drugs trade's impact on the way of life of indigenous people in La Moskitia, home to the Miskito, Pech and Tawahka peoples, and a wilderness area before it became used for landing strips by traffickers. The tribal people who live along the area's rivers and lagoons farm cassava, rice and bananas and hunt game such as deer and pigs. However, the boom in air-trafficking has flooded the region with heavily armed criminals and illicit cash, accelerating deforestation by affiliated ranchers, palm oil barons and loggers. The indigenous peoples are increasingly finding their access to traditional lands denied by these invaders and their ancient way of life disrupted, while young people are increasingly turning their backs on tradition, lured by the cash, drugs, weapons and consumer lifestyle of the traffickers. As a result of the criminal violence brought by this invasion, as many as five indigenous communities have been either totally or partly abandoned

⁸ See Amnesty International's press release [Honduran Indigenous leaders at risk of unfair imprisonment](#)

in La Mosquitia, including Ahuasbila and neighboring Rus Rus.

MINING: LOCOMAPA

The aggression shown towards members of the Tolupan indigenous community of Locomapa, Yoro, continues, despite a total of 38 people being granted precautionary measures⁹ by the IACtHR in December due to the persecution suffered through their peaceful opposition to illegal logging and antinomy mining, a stand which resulted in the murder of three of their number on August 25, 2013. Their killers, Selvin Fúnez Matute and Carlos Matute ('Los Matute') are still at large and continue to issue threats, despite being subject to arrest warrants.¹⁰

However, this time, the most serious [incident](#) involved a retired general, Finlander Armijo Uclés, who according to MADJ (Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice), turned up with a gun on June 9 at the home of Santos Antonio Cordova, one of the beneficiaries of the precautionary measures, and his partner, María Idalia Soto. Along with his armed bodyguards, the retired general destroyed the family's banana and coffee crops, and stole building materials. The couple's four children were alone in the house, and Uclés told them that he would raze it to the ground the next day as it was his property. The family is now displaced. It is the second time that the family has had to endure aggression from Uclés for defending their land against him. Uclés has been trying to force Tolupans in the area off their land since he arrived in 1980.

MINING: LA NUEVA ESPERANZA

On June 30, there was a hearing in the case of Wilfredo Funes, the foreman of Minerales Victoria's exploration works in La Nueva Esperanza, in Tela municipality, Atlántida, charged with holding [two PROAH observers captive](#) for two-and-a-half hours on July 25, 2013. He was also charged with threats and trespass on the property of a couple where the PROAH members had spent the night to accompany them because of the threats they had received for refusing to sell their land to the mining company. Funes was responsible, directly or indirectly, for many of the acts of intimidation leveled against the villagers and their supporters for their peaceful opposition to mining exploration, as a result of which they were granted precautionary measures by the IACtHR on December 24.¹¹

At the hearing, which PROAH attended as an observer, and COFADEH represented the two PROAH volunteers who were held captive, it was ruled that, despite the fact that Funes had pleaded guilty to the charges, there would be a normal trial with a public hearing, as opposed to a shortened trial procedure. Although this was due to a legal technicality, it was welcomed by Víctor Fernández of MADJ, who has been supporting the village and was representing the couple, as he had argued for the right of the victims to be heard at the trial. Afterwards, he also stressed the need to put on trial those who were ultimately responsible for these crimes (such as the mining company owner himself, Lenir Pérez, Miguel Facussé's son-in-law), as well as for other criminal acts such as threats by phone, which had so far not been investigated.

⁹ [IACtHR precautionary measures – PM 416/13 of December 19, 2013 – 18 members of the Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y la Justicia \(MADJ\) and their Families, Honduras \(in Spanish only\)](#)

¹⁰ For more information on Locomapa and its situation, see Sandra Cuffe's article "[We came back to Struggle](#)"

¹¹ IACtHR precautionary measures – [PM 195/13 of December 24, 2013 – Leaders and Human Rights Defenders of the Community of La Nueva Esperanza and of Florida Regional Community Council, Honduras \(in Spanish only\)](#)

MINING: EL TRÁNSITO – PROTESTERS PUT ON TRIAL

Eight community leaders from El Tránsito, Nacaome, in the Department of Valle, attended a court hearing on June 26, accused of trespassing on the property of María Valle Valladares. This is the result of their peaceful protest in which they have sought to block access to reactivated mine-workings on her land. They are concerned about the impact this is having on the water supply, already now contaminated with cadmium and iron, as well as the effect of dynamiting on their homes, close to the workings. (For more background, see our P. 9 of our [March summary](#)). The next hearing is scheduled for August 20, and in the meantime the eight have been ordered to sign at the court in Nacaome once a month. According to one of them, the judge made an inspection of the site and said that the roadblock was not on María Valle's property but on a public highway, and was essentially a checkpoint serving the community (if true, raising the question of why he did not dismiss the case at the first hearing).¹² Recently, security guards from the mining company had fired on 25 of the protesters but, according to the community council (*patronato*) the police refused to accept the complaint and the Public Prosecution Service has also failed to act.¹³

MINING: MORE DECLARATIONS OF OPPOSITION

Following the example of El Negrito, Yoro (see P. 7 of March summary), two more municipalities declared themselves mining-free zones in June – **San Nicolás, in Santa Bárbara, and Balfate in Colón**, on the Caribbean coast. In addition, the council of the San Isidro Labrador Catholic Church in Tocoa, Colón, in a formal statement, declared its opposition to mining and hydroelectric concessions in the municipality, arguing that they had been imposed without proper consultation or independent and robust environmental impact assessments. The declaration follows the [statement](#) in July 2013 by the Diocese of La Ceiba, expressing similar opposition to mining and hydroelectric concessions in the department of Atlántida, including in La Nueva Esperanza. This attitude is in stark contrast to that of Cardinal Rodríguez, the head of the Catholic Church in Honduras, who appears to have undergone a Damascene conversion in reverse – from condemning mining because of its impacts (for example, his [description](#) of the Siria Valley as a 'natural tragedy' in 2001) to active endorsement of it (such as his [collaboration](#) with Five Star Mining in Agalteca, whose operations have had a [negative impact](#) on the local area and population).

MINING: REPORT ISSUED ON SITUATION IN HONDURAS 2007-2012

ICEFI (Central American Institute for Fiscal Studies) in conjunction with the Danish NGO IBIS, issued their [Analysis of Mining in Honduras 2007-2012](#) (in Spanish). The study highlights the way in which mining in Honduras provokes conflict, with confrontations between the mining companies and communities, the low levels of tax contributions at national and municipal level, environmental problems, human rights violations, a weak legal framework favorable to mining companies and weak state institutions incapable of properly regulating and monitoring mining activities. It takes two gold mines as examples – San Martín in the Siria Valley, Francisco Morazan, of the Canadian company Goldcorp, and San Andrés, in Copán, owned by a succession of Canadian companies, currently Aura Minerals, which is [still active](#). In both cases, there has been large-scale deforestation and contamination of the water supply, with the population suffering illnesses associated with the mines and left worse off materially than they were before.

¹² ERIC and Radio Progreso [Dictan medidas cautelares contra 8 pobladores de la aldea El Tránsito al sur de Honduras](#)

¹³ ERIC and Radio Progreso [Ocho personas comparecerán ante la justicia por oponerse a explotación minera](#)

This lack of financial benefit extends nationally - in the period under review, it is estimated that in Honduras, mining companies' payment of taxes as a proportion of profits, at 10%, fell well below that of Peru (27%), Chile (36%), Colombia (37%), and Bolivia (58%). The new Mining Law, passed in 2013, does little to change this situation, while the report authors express the fear that, given the lack of social consensus for its objective to promote mining, combined with weak institutions, it will only serve to further increase social conflict.

MINING: PERMANENT PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL ISSUES VERDICT ON CANADIAN COMPANIES

Goldcorp was one of five Canadian companies, operating in Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala and Chile, to be found guilty of human rights violations in a preliminary verdict issued by the Permanent People's Tribunal in its Session on the Canadian Mining Industry in Latin America, from May 30 to June 1. The three main areas of human rights violated were the right to life, including an adequate quality of life, nutrition, water, health, housing, the freedom and integrity of persons, security and a healthy and safe environment; the right of peoples to self-determination and thus to the land and territories where they live and their natural resources, and the right to participation and to free, prior and informed consent. The Tribunal also considers the Canadian state and the host countries to be at fault for '*not having prevented and for having facilitated, tolerated or covered up these human rights violations, as well as for having impeded in practice access to adequate mechanisms that would protect the victims from these violations*'.

LAND DISPUTES: BAJO AGUÁN

Exhumations

Fifteen bodies of murdered campesinos were exhumed from cemeteries and oil palm plantations in various parts of the Bajo Aguán from June 16 to 20, by UMVIBA (Bajo Aguán Violent Deaths Unit). The Unit was established in February to conduct investigations into killings in the context of land disputes in the region.¹⁴ It is exhuming those bodies which have not before been subject to an autopsy, and aims to disinter a further 25 corpses in the following weeks. However, for these it needs information on the whereabouts of the corpses, some of which are of people who have been disappeared.

The process, which was greeted with caution by campesino movements when it was first announced, has been criticized in a statement issued by the **Aguán Valley Regional Agrarian Platform, which has declared it illegal due to a lack of transparency, as well as to the failure to consult** and involve the murder victims' relatives. The Platform accuses it of being an attempt to sanitize the image of Miguel Facussé's Dinant company, following the critical report by the World Bank's Compliance Advisor Ombudsman (CAO) on its loan to the company, which included concerns that Dinant's security guards had been implicated in the murder of campesinos (see P.8). The statement demands a halt to the exhumations until the consent and participation of the victims' relatives has been secured, as well as the appointment of independent international forensic experts proposed by the campesino organizations and families concerned. It also demands details of the source of funding for UMVIBA, as they have heard that it is being financed by USAID.¹⁵

¹⁴ For more background on UMVIBA, see Conexihon Unidad especializada investigará asesinatos en el Aguán and P.10 of our January-February summary

¹⁵ For more background, see Giorgio Trucchi's article Honduras: Exhumación de campesinos asesinados y el negocio palmero de Dinant

El Tumbador

This was mentioned by the Platform as an example of a case where there was clear evidence of involvement of Miguel Facussé's security guards in the murder of campesinos, but which remained in impunity. On November 15, 2010, five campesinos from the MCA (Aguán Campesino Movement) were participating in an attempted land occupation at the oil palm plantation when they were shot dead by guards contracted by Exportadora del Atlántico, a Dinant-affiliated company. Although five guards were charged with murder, the case against them was provisionally dismissed on January 18, 2013, following a series of irregularities in the investigation, including the failure to carry out ballistics tests or draw up an inventory of the guards' weapons.¹⁶ [COFADEH recently visited the area](#), and found that there had been no progress in presenting an appeal, and the widows, without the support of their partners, in even greater poverty than before.

Dinant and the World Bank

On June 13, 29 civil society organizations signed [a joint letter](#) to the World Bank's private sector arm, the IFC (International Finance Corporation) and the Bank's board. It concerned '[The IFC's Environmental & Social Lessons Learned](#)', a presentation given to the board on April 4, drawing on the experiences of the last few years, but primarily triggered by the CAO Audit [report](#) on IFC's investment in Dinant. While welcoming the exercise, the organizations expressed concern that its effectiveness could be compromised by serious omissions in the lessons learned document, as well as by a lack of clarity about how the lessons would be followed through. For example, in its Dinant audit, the CAO found that the failures identified arose, in part, from staff incentives "*to overlook, fail to articulate, or even conceal potential environmental, social and conflict risk*", and that staff felt pressured to "*get money out the door*" and discouraged from "*making waves*". However, there was no mention of reforms to increase the emphasis on environmental and social due diligence. The letter also pointed to the miscategorization of risk, with the Dinant project considered only medium risk, which affected how problems were handled. The IFC was now in danger of making the same mistake with other loans, including one to the Davivienda Bank in Honduras, which could involve highly controversial land acquisitions (the subject of a separate letter sent by NGOs to the World Bank board in April).¹⁷

The NGOs also found it 'surprising and disappointing' that the IFC invited Dinant onto a panel at the 2014 Sustainability Exchange in May to speak about how to manage security and human rights issues (see P.7 of our [April summary](#)), as it sent 'a very poor signal to affected communities who continue to live in an atmosphere of threat and tension in the Aguan Valley'.

La Trinidad farm – Case against MARCA campesinos provisionally dismissed

On June 21, the preliminary hearing took place for 9 campesinos, members of MARCA (Authentic Land Recovery Campesino Movement of the Aguan), from La Trinidad farm. According to the human rights observer Greg McCain, who attended the hearing, the case against the campesinos was provisionally dismissed, as there was not enough evidence to take the case to trial, but the authorities have 5 years to reactivate it. The campesinos had been arrested on May 21 during a violent eviction by police and soldiers, which gave rise to considerable outcry (see P.11 of our [May summary](#)). One of the victims was Jennifer Rodriguez, who was pregnant. During the eviction she was violently seized,

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch "[There Are No Investigations Here](#)"

¹⁷ For more commentary, see the Bretton Woods Project [IFC: Learning lessons or institutional amnesia?](#)

pushed to the ground and kicked by police and soldiers. She lost the baby a short time later. Such was the level of complaints that the Human Rights Coordinator of the Public Prosecution Service [visited the area](#) two days after the evictions to hear testimony from the injured and those who had received death threats from the soldiers and police, which included people benefiting from precautionary measures ordered by the IACHR.

Eviction of Paso Aguán farm

On June 26, 400 families were [evicted](#) from the farm, in Trujillo municipality, by soldiers and police. The campesinos are members of the MCRGC (Gregorio Chávez Refoundation Campesino Movement), and had been occupying the farm, appropriated by Miguel Facussé, since May 5. This time, the eviction appears to have passed off peacefully, although three members of the Movement reported that a few days earlier, on June 20, they had been arrested without a warrant at a hospital in Tocoa, where they had taken another campesino, and then transferred to the police station in Trujillo. One of those detained was Sergio Adalid Calix, one of the 123 leaders of campesino movements in the Bajo Aguán who, since May 8, has been subject to precautionary measures granted by the IACHR.¹⁸

(The subsequent violent re-eviction on July 3, the subject of an [urgent action](#) by COFADEH, will be dealt with in our July summary).

JOURNALISTS

Restrictions on Freedom of Expression since the Coup

Reporters without Borders provided a survey of the state of freedom of information in Honduras - [Media still gagged five years after coup](#) – in which it provides a range of examples indicative of its dramatic decline:-

[The Ministry of Security's refusal to continue providing homicide figures](#) to the Violence Observatory of the UNAH (National Autonomous University of Honduras), forcing the Observatory to cease publication of its authoritative and independent monthly report on violence after nine years, which has consistently published higher figures than the state's.

The public's right to information was also restricted by the [Law on Official Secrets and Classification of Public Information](#) that parliament adopted on January 13, 2014 and which stripped the Institute for Public Access to Information (IAIP) of its responsibility for classifying information of public interest, reassigning this responsibility to each ministry and state agency. The law says: "Any information (...) relating to the internal strategic framework of state agencies and whose revelation, if made publicly available, could produce undesirable institutional effects" (which is extremely broad) may be "restricted."

Journalists – even of the mainstream press - have [complained](#) that **ministers and other government officials are no longer allowed to speak directly to the press** without first getting clearance from the president's office, something which has not happened in the previous three governments, at least.

Local radio stations and freelance journalists, the majority in Honduras, are **pressured by selective allocation of advertising**, often their only source of income. As a result, many limit themselves to providing officially approved and uniform coverage. In addition, there is the widespread practice of 'journalism for hire', under which anyone with enough money can pay a reporter to put out a story that benefits their individual interests.

This situation and the near-monopoly of the leading media companies leave little space for independent

¹⁸ IACHR precautionary measures PM 50/14 - Campesino Leaders of Bajo Aguán, Honduras
<http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/decisions/precautionary.asp> Resolution in Spanish only

and critical news reporting. As a result, the harassment of civil society organizations often also targets their affiliated community radio stations (see case of 'Criminalization' below).

The RWB article also states that control of coverage of sensitive subjects such as police corruption, land conflicts and the environmental impact of mining is all the stricter when powerful economic interests are at stake, as in the case of Dinant. A good example of this is the case of Gonzalo Rodríguez (see under 'Dismissal' P.11).

Murders

Two journalists were murdered in June. With the killing of Radio Progreso's sales and marketing manager, Carlos Mejía Orellana in April, and of Hernán Cruz Barnica in May, **it brings to four the number of media workers killed this year**, thereby already exceeding the total of three for the whole of 2013.

The first victim was [**Oscar Anthony Torres**](#), a young radio broadcaster, who was shot dead on June 1, in Palestina, municipality of Patuca, in Olancho. He had presented music programs for two different local radio stations, Patuca Stereo and La Doble M. One theory is that he was murdered as a result of a robbery which went wrong, as he was found with his trouser pockets inside out and with no valuables on him.

The second victim was [**Luis Alonso Fúnez Duarte**](#), another broadcaster of music programs on a local radio station, also in Olancho, this time in Catacamas. Like Oscar Torres, he was shot outside his home, the murderers killing him as he arrived on a motor-bike with his son on June 23. As well as the music program, he presented a political satire program for Radio Patria, called *Barriendo y Trapeando* (Sweeping and Mopping). According to a [newspaper report](#), his relatives do not wish to give information on the motive for the killing.

Threats

On June 16, [**Alex Sabillón**](#), presenter of TV program *Hechos de Choloma* (Happenings in Choloma) was issued a [direct death threat](#) by Miguel Callejas, Director of the Highways Commission of Choloma Municipal Council. According to the journalist, he said to him, "I don't care if you've got police protection, we're going to kill you, you bastard" ("No me importa que andes con policía, hijo de puta, te vamos a matar"). The threat was issued in the presence of the policeman assigned to protect Alex Sabillón, outside the police station and the TV station where he works. [**Reporters without Borders**](#) issued a statement in May expressing concern at increased acts of intimidation against the journalist, with this latest threat adding to the 12 attacks on him already recorded since 2011.¹⁹

Criminalization

[**Reporters without Borders**](#) issued a statement condemning the charges of sedition against **Radio Progreso correspondent Albertina Manueles Pérez** for broadcasting a communiqué issued by the people of San Francisco Opalaca, in which they refused to recognize the officially elected mayor (see P.3 above). The organization stated that '**Radio Progreso** and community radio stations regularly face attack as well as prosecution aimed at their content, which officials call subversive'. RWB endorsed the IACHR's recommendations calling on the Honduran government to protect the staff and contributors of Radio Progreso. It also referred to the **constant harassment suffered by community radio stations linked to the COPINH**, including the attack on the aerial of Radio Puca de Opalaca on May 30.

¹⁹ Conexihon [Persiste la intimidación y el asecho en contra de reportero de televisión](#)

Dismissal

Gonzalo Rodríguez, a TV journalist with Channel 6 (*Canal 6*), based in the Bajo Aguán, was sacked the day after he confirmed to the channel's proprietor, Joaquín Nodarse, that he was a member of C-Libre – he was chair of its journalists' network in Colón. Prior to his dismissal, he had also been told by Channel 6's management not to mention Dinant, as it was an important client (presumably for adverts). The journalist had tried to cover both sides of the conflict in the Bajo Aguán objectively, but was told by Joaquín Nodarse that his reports were 'affecting one of my clients' and that 'I don't earn a living from the campesinos, they don't give me anything' ('*Yo no como de los campesinos, ellos no me dan nada*').

This is the second case of sackings of journalists from Channel 6 in the space of two months. **Reporters Without Borders** condemned the removal from air of **Suelte la lengua** (Talk Freely), a program presented by Jorge Burgos and **Emy Padilla** which is openly critical of the government, and which has not broadcast since May 15 without any explanation from the channel's management (see P.14 of our [May summary](#)).

Alfredo Villatoro's murderers receive life sentences

The three men found guilty of radio presenter Alfredo Villatoro's abduction and murder in May 2012 were handed [life sentences](#) on June 11. They are members of the Osorio gang, and are the direct perpetrators - the masterminds behind the killing have still not been identified.

LAWYERS

On June 23, [Rufino Zavala](#), a justice of the peace (*juez de paz*) was shot a number of times at Paso Hondo, a community in the municipality of Oropolí, in El Paraíso, when he was ambushed while riding on his motor-bike. He died on the way to hospital. The local people attributed the attack to criminal gangs that have increasingly been operating in the area, and the authorities there have requested a stronger police presence.

LGBTI

The Wall Street Journal published an offensive article 'Why Sexual Minorities Have an Inside Track to a U.S. Green Card'²⁰, focusing on the apparently preferential treatment accorded to LGBTI persons seeking asylum because of persecution, and using Hondurans as its case study. An [article](#) published by CEPR responded by outlining the dramatic increase in violence targeted at LGBTI people since the coup (at least 25 murders of LGBT individuals between 1990 and 2005, but more than 116 murders since 2008) not only because their sexual identity but also because of their resistance to the coup. It points out that while the US may provide an 'inside track' for LGBT immigrants to gain asylum status, the State Department backs the very government under which such crimes take place with impunity.

SEX WORKERS

On June 2, International Sex Worker Day, sex workers marched through Tegucigalpa, protesting against discrimination, police harassment, and murders. According to their organization, RedTraSex Honduras, 15 sex workers were murdered between September 2013 and January 2014 alone - eight in San Pedro Sula (transgender people killed in two death squad-style massacres – see P.16 of our [October-](#)

²⁰ <http://online.wsj.com/articles/why-sexual-minorities-have-an-inside-track-to-a-u-s-green-card-1402676258> (access by subscription only)

December summary²¹), four in La Ceiba, and three in Tegucigalpa. According to a survey conducted by RedTraSex, 30% of sex workers had visited a clinic in 2012 specifically due to physical attacks or violence. If they report such attacks, they are not taken seriously by the police, who are frequently guilty themselves of beating sex workers, as well as detaining them arbitrarily.²²

WOMEN

Murders

There were concerns expressed that there appears to be little sign of a reduction in the murders of women. According to UNAH's Violence Observatory, the number of women murdered in 2013, at 636, has almost doubled from its 2009 level of 363. (The corresponding figures for men are 4,902 and 6,121). According to figures produced by CDM (Center for Women's Rights), 152 women were murdered from January to April 2014, which would indicate a reduction in the rate of killings. However, they are based only on newspaper reports, given the state's refusal to cooperate by granting access to its own figures on murders (see P. 9). Gladys Lanza, of the Visitación Padilla Pro-Peace Women's Movement complains about this in an article which points to other failings in the state's response, including under-resourced institutions.²³

Domestic Violence

By June 5, over 200 legal challenges on constitutional grounds had been filed with the Supreme Court, concerning amendments adopted in February last year to Article 23 of the **Domestic Violence Act**. The objections are led by women's organizations which are part of the National Campaign against Femicides. They argue that the article, by imposing confidentiality upon legal proceedings, with only the parties directly concerned and judicial authorities allowed access to details of the case, can deny victims of domestic violence the right to justice because it prevents them from receiving support from women's rights organizations during the proceedings. It also means that the media can not report on the case, which the women's organizations consider unconstitutional in imposing secrecy on a social issue of public interest.

The EU has been funding initiatives to improve the institutional response to domestic violence and to counter impunity. In March 2014, government agencies and civil society opened the Support and Protection Center for Women's Rights (**CAPRODEM**) in Tegucigalpa to provide legal, psychological and social assistance to victims of violence. A protocol has also been developed to establish a system of guidelines to improve the response of the different institutions involved in the prosecution and punishment of acts of violence against women.

On June 10, women community leaders presented a report - 'Impact of violence and insecurity on the lives of women from a human security perspective' (in Spanish) – in collaboration with CPTRT (Center for Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation of the Victims of Torture and their Families), CEM-H (Honduras Center for Women's Studies), Trocaire and Oxfam. It was based on a successful initiative in Medellín, Colombia to democratize the debate about security, normally firmly in the hands of state institutions, and was originally promoted by Jenny Pearce, of Bradford University's Center for

²¹ In fact there was a 9th murder in San Pedro Sula in that period - on January 7, 2014, transgender sex worker Marco Noé López Castillo was abducted and murdered by armed men

²² Sandra Cuffe – Upside Down World Sex Workers Take to the Streets in Honduras to Protest Murders and Discrimination

²³ Infosurhoy Honduras: Authorities fight murders of women provides good background on the state response to murders of women and to domestic violence.

Peace Studies in the UK. The Honduran community leaders' proposals, based on a holistic concept of security embracing, for example, food and economic security, range from a review by women's groups of the national security policy, through to campaigns to prevent violence against women on public transport, local employment creation schemes, and changes to land tenure arrangements to benefit women.

JUDICIARY

According to an [article](#) by El Heraldo, by June 8, a total of **76 justice workers had been sacked or suspended from their posts by the Judiciary Council since it became operational in October 2013**. Of these 76, 32 have been sacked, 34 suspended for up to three months and 10 re-appointed after hearings established that there had been no wrongdoing. Of the 66 sacked or currently suspended, 28 were judges, 16 secretaries, and 4 were public defenders. The offenses included failing to respect rulings of higher courts, ordering probation when it was not appropriate and delays in legal proceedings. The process has been condemned by the AJD (Association of Judges for Democracy) as arbitrary, while IACtHR has expressed concern at its potentially destabilizing impact on the justice system (see, for example, P.15 of our [summary for October-December](#)). Around 20 *recursos de amparo* (appeals on the basis that rights have been violated) have been lodged with the Supreme Court by suspended or sacked justice workers.

TORTURE

To mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on 26 June, the CPTRT gave a [presentation](#) of its Report on Torture, Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment covering the period July 2012 to June 2014. During this period, the CPTRT documented 38 direct victims of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, 9 of whom had suffered this aggression in 2009 and 2011. This was a far lower rate than the 260 recorded from June 2009 to June 2012 in its previous report²⁴, which included the repression at demonstrations in the immediate aftermath of the coup. Even so, the highest number of attacks were still committed in open spaces (suggesting that some could have occurred during demonstrations), and then during transport for detention. 75% were committed by the police and/or DNIC agents (National Criminal Investigation Directorate). Most of the victims (87%) received blows to various parts of their body, 50% suffered asphyxiation, while 3% suffered electric shocks and another 3% burns.

The report was presented at a conference organized by CONAPREV (National Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment), where Mario Coriolano, a member of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, and former Vice-Chair of the UN Sub-Committee on the Prevention of Torture also gave a [talk](#). He also considered **the police the main source of torture, along with the outmoded prison system**, with detention centers places where cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment were widespread, both directly through the police and through overcrowding.

Honduras' 24 prisons were considered a 'time bomb', with 13,000 inmates when their capacity was 8,000. He expressed concern at the level of impunity for torture, and urged the authorities to reduce overcrowding, draw up official records of torture cases, and for justice operators to carry out independent, prompt and thorough investigations into such cases.

²⁴ *Informe sobre Tortura, Tratos Crueles Inhumanos o Degradantes, Una Perspectiva desde la Salud* (June 2009 – June 2012) available at: <http://www.cptrt.net/informe>

POLICING

Unprovoked attack on shop-owners

As if to illustrate the systemic nature of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in the police force, COFADEH published an [article](#) on June 20 on an apparently unprovoked attack on a couple and their son on February 27 in the capital. The family were entering their shop at 9.30 pm as they were going to spend the night there to guard it, having suffered a burglary at the shop a few days before. Police officers from the nearby Belén station surrounded the shop, shot into it, wounding the couple, firing tear gas and beating up the husband and the son. According to the husband, who was seriously wounded in the neck, he was driven around for several hours by the police, who told him that they were going to let him bleed to death before finally taking him to hospital. The couple say that at no time did the police state why they were attacking them, nor did they produce a search warrant. (The son was later forced to sign a search warrant with a gun at his head at the police station where he had been taken). Four months on, the son was still feeling the effects of the many blows to his head, while the husband was confined to bed because of the bullet wound to his neck and damage to his ribs. He was under house arrest, having been charged with attempted murder, after firing a gun during the attack in desperation.

Corruption

Insight Crime published an [article](#) on the intelligence reports obtained by [El Heraldo](#) newspaper on Guatemalan drug trafficker, Jairo Orellana Morales, alias "El Pelón." They show how Honduran officials provided him and his collaborators with falsified documents that facilitated their drug trafficking operations in the border region with Guatemala, while **members of Honduras' national police also allegedly gave Orellana protection** that allowed him to operate in the country for years. The drug trafficker, who had links with the Zetas and the Sinaloa cartel, was finally arrested in May. He was the author of various revenge killings in San Pedro Sula, in Honduras operating primarily in Copán department. The authorities [have seized 17 properties and four businesses, and have frozen 22 bank accounts](#) in San Pedro Sula and Santa Cruz de Yojoa thought to be associated with Orellana's front men in Honduras.

Purge

A mission of the OAS (Organization of American States) [visited](#) Honduras on June 2 to inspect the work of the DIECP (Police Personnel Investigation and Assessment Directorate), the body responsible for the clean-up of the police force. They were invited by the Honduran government 'to let them see the progress in public security matters, a priority of the president..' There does not seem to be any information on the findings of their visit.

The head of the DIECP, Eduardo Villanueva, [announced](#) on June 4 that it had investigated 89% of senior officers and issued 500 rulings where police were deemed to be unsuitable, while Arturo Corrales, the Minister of Security, [stated](#) that a total of 1,200 police had now been dismissed from their posts.

Meanwhile, COFADEH has [complained](#) about the fact that where senior police *have* been removed from their posts (mostly with honorable discharges), some of the officers promoted to replace them, often hastily, have committed human rights violations. They cite the case of Elder Madrid Guerra, recently promoted to commissioner general who, along with five other police officers, has been charged with the illegal detention, ill-treatment and torture of 23 people during a peaceful protest against the coup outside the Congress building on August 12, 2009, while he was commander of the COBRA special

forces (see P.11 of our [April summary](#) for more details). As well as this, Madrid Guerra has been reported to the Public Prosecution Service by his family for attacks and other harassment of his mother and sister, trying to appropriate the family wealth to the detriment of his relatives.

MILITARIZATION

Alex Main's article for NACLA [**The U.S. Re-militarization of Central America and Mexico**](#) provides an excellent overview of the issue, and its human cost.

Meanwhile, the **Guardians of the Fatherland** program is continuing to give cause for concern. It is designed to prevent children and young people aged 5 to 23 being recruited into gangs by getting them to attend 'trainings' by the military on Saturdays for three months. A number of human rights organizations, including advocates for children, such as Guadalupe Ruelas, Director of Casa Alianza, and COIPRODEN (Coordinating Group for Private Institutions for Children, Adolescents, Young People and their Rights) which has 30 member organizations, have argued that it is inappropriate for the military to have this pastoral role, which should be the province of specialist state institutions. Now Radio Progreso has [reported](#) that parents are witnessing the negative effects of the program, with children who have attended the trainings now saying that they can defend themselves in the street, even late at night, and that the parents do not know what form the training takes as they are not allowed to attend. It has also been revealed that Carlos Moisés del Cid García, Coordinador of the Children and Adolescents' Human Rights Program for the CONADEH (National Human Rights Commissioner) was [dismissed](#) from his post on May 29, just hours after presenting his boss with the report he had commissioned on the Guardians of the Fatherland, which voiced similar concerns.

ZEDEs

On May 26, **the Supreme Court rejected the legal challenges to the law establishing ZEDEs** (Employment and Economic Development Zones) which had been filed by over 50 organizations on constitutional grounds. The ruling was not made public until almost a month later, but it came as little surprise - in April the constitutional branch of the Public Prosecution Service (*Fiscalía de la Defensa de la Constitución*) had [ruled](#) that the ZEDEs did not violate the constitution. OFRANEH (Honduran Black Fraternal Organization) was one of the organizations that lodged the legal challenge with the Supreme Court on February 25, as it believes that **as many as 24 Garifuna communities could be affected by 5 potential ZEDEs** on the north coast. Despite this, one of the Supreme Court's stated reasons for rejecting the challenge was that none of the parties which had filed it had a direct interest or were directly affected by the schemes. OFRANEH argues that, by adopting the law, the Honduran government has violated the right to prior consultation enshrined in ILO Convention 169 on the rights of indigenous peoples, and points out that the state's active respect of this right was one of the main forms of reparation listed by the IACtHR at the hearing of the Inter-American Court on the [case of Triunfo de la Cruz](#) on May 21.²⁵

The UN Committee for the Eradication of Racial Discrimination (CERD), in the [concluding observations of its 84th session in February](#), had also expressed concern at the ZEDEs' impact on indigenous and Afro-Honduran peoples, and their compatibility with Honduras' international treaty obligations concerning these peoples.

The legislative process for these special zones has been a highly controversial one. Their original incarnation, the REDs (Special Development Regions) or charter cities – economic enclaves with their

²⁵ OFRANEH [Las ZEDE y la Falta de Aplicación de la Consulta-Consentimiento Previo Libre e Informado](#). For more details of the legal challenge, see PanAm Post [Honduran Supreme Court Rejects Claims of ZEDE Unconstitutionality](#)

own justice systems - were declared unconstitutional in February 2012 by the Public Prosecution Service and then by the Supreme Court in October of the same year. Less than two months later, on December 12, Congress sacked all but one of the five judges of the Constitutional Chamber of the Court, which provoked widespread expressions of concern, including from the IACtHR. (The sole survivor, Oscar Chinchilla, the only one to vote in favor of the REDs, later went on to become the Director of Public Prosecutions (*Fiscal General*), in what was condemned as a political appointment.)²⁶ Almost immediately afterwards, in January 2013, a decree was passed by Congress, changing the constitution to allow for ZEDEs.

The description of the ZEDEs on the dedicated website is keen to point out that they would be an inalienable part of the Honduran state, subject to the constitution and to the government in matters such as the justice system, territory and defense, thereby seeking to address one of the central concerns of their critics - that the ZEDEs would violate Honduras' sovereign control over its territory and constitutionally-established judicial structure. However, observers have expressed continued concern about, for example, how land would be acquired under the new arrangements. Under the REDs, the government had planned to grant sparsely inhabited land to investors who would then build new cities, giving rise to opposition by indigenous groups concerned at the prospect of dispossession. With the new law for ZEDEs, those directing them would have to purchase the land from its current owners, but both the Honduran and the ZEDE governments could compel the owner to sell if they encountered opposition, giving rise to **fears of social conflict, realistic given the traditional repression of those asserting their land rights**. The South Korean heavy industry company, Posco Plantec, is currently conducting a feasibility study to determine which area in the south of the country would be suitable for the first ZEDE.

LAW FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, JOURNALISTS AND JUSTICE OPERATORS

This had its first reading in a plenary debate in Congress on June 3 (some reports give the impression that it was adopted there and then, but in fact only 21 of its 73 articles were debated). One of its main provisions is the establishment of a body under the Ministry of Governance, Justice, Human Rights and Decentralization, dedicated to the protection of human rights defenders, journalists and justice defenders, to which they can refer when they feel at risk. A number of international human rights bodies, including the Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Expression and for Human Rights Defenders, have recommended the establishment of a protection mechanism. However, the initiative has been met with some scepticism by certain Honduran and international NGOs. For example, at the October sessions of hearings of the IACtHR, the draft law was criticized for providing for many of the same protection measures that had failed in the past, for example, the use of police patrols which are untrained in the protection of human rights defenders and distrusted by them (see the annex to our October-December summary).

Proyecto de Acompañamiento internacional en Honduras (PROAH) <http://proah.wordpress.com>
Honduras Accompaniment Project <http://hondurasaccompanimentproject.wordpress.com>
Friendship Office of the Americas <http://friendshipamericas.org>

²⁶ See, for example, joint FIDH, CIPRODEH and COFADEH Report Elecciones en Honduras: Militarización y Grave Atentado Contra el Poder Judicial