

Another Month in Honduras...

Human Rights Monitor – December 2018

The calls for Juan Orlando Hernández's resignation continued to be heard throughout this month as new revelations linked him to the Pandora corruption case and his brother continues to await trial in the US for drug trafficking. The MACCIH, meanwhile, presented two new corruption investigations further implicating his National Party. The Honduran migrants stranded in Tijuana face the difficult decision between staying in Mexico or trying to cross the US border as violence in Honduras stays high claiming the life of another lawyer, the eighth this year. Welcome to another month in Honduras.

In solidarity,

Daniel Langmeier

Honduras Forum Switzerland

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Abbreviations

| | |
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| ASJ | Association for a More Just Society |
| ATIC | Technical Bureau for Criminal Investigation |
| BID | Inter-American Development Bank |
| CABEI | Central American Bank for Economic Integration |
| CDM | Center for Women's Rights |
| CIPRODEH | Center for Human Rights Research and Promotion |
| CMH | Medical Association Honduras |
| CNA | National Anti-Corruption Council |
| COFADEH | Committee of Families of the Detained-Disappeared in Honduras |
| COIPRODEN | Coordination of Private Institutions for Children's Rights |
| CONADEH | National Human Rights Commission |
| COPINH | Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras |
| FEPRODDHH | Special Public Prosecutor Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Operators |
| FOSDEH | Social Forum on the External Debt of Honduras |
| FOSDEH | Free, Prior and Informed Consent |
| HRDs | Human Rights Defenders |
| IACHR | Inter-American Commission on Human Rights |
| IACtHR | Inter-American Court of Human Rights |
| ILO | International Labor Organization |
| ISHR | International Service for Human Rights |
| MACCIH | Support Mission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras |
| MADJ | Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice |
| MP | Attorney General's Office |
| OACNUDH | UN Human Rights Office in Honduras |
| TSC | Supreme Audit Court |
| UFECIC | Anti-Corruption Unit of the Attorney General's Office |
| UNAH | National Autonomous University of Honduras |
| ZEDE | Zone for Employment and Economic Development |

JOH under Pressure

Last month, which included the first anniversary of the November 2017 electoral fraud, public pressure started to rise again against the JOH regime. Among the main causes were the arrest of his brother for drug trafficking in the US, a testimony involving JOH in the Pandora corruption case and the brutal repression of the protests on the anniversary. This month, pressure continued to rise. A sometimes neglected reason for his unpopularity was addressed in an essay in Envío: the perception of the Honduran people does not square well with the statistics presented by the JOH regime, e.g. the homicide rate or the poverty rate.^{1 2}

On December 2, Padre Melo called for a united social and political front to get rid of the JOH regime.³ The same day, the Citizen Action Movement (MAC) affiliated to PAC, published a press release demanding the resignation of JOH.⁴ Meanwhile in Congress, Libre once more tried to present a bill demanding an investigation of JOH's link to his brother's drug trafficking activities.⁵ When the Nationalist-controlled Congress tried to silence them, they started to protest.⁶ The organizations conforming the Citizens Action Platform against the Dictatorship presented a request at the MP for the investigation of JOH and possible drug trafficking links.⁷ OFRANEH wondered if what we have seen since the arrest of Tony Hernández are the first sign of a tumbling narco-state.⁸ On December 17, almost a month after his arrest in the US, the MP started to seize goods and property of Tony Hernández.⁹ The Coalition against Impunity reiterated its demand for JOH to resign immediately.¹⁰

On December 11, the Citizens Action Platform against the Dictatorship had also presented demands at various MP offices in Honduras to include JOH and Pepe Lobo in the Pandora corruption case investigations.^{11 12} In an interview with Radio Progreso, the former judge Ramón Barrios said that the National Party functions like a criminal organization. "I want to say this without any doubt and as it should be: it is a criminal organization. And I say this because I know Nationalist people who do not agree with what Juan Orlando Hernández has done. The political parties are intermediate organizations between the citizens and the State that are precisely founded to arrive and exercise the political power of the country, but there is no doubt that in the last ten years the National Party has become a criminal organization, and I take responsibility for what am I saying."¹³ A day later, Libre

1 https://honduras-forum.ch/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/1811_Langmeier_Env%C3%ADo_PoderEstadistico.pdf

2 EN: https://honduras-forum.ch/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/1805_Langmeier_StatisticalPower-1.pdf

3 <https://tiempo.hn/padre-melo-a-plataformas-de-oposicion/>

4 <https://confidencialhn.com/movimiento-de-accion-ciudadana-pide-salida-inmediata-de-herandez/>

5 <https://tiempo.hn/suspenden-sesion-en-el-cn-libre-buscaba-presentar-mocion-para-investigar-a-joh/>

6 <https://confidencialhn.com/fuera-j-fauna-legislativa-provoca-cancelacion-de-sesion-en-congreso/>

7 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/10/plataforma-ciudadana-presentara-accion-criminal-contra-juan-herandez-ante-el-ministerio-publico/>

8 <https://ofraneh.wordpress.com/2018/12/10/se-tambalea-el-narcoestado/>

9 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/author-login/125-diciembre2018/3714-se-autoriza-iniciar-aseguramiento-de-bienes-a-juan-antonio-herandez>

10 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/17/coalicion-contra-la-impunidad-exige-la-salida-inmediata-de-juan-herandez/>

11 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/11/demandan-requerimiento-fiscal-contra-joh-y-pepe-lobo-por-caso-pandora/>

12 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/demandan-ampliacion-de-requerimiento-fiscal-contra-presidente-herandez-caso-de-corrupcion/>

13 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/partido-nacional-funciona-ahora-como-una-organizacion-criminal-senala-ex-juez-ramon-barrios/>

announced new protests "to get rid of the dictator".¹⁴ They will take place on January 27, 2019, the anniversary of the second inauguration of the JOH regime.¹⁵

JOH reacted to the pressure by changing the members of his cabinet. Initially, it was believed that he would also replace the highly disputed Minister of Security, Julián Pacheco.^{16 17} The former president of the Central Bank, Hugo Noe Pino, found the right words for the proposed changes: "The dictator seeks to oxygenate the discredit of his government by changing ministers. What he does not understand is that he is the main problem, because of the illegality, illegitimacy, and corruption of the government."¹⁸ Additionally, JOH faced a "Trump-Problem": "The regime of Juan Hernandez has problems in its restructuring because many of the people to whom it has been proposed to be part of the cabinet have rejected the offer embarrassing the current government."¹⁹ As a consequence, Minister of Security, Julián Pacheco Tinoco, was confirmed in his position.²⁰ Pacheco was implicated in drug trafficking cases in several testimonies by drug traffickers arrested in or extradited to the US.^{21 22}

Nevertheless, protests in Honduras alone won't suffice and close attention has to be paid to the voices coming from the US.²³ Some observers even believe that the impetus to change his cabinet came from the US embassy.²⁴ Last month, in relation to the migrant caravan, the Trump administration threatened to cut aid. Together with the arrest of JOH's brother, this led some observers to interpret this as hopeful signs. "It may be that Washington has decided Hernández no longer serves US interests. His brother Tony, a notorious drug-trafficker who operated with impunity for 14 years, was unexpectedly arrested in Miami at the end of November. If President Hernández is deposed, he won't be the first Central American leader whose crimes are initially overlooked by the US, but provide a ready excuse for disposing of him when he ceases to be useful and becomes an embarrassment."²⁵ But shortly afterwards, on December 5, the US donated a plane to the Honduran Air Force (FAH), a body representing violent state repression during the post-electoral violence.²⁶ Later in December, JOH also met with the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Sergio de la Peña, in Tegucigalpa²⁷ and the Deputy State Secretary for the Western Hemisphere, Kimberly Breier, met with Attorney General Óscar Chinchilla^{28 29}. They lauded

14 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1242826-466/mel-zelava-vuelve-a-convocar-un-gran-paro-nacional>

15 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/27/libre-convoca-a-protesta-nacional-el-proximo-27-de-enero-de-2019/>

16 <https://confidencialhn.com/hernandez-se-apresta-a-cambiar-funcionarios-incluyendo-seguridad-publica/>

17 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3120-joh-prepara-nuevo-gabinete-con-empresarios-ongs-y-organizaciones-sociales>

18 <https://twitter.com/hnoepino/status/1070484453590515712>

19 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/20/casi-nadie-quiere-formar-parte-de-gobierno-de-joh/>

20 <https://confidencialhn.com/ratifican-a-julian-pacheco-seguira-como-secretario-de-seguridad1/>

21 <http://cepr.net/publications/op-eds-columns/top-u-s-backed-honduran-security-minister-is-running-drugs-according-to-court-testimony>

22 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/21/pese-a-senalamientos-de-narcotrafico-hernandez-ratifica-a-julian-pacheco-en-seguridad/>

23 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/09/el-ultimo-danzon-de-heidee-con-joh/>

24 <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/197099>

25 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2018/12/05/john-perry/the-plunder-continues/>

26 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/05/ee-uu-dona-avion-a-militares-de-honduras-en-medio-de-senalamientos-de-narcotrafico/>

27 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/07/presidente-de-honduras-se-reune-con-subsecretario-de-defensa-de-ee-uu/>

28 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1240328-466/estados-unidos-elogia-labor-del-fiscal-chinchilla-al-frente-del-ministerio-p%C3%BAblico>

29 <https://hn.usembassy.gov/es/mensaje-fin-ano-embajada-estados-unidos-honduras/>

Chinchilla, even though he had failed to prosecute Tony Hernández for years.³⁰ And if this weren't enough, JOH also met with US' chargé d'affaires Heide Fulton in Trujillo where she called Honduras a "strong ally".³¹ Carlos H. Reyes denounced in a press conference by the Alignment against the Reelection (CCC) that the US maintained its support of JOH.³² But before the month was over, the voices coming from the US changed once more. ".....Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador are doing nothing for the United States but taking our money. Word is that a new Caravan is forming in Honduras and they are doing nothing about it. We will be cutting off all aid to these 3 countries - taking advantage of U.S. for years!"³³ ³⁴ Hugo Noé Pino reacted to Trump's Tweet: "I believe that if the Trump administration wants to help reduce migration, it could begin by stopping to support an illegal, illegitimate government with little credibility like Honduras currently has."³⁵

Human Rights and Their Defenders

COFADEH (36th)³⁶, MAS (7th)³⁷ and Radio Progreso (62th)³⁸ ³⁹ celebrated anniversaries this month. On December 7, the world commemorated their work at the International Day of Human Rights Defenders. The IACHR and OACNUDH published a joint press release highlighting the role of HRDs as "essential pillars of democracy".⁴⁰ Nevertheless, as CIVICUS reminded us, HRDs "are being violently attacked and killed in record numbers 20 years after historic UN declaration adopted to protect them".⁴¹ Regarding the specific situation of Central America, CIPRODEH and other regional human rights organizations published the 2018 human rights monitor for Central America.⁴² The Honduran case has been further analyzed by Juan Almeyda. He posited that the Honduran experience challenges us to rethink human rights in order to prevent what he calls the "hondurization of Latin America".⁴³

OACNUDH signed a cooperation agreement with the Human Rights Secretariat. The cooperation will take place in the following five areas: i) human rights education; ii) public policies; iii) legislative alignment; iv) human rights defenders; and v) people displaced by violence.⁴⁴

30 <https://confidencialhn.com/arresto-de-tony-y-aseguramiento-de-bienes-deja-mal-parado-al-fiscal-chinchilla/>

31 <https://confidencialhn.com/habla-fulton-honduras-es-un-aliado-y-socio-estategico-para-ee-uu/>

32 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/27/ee-uu-sostiene-al-regimen-de-herandez-ante-una-possible-invasion-a-venezuela-carlos-h-reyes/>

33 <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1078638249562775552>

34 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/28/trump-amenaza-nuevamente-con-cortar-toda-la-ayuda-a-honduras-guatemala-y-el-salvador/>

35 <https://hondudiario.com/2018/12/29/es-contradictorio-pensar-que-se-va-a-suspender-ayuda-de-ee-uu-a-honduras/>

36 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/sembrando-memoria-cofadeh-cumple-36-anos/>

37 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/mas-arriba-a-siete-anos-por-la-defensa-del-ambiente/>

38 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/radio-progreso-62-anos-de-informar-y-entretener-al-pueblo-hondureno/>

39 <https://twitter.com/ONUDDHH/status/1074054308461797377>

40 <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/prensa/comunicados/2018/261.asp>

41 <https://civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/media-releases/3659-human-rights-groups-globally-call-for-end-to-killing-of-activists-in-record-numbers>

42 <http://ciprodeh.org.hn/images/Doc/INFORME-DERECHOS-HUMANOS-V4.pdf>

43 <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/197024>

44 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/10/oacnudh-y-secretaria-de-derechos-humanos-firman-acuerdo-de-cooperacion-tecnica/>

Assassinations

The municipal board in Los Prados together with MASSVIDA demanded an investigation into the murder of the community leader Reinaldo Reyes Moreno (see last month's monitor). The board also denounced a local media outlet which had claimed without any proof the president of the board was involved in the murder.⁴⁵

Lawyers

On December 3, the criminal lawyer Reinaldo Barahona was murdered just outside the Supreme Court.⁴⁶ He was the eighth lawyer murdered in 2018. The police reacted by blaming the victim. According to the press speaker of the National Police, Reinaldo Barahona was murdered because he defended criminals.⁴⁷ Criminologist Gonzalo Sánchez explained that this murder in front of the Supreme Court, surrounded by police and armed forces, showed the confidence of criminals in Honduras.⁴⁸ Some 130 lawyers have been murdered since 2010 and over 90% of the cases rest unpunished.⁴⁹

Attacks, Criminalization and Harassment

Human rights defenders in certain areas seem to be especially targeted in Honduras. Giorgio Trucchi dedicated two articles to one such area this month, Zacate Grande.^{50 51} Also in the south of Honduras, HRD and coordinator of MASSVIDA, Germán Chirinos, denounced a new act of intimidation against him.⁵² The Bajo Aguán is another such region and on December 4, the community radio La Voz de Copa denounced that state security forces destroyed the crops of campesino families in Saba.⁵³ Close by, in Río Bijao, Cortés, some 28 campesino families face criminalization after they had started a land recuperation process in July 2017.⁵⁴ C-Libre informed about a new tool of criminalization this month, the Special Law on Jurisdictional Bodies.⁵⁵

Students

Honduras' student body experienced a very difficult month. On December 6, the police arrested three students who then immediately were sent to pre-trial detention. They were accused of burning buses in a student protest even though there were videos showing that undercover police agents had burnt them.⁵⁶ Pasos de Animal Grande denounced, after speaking to them, that they suffered

45 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/mirada-al-sur/903-patronato-de-los-prados-exige-justicia-ante-asesinato-de-lider-comunitario>

46 <https://confidencialhn.com/asesinan-a-un-abogado-en-las-barbas-del-poder-judicial-y-casa-de-gobierno/>

47 <https://tiempo.hn/parte-policia-penalista-hondureno-defendiendo/>

48 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1239084-466/frente-al-palacio-de-justicia-eso-ya-no-tiene-nombre-dice-crimin%C3%B3logo>

49 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/03/alrededor-de-153-abogados-han-sido-asesinados-en-honduras-entre-2002-y-2018/>

50 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/zacate-grande-criminalizacion-de-la-lucha-en-defensa-de-territorios-y-playas/>

51 <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/196948>

52 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/defensor-de-ddhh-nuevamente-se-encuentra-bajo-riesgo-por-defender-el-medio-ambiente/>

53 <http://www.hondurastierralibre.com/2018/12/honduras-campesinos-organizados-en.html>

54 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/luchar-por-un-pedazo-de-tierra-en-honduras-implica-la-criminalizacion/>

55 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/mirada-al-sur/899-reforma-a-la-ley-de-jurisdiccion-agudiza-la-criminalizacion-de-sectores-que-defienden-derechos>

56 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/tres-universitarios-son-enviados-a-prision/>

physical and psychological torture in custody.⁵⁷ As a response, UNAH students started an occupation of the university.⁵⁸ The Alignment against the Reelection (CCC) condemned the arrest and pre-trial detention.⁵⁹

At the same time, Reporteros de Investigación published an investigative report of the gruesome murder of the 24-year old student Iván Enrique Mejía Montoya which may be linked to student protests and the violent state repression.⁶⁰ One year earlier, Eduardo Urbina, a Honduran student, was forced to seek political asylum in Costa Rica as a consequence of the post-electoral repression.⁶¹ At least six further students have asked for asylum in Costa Rica since the heavily repressed student protests last summer.⁶²

On December 11, the families of the three criminalized and arrested students addressed the Honduran Judicial System demanding freedom for their loved ones.⁶³ One of their mothers denounced the continuous mistreatment of them in custody.⁶⁴ Wilfredo Méndez, director of CIPRODEH, denounced the accusations against the student as abhorrent.⁶⁵ Throughout this time, the protests at UNAH continued.⁶⁶ One day later, a judge definitively dropped the charges against the three students as it had been shown that they did not participate in the burning of the buses.⁶⁷ C-Libre denounced that they were victims of arbitrary actions by the Honduran judicial system and that they suffered "harassment, physical and psychological abuse both in the courts by the police agents guarding them as well as in the Central Penitentiary".⁶⁸

Indigenous Peoples

Last month, Honduras was examined by the UN Committee of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.⁶⁹ OFRANEH highlighted how the grave situation Honduras' indigenous peoples is reflected in the final observations by the committee.⁷⁰ OFRANEH's general coordinator Miriam Miranda also spoke with Pikasa Lab about the struggle of Honduras' Garífuna people, on how the JOH regime ignores IACtHR sentences and on why humanizing the planet is the only way to save it.⁷¹

57 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/especiales/protesta-social-unah/item/2361-juez-envia-a-la-carcel-a-estudiantes-de-la-unah>

58 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3129-paralizan-la-unah-por-detencion-arbitraria-de-tres-estudiantes>

59 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2363-convergencia-contr-el-continuisimo-funcionarios-judiciales-siguen-agenda-del-regimen>

60 <https://reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2018/12/10/con-llantas-queman-estudiante-de-la-unah-dos-dias-despues-de-protesta-y-afloran-falsas-acusaciones-contr-detenidos-por-quema-de-buses/>

61 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/las-tarantulas-no-pudieron-ni-podran-conmigo/>

62 <http://elpulso.hn/al-menos-seis-estudiantes-de-la-unah-solicitaron-asilo-en-costa-rica/>

63 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/familiares-claman-justicia-por-universitarios-presos/>

64 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/especiales/protesta-social-unah/item/2365-madre-de-estudiante-un-policia-me-dijo-que-no-podia-dar-comida-a-un-terrorista>

65 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/11/acusacion-contr-universitarios-es-aberrante-wilfredo-mendez/>

66 <https://confidencialhn.com/prosiguen-tomas-en-la-unah-estudiantes-exigen-liberacion-de-edificios/>

67 <https://tiempo.hn/en-libertad-quedan-estudiantes-acusados-de-incendiar-buses-rapiditos-frente-a-la-unah/>

68 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/dh/902-sobreseimiento-definitivo-confirma-injusta-criminalizacion-a-tres-estudiantes>

69 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23952&LangID=E>

70 <http://elpulso.hn/examen-cerd-hn/>

71 <https://ofraneh.wordpress.com/2018/12/18/honduras-el-comite-para-eliminacion-de-la-discriminacion-racial-y-el-anteproyecto-de-ley-de-consulta/>

72 <http://lab.pikaramagazine.com/entrevista-miriam-miranda/>

On December 18, two indigenous Tolupan men in San Francisco Locomapa, Yoro were injured by illegal loggers. Both men are supposed to benefit from protective measures by the IACHR.⁷³

The Case of Berta Cáceres

The first part of the Berta Cáceres trial, the one against the material authors, concluded in November in Honduras. In December, the case was discussed at the Inter-American level in a hearing held at the IACHR.⁷⁴ One of its commissioner asked the Honduran State to revoke the concession granted for the Agua Zarca project as the process leading to the concession contradicts jurisprudence of the IACtHR.^{75 76} In Honduras, COPINH and its coordinator Berta Zúniga explained the importance to have the concession of Agua Zarca canceled.⁷⁷ In its press release on the 170th sessions of hearings, the IACHR also commented on the Berta Cáceres case. The IACHR expresses concerns about the various irregularities during the trial and the lack of investigation into the intellectual authorship of the crime.⁷⁸

On the international level, meanwhile, the recently elected US congresswoman Ilhan Omar published a statement demanding the investigation and arrest of the intellectual authors behind Berta's assassination.^{79 80} Several UN experts and Special Rapporteurs joined in publishing a joint press release expressing their concern that the intellectual authors of the assassination of Berta Cáceres still walk free.^{81 82} Once more ignoring all of this, the US embassy lauded for the second time the work of the MP.⁸³ Even worse, the president of the Judicial Power, Roland Argueta, admitted a complaint about defamation by Camilo Atala for being linked to the Berta Cáceres case.⁸⁴

LGBTI

In the beginning of December, three US senators demanded from federal officials to publicly release information about the circumstances surrounding the death of a Honduran trans-gender migrant who was in the custody of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.⁸⁵

73 <http://www.hondurastierralibre.com/2018/12/honduras-hieren-indigenas-tolupanes-en.html>

74 <https://www.cejil.org/es/cidh-condenas-caso-berta-caceres-no-representan-justicia>

75 <https://copinh.org/2018/12/video-y-fotos-copinh-presente-audiencias-cidh-causa-de-berta-caceres/>

76 <https://twitter.com/COPINHHONDURAS/status/1070717957368623105>

77 <https://copinh.org/2018/12/audio-doblar-el-brazo-a-la-impunidad/>

78 <https://copinh.org/2018/12/cidh-culmina-su-170-periodo-de-sesiones/>

79 <https://twitter.com/IlhanMN/status/1069689251552468992>

80 <https://copinh.org/2018/12/comunicado-de-ilhan-omar-congresista-de-eeuu-exigiendo-juicio-a-los-autores-intelectuales/>

81 <https://www.protecting-defenders.org/es/noticias/honduras-expertos-de-la-onu-lamentan-que-los-autores-intelectuales-de-la-muerte-de-berta>

82 <https://news.un.org/es/story/2018/12/1447371>

83 <https://twitter.com/USAmbHonduras/status/1071077370763927552>

84 <https://confidencialhn.com/admiten-pruebas-en-querrela-contr-excomisionada-policia-y-parlamentaria/>

85 <https://www.kqed.org/news/11710546/a-transgender-migrant-died-in-ice-custody-kamala-harris-and-new-mexico-senators-want-an-explanation>

Freedom of Expression and Journalists

Civil society organizations wrote a letter to EU ambassador Alessandro Palmero expressing concern regarding the violent repression by state security forces on November 26 and the situation of the journalist Geovanny Sierra.⁸⁶ The same day, the journalist Bartolo Fuentes denounced that the JOH regime continued to persecute him even abroad. He is being scapegoated as the organizer of the migrant caravan.⁸⁷ In another case of criminalization against journalist Jairo López, the sitting judge was replaced for conflicts of interest. He had been the legal representative of the plaintiff in the past...⁸⁸

On December 5, Pen International and Pen Honduras organized a forum in Tegucigalpa on crimes against journalists and who benefits from their silence.⁸⁹ Some journalists already suffer crimes and harassment still in the stage of studying journalism. C-Libre denounced this month that the police detained journalism students covering a protest as part of an assignment.⁹⁰ Edgard Andino, director of the TV program "El Patrullero 24/7" denounced that they and journalists in general are under constant attack for their work and he holds the government, the National Party and the Armed Forces responsible for it.⁹¹

Radio Progreso correspondent Erick Pineda had an especially difficult month. He woke up on December 9 witnessing how unknown subjects sprayed the following threat on a wall opposite to his house: "We give you 24 hours to leave the country. You Fucking Correspondent."⁹² Radio Progreso immediately brought the case to the attention of the protection mechanism and filed complaints at further state bodies.⁹³ According to Pasos de Animal Grande, he had received threats from the police.⁹⁴ OACNUDH expressed its concern about the threat.⁹⁵

Because the JOH regime continued to ignore the demands for justice in the case of journalist Geovanny Sierra,⁹⁶ journalist and social communicators organized as PRENSA 504 held a protest outside the National Penitentiary Institute (INP).⁹⁷ They demanded justice for Sierra who had been shot from inside a INP bus when covering the protests on the anniversary of the electoral fraud last month. Due to the bullet wound, he lost the ability to use his right arm.

86 <https://tiempo.hn/carta-embajador-ue-agresion-contra-periodista/>

87 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/01/gobierno-de-joh-me-persigue-mas-alla-de-las-fronteras-hondurenas-bartolo-fuentes/>

88 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2357-recusan-a-juez-en-el-caso-del-periodista-jairo-lopez-por-conflicto-de-intereses>

89 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2358-a-quien-le-interesa-mantener-callados-a-los-periodistas-en-honduras>

90 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/detencion-arbitraria/930-policias-detienen-a-estudiante-de-periodismo-que-realizaba-cobertura-formativa>

91 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2366-periodista-edgard-andino-nos-quieren-amedrentar-para-que-dejemos-de-hacer-periodismo>

92 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/amenazan-de-muerte-a-corresponsal-de-radio-progreso-2/>

93 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2362-mensaje-de-muerte-te-damos-24-horas-para-salir-del-pais-le-dicen-en-mensaje-a-corresponsal-de-radio-progreso>

94 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2367-antes-de-la-amenaza-en-la-pared-periodista-erick-padilla-fue-amenazado-por-policias>

95 <https://twitter.com/ONUDDHH/status/1071912400016826369>

96 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/en-la-impunidad-continua-atentado-contra-periodista-geovanny-sierra/>

97 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/898-prensa-504-exige-justicia-por-atentado-contra-periodista-de-une-tv>

Violence against Women

Reporteros de Investigación published an interactive map of femicides occurring between 2013 and 2016 in Honduras.⁹⁸ This year, at least 344 women were violently murdered in Honduras.⁹⁹

According to journalist Stephen Kinzer, the high level of gender-based violence are one important, but overlooked driver of migration from the Northern Triangle. "In recent years, this plague has reached dramatic proportions. "It is taking on a magnitude and a level of cruelty that is devastating Central America," a United Nations official asserted in 2016. He spoke as the UN released a report showing that among all countries in the world that are not at war, the three with the highest rates of violence against women are Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador."¹⁰⁰

Political Prisoners

On December 4, a judge prolonged the pre-trial detention measure against the two political prisoner Edwin Rovelo and Raúl Alvarez.¹⁰¹ After a visit, their lawyers denounced that the two are without access to medical care and that their health is deteriorating.¹⁰² On December 24, Manuel Zelaya asked on Twitter for Christmas without political prisoners.¹⁰³ Three days later, the Alignment against the Reelection (CCC) and the National Committee for the Liberation of the Political Prisoners held a press conference demanding their freedom.¹⁰⁴

Extractive Industries

An important instrument by social movements are community radio stations, especially to inform about extractive industry projects and to organize. This months, representatives of seven community radio stations met in a three-day gathering to discuss their work in defense of their land and public goods. One of the stations, Radio Stereo Namasigüe, had recently been founded as a response to problems with international investment in solar energy projects in the south of Honduras.¹⁰⁵ Another useful tool was published this month by ERIC and Radio Progreso: a book by Joaquín A. Mejía Rivera on international human rights obligations of the Honduran State regarding the protection of the commons and how they should be leveraged on the ground.¹⁰⁶

Mining

Honduran communities continue to organize public town hall meetings to vote about mining projects. This month, the inhabitants in El Triunfo, Choluteca rejected mining projects in their area

98 <https://reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2018/12/07/mapa-interactivo-de-crimenes-contra-mujeres-en-honduras-durante-cuatro-anos/>

99 <https://tiempo.hn/unas-344-mujeres-murieron-violentamente-en-2018-la-mayoria-de-los-casos-continuan-impunes/>

100 <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/12/05/how-femicide-drove-caravan/5lktZE3HNESy7AwLksW5LJ/story.html>

101 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/tribunal-de-sentencia-mantiene-en-firme-reclusion-de-presos-politicos-en-la-tolva/>

102 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/dh/911-presos-politicos-en-la-tolva-no-reciben-atencion-medica>

103 <https://confidencialhn.com/expresidente-zelaya-pide-una-navidad-sin-presos-politicos/>

104 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/libertad-para-los-presos-politicos-y-justicia-para-los-martires-de-ayer-y-de-hoy/>

105 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/884-radios-comunitarias-nos-unimos-para-romper-los-cercos-mediaticos-en-honduras>

106 <https://joaquinmejiarivera.blogspot.com/2018/12/dos-nuevos-aportes-del-eric-sj.html>

through such a process.^{107 108} The consultation was organized with the help of MASSVIDA and 60 communities participated. 97.90% rejected mining activities in their area.¹⁰⁹ ConexiHon reports on a town hall meeting in Orocuina, Choluteca on November 10 with the same outcome.¹¹⁰ Radio Progreso published a helpful article on the challenges to have such decisions officially recognized.¹¹¹

In the last two monitors, we covered the worrisome situation in El Guapinol. This month, a judge decided that the local leader Jeremías Martínez would have to await trial in prison. He is being criminalized for his peaceful resistance against the mining project by Inversiones Los Pinares. His lawyer Omar Menjívar denounced that due process has been violated and that he was being sent for a crime he did not commit.¹¹²

Hydroelectricity

The MP presented an arrest warrant against the former under-secretary of Natural Resources, Marco Jonathan Laínez, for abuse of authority. He did not consult the local inhabitants before granting a license for a hydroelectric project.¹¹³

Corruption and Its Enemies

Throughout 2018, almost every month brought forward a new large-scale corruption case. In this regard, December was not different. Additionally, it brought to light new aspects in already uncovered corruption cases. Before turning to those, we highlight other corruption-related news items of this month.

In December, there were various instances of state bodies or newspapers announcing new corruption charges or investigations against public officials, e.g. by the TSC¹¹⁴ or by La Prensa¹¹⁵. In a more specific case, the TSC sent six cases to the MP regarding cases of illicit enrichment reaching more than 15 million Lempiras.¹¹⁶ The Intervention Committee of the National Registry of Persons (RNP) presented their first results. They found 20 acts of corruption demanding an investigation by the MP and the Supreme Audit Court (TSC).¹¹⁷

The CNA had several appearances in the press. First, its director Gabriella Castellanos claimed that some 80% of congresswo/men have access to NGOs to divert public funds.¹¹⁸ Then it announced to

107 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/el-informador/item/2356-decision-de-las-comunidades-empresas-mineras-deben-irse-de-el-triunfo-choluteca>

108 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1238770-466/el-municipio-de-el-triunfo-voto-por-el-futuro-de-su-explotacion-minera>

109 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn/en-consulta-ciudadana-el-triunfo-choluteca-dice-no-a-la-mineria/>

110 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/mirada-al-sur/885-orocuina-se-declara-libre-de-mineria-y-plantas-fotovoltaicas>

111 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn/presionar-a-autoridades-para-que-declaren-oficialmente-al-municipio-libre-de-minera-reto-para-el-triunfo-choluteca/>

112 <http://www.hondurastierralibre.com/2018/12/honduras-persecucion-y-criminalizacion.html>

113 <https://confidencialhn.com/libran-requerimiento-contr-a-exfuncionario-ambiental-por-abuso-de-autoridad/>

114 <https://confidencialhn.com/tribunal-superior-de-cuentas-enviara-nuevos-casos-de-corrupcion-al-ministerio-publico/>

115 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1240757-410/denuncian-18-funcionarios-fraude-obras-fallidas-honduras>

116 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1240734-466/el-tsc-remite-seis-informes-al-mp-con-enriquecimiento>

117 <https://tiempo.hn/interventora-pide-al-mp-investigar-irregularidades-y-negligencias-en-el-mp/>

118 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/13/el-80-de-los-diputados-del-congreso-de-honduras-tiene-ongs-para-saquear-fondos-del-estado/>

investigate infrastructure contracts worth more than 2 billion Lempiras handed out by subsidiaries of the Infrastructure and Public Services Secretariat (Insep).¹¹⁹ And before the year had handed, it announced to present new corruption cases in 2019 involving current and former state officials.¹²⁰ Later it specified that there would be two to three high impact corruption cases for the first semester of 2019.¹²¹

The Onslaught against the Anti-Corruption Bodies

Compared to some months ago, the public and open threats against the MACCIH and other anti-corruption bodies have diminished, but not at all disappeared. On December 10, the former president of the Judicial Power, Jorge Rivera Avilés, shot against the MACCIH, claiming that Honduras' judges lost their independence due to interference by the MACCIH. While the independence of the judges before the arrival of the MACCIH was questionable at best, Rivera Avilés may also have been motivated to denigrate the MACCIH for facing corruption charges himself.¹²² A few days later, the former Liberal presidential candidate Luis Zelaya claimed that in the background there is a similar campaign as in Guatemala against CICIG in Honduras to close down the MACCIH.¹²³

The Open Chest Case

The MACCIH and UFECIC presented its newest corruption case, the denominated “arca abierta” or “Open Chest” case, on December 11.¹²⁴ The presentation was accompanied by charges against five congresswo/men and ten further individuals. They are accused of misappropriating state funds (\$879'000) through the use of a bank account in the name of the Green Planet Association. The investigation went back to 2016, when the MACCIH and UFECIC first set sight on the doings of the Green Planet Association.¹²⁵ Among the accused was the Nationalist congresswoman Gladis Aurora López Calderón whose investment in controversial hydroelectric projects haven been criticized for years by indigenous and human rights organizations.¹²⁶ JOH was also mentioned as part of the case. According to Criterio, he had authorized the transfer of the funds in question.¹²⁷

ContraCorriente warned about too much enthusiasm. “[In all cases there were fiscal requirements, but the outstanding debt is the issuance of requirements against the ringleaders of each case”.¹²⁸ Radio Progreso agreed. “The main debt that MACCIH-UFECIC have with the population is the omission of two key figures in each of the cases of corruption presented by the Mission since it has

119 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1242846-410/cna-detecta-12000-millones-en-contratos-fraccionados-en-insep>

120 <https://tiempo.hn/cna-casos-por-corrupcion-en-impunidad/>

121 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1244027-466/el-consejo-nacional-anticorrupci%C3%B3n-presentar%C3%A1-tres-casos-de-alto-impacto-en-2019>

122 <https://confidencialhn.com/expresidente-del-corte-suprema-cuestiona-la-perdida-de-independencia-judicial-por-intromision-de-maccih/>

123 <https://confidencialhn.com/luis-cree-que-vendra-una-campana-para-cerrar-la-maccih/>

124 https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=C-079/18

125 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1244174-466/desde-el-2016-seguian-la-pista-de-planeta-verde-ong-usada-por-diputados>

126 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3133-arca-abierta-octavo-golpe-de-la-maccih-a-corrumpidos-en-honduras>

127 https://criterio.hn/2018/12/11/joh-autorizo-transferencias-de-fondos-saqueados-por-diputados-y-familiares-en-caso-arca-abierta/?fbclid=IwAR33jNC4nsvxsh5rsvcpCFhF9eiid1UYG6_2oWTgG3re61zDeuj-MrNDEtU

128 <https://contracorriente.red/2018/12/11/las-deudas-de-la-maccih/>

been operating in the country, both Mauricio Oliva as president of the National Congress, who has links clear with these acts, and Juan Orlando Hernández."¹²⁹

The Pandora Corruption Case

December started with an announcement by the CNA that the MP was about to arrest additional public officials as part of Pandora corruption case.¹³⁰ These arrests did not materialize, but on December 11, the Social Citizen Platform presented demands at various MP offices in Honduras to include JOH and Pepe Lobo in the Pandora corruption case investigations.¹³¹ Fernando Suárez, an accused in the same case, had included them in a testimony.¹³² Journalist and social investigator published a three-part report for CESPAD on the role of Pepe Lobo and JOH in the Pandora corruption case.¹³³ In one installment, she described the case as an important vessel for the financing of JOH's 2013 presidential campaign.¹³⁴ But instead of going after the intellectual authors, a judge suspended temporarily the migrant alert against Elvin Santos Lozano.¹³⁵ He was allowed, for health reasons, to travel abroad, but must be back in Honduras by January 7, 2019.

The IHSS Case

The MACCIH and UFECIC presented another new corruption case in December, but one linked to the emblematic IHSS case.¹³⁶ The case involves the company DIMESA. According to their investigations, the IHSS made sales of expensive and overvalued, but unnecessary medical equipment solely to profit DIMESA.¹³⁷ They presented arrest warrants against twelve former IHSS board members¹³⁸, all except one was arrested the same day.¹³⁹ ¹⁴⁰ The next day, Hilario Espinoza, the only one who had not been arrested, appeared before a court, denouncing that he had not been informed about the search for him and that there was no legal way for him to present himself to the authorities.¹⁴¹ The business lobby COHEP went on the offensive speaking of a political persecution of its members.¹⁴² Interestingly, just a day before the MACCIH informed about this new case, COHEP's former president Óscar Galeano had been arrested linked to the IHSS corruption case.¹⁴³ The IHSS labor union also tried to protect its accused former board member.¹⁴⁴ ¹⁴⁵

¹²⁹ <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/sin-presentar-requerimientos-contrajoh-y-mauricio-oliva-a-pesar-de-existir-vinculos-con-redes-de-corrupcion/>

¹³⁰ <https://tiempo.hn/mp-presentara-requerimientos-fiscales-contrafuncionarios-corrupptos-segun-cna/>

¹³¹ <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/11/demandan-requerimiento-fiscal-contrajoh-y-pepe-lobo-por-caso-pandora/>

¹³² <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/demandan-ampliacion-de-requerimiento-fiscal-contrapresidente-herandez-caso-de-corrupcion/>

¹³³ <http://cespad.org.hn/2018/12/17/los-artifices-de-la-red-de-corrupcion-en-la-caja-de-pandora/>

¹³⁴ <http://cespad.org.hn/2018/12/26/pandora-una-de-las-fuentes-de-financiamiento-de-herandez-para-llegar-a-la-presidencia-de-honduras/>

¹³⁵ <https://confidencial.hn.com/suspenden-orden-de-captura-contraelvin-santos-padre-y-audiencia-sera-en-enero/>

¹³⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/OEAMACCIH/videos/vb.575386339332629/359811848113756/?type=2&theater>

¹³⁷ https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?Codigo=C-076/18

¹³⁸ <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/04/presentan-requerimiento-fiscal-contramiembros-de-exjunta-directiva-del-seguro-social/>

¹³⁹ <https://tiempo.hn/a-prision-mandan-a-los-once-implicados-en-el-caso-de-latrocinio-del-ihss/>

¹⁴⁰ <https://contracorriente.red/2018/12/05/el-desfalco-del-ihss-se-sigue-desenredando/>

¹⁴¹ <https://confidencial.hn.com/sindicalista-perseguido-por-mega fraude-al-ihss-niega-corrupcion-en-compra-de-equipos-a-dimesa/>

¹⁴² <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/05/cohep-dice-que-hay-persecucion-contrasus-miembros-senalados-en-latrocinio-del-ihss/>

¹⁴³ <https://confidencial.hn.com/detienen-a-expresidente-del-cohep-por-presunta-participacion-en-mega fraude-al-ihss/>

¹⁴⁴ <http://elpulso.hn/si-cometieron-delito-fue-mas-por-omision-jose-luis-baquedano/>

¹⁴⁵ <http://elpulso.hn/los-trabajadores-capturados-no-se-han-bebido-un-refresco-del-pisto-del-ihss-joel-almendarez/>

On December 10, the twelve accused had their first day in court.¹⁴⁶ Afterwards, seven were released from pre-trial detention while two remained in custody and three got house arrest.¹⁴⁷ Their defense team challenged the committal to trial.¹⁴⁸

The Astropharma Case

In the Astropharma corruption case, which included the sale of fake pharmaceuticals, the owner of International Laboratories (Lain), Miguel Flores Cisneros, was found guilty. Lain sold the drugs to Astropharma which then sold it to the Health Secretariat. Astropharma belongs to the Gutiérrez family, among them the former Nationalist vice-president of Congress, Lena Gutiérrez. She celebrated the sentence as proof of their innocence, but she and her family are still under investigation on various accounts.¹⁴⁹ The case will continue on January 18 with an evidentiary hearing.¹⁵⁰ At the same time, the sitting judges changed the precautionary measures against some of the accused. In the case of Lena Gutiérrez, this means that she is allowed again to participate in public events.¹⁵¹ According to ConfidencialHN, another Nationalist politician involved in the case, Marco Tulio Gutiérrez, paid a multi-million bail to get rid of his house arrest.¹⁵²

Departmental Funds

On December 7, the MACCIH published a press release expressing its concern regarding Congress' intention to reactivate the corruption-riddled Departmental Funds (see also last month's monitor).¹⁵³

The Cases against Congresswo/men

One year ago on December 11, the MACCIH and UFECIC presented the “Red de Diputados” or the Network of Congressmen corruption case involving four congressmen and one congresswoman. They were accused of misappropriating money from an NGO and then were expelled from their parties. El Pulso published an overview of the case.¹⁵⁴ Another case involving congresswo/men and linked to the Network of Congressmen is the Impunity Pact case.¹⁵⁵ A Nationalist congressman, Antonio Rivera, and a Nationalist congresswoman, Sara Medina, appeared in court on December 12 for their declaration.¹⁵⁶ The judge ruled that they can await trial in freedom.¹⁵⁷

146 <https://tiempo.hn/caso-directivos-del-ihss-fianza-para-dos-firmanan-libro-siete-y-tres-con-arresto-domiciliario/>

147 <https://tiempo.hn/un-juez-emite-un-fallo-favorecedor-para-los-implicados-en-el-desfalco-del-ihss/>

148 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1242109-466/apelan-fallo-de-jueza-en-caso-licitaci%C3%B3n-fraudulenta-del-ihss>

149 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/03/ni-yo-ni-mi-familia-fabricamos-las-famosas-pastillas-de-harina-lena-gutierrez/>

150 <http://www.hondurastierralibre.com/2018/12/honduras-para-el-18-de-enero-de-2019.html>

151 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1242105-466/cambian-medidas-a-implicados-en-el-caso-astropharma>

152 <https://confidencialhn.com/suspenden-arresto-domiciliario-a-marco-tulio-gutierrez-a-cambio-de-millonaria-fianza/>

153 <https://www.oas.org/es/sap/dsdme/maccih/new/docs/MCH-008.18-MACCIH-OEA-expresa-preocupacion-por-reformas-encaminadas-a-reactivar-el-Fondo-Social-Departamental.pdf>

154 <http://elpulso.hn/a-un-ano-de-la-red-de-diputados-o-el-blindaje-de-la-corrupcion/>

155 <https://twitter.com/UFECIC1/status/10707642664278016>

156 <https://confidencialhn.com/a-audiencia-de-declaracion-de-imputados-involucrados-en-pacto-de-impunidad/>

157 <https://confidencialhn.com/rivera-y-medina-se-defenderan-en-libertad-por-pacto-de-impunidad/>

The Case against the Former First Lady Rosa Elena de Lobo

The only headline this month about the case against the former first lady was that her lawyer resigned.¹⁵⁸

State Security Forces

For months, there have been tension between the Deputy Attorney General Francisco Sibrián and the director of Forensic Medicine, Julissa Villanueva (see also past editions of this monitor). On December 13, Sibrián dismissed her unconvincingly portraying it as a study-leave.¹⁵⁹ Villanueva publicly stated that it had to do with her insistence on the irregularities in the case of a murdered ATIC department head, Sherill Yubissa Hernandez Mancía, which both ATIC and the MP first wanted to present as a suicide.¹⁶⁰ By the end of the same day, the MP had already sworn in a new ad-interim director.¹⁶¹ Irregularities took also place in Congress, when various army officials were promoted under suspect circumstances.¹⁶²

At the end of the month, Congress announced that it would debate a three-year prolongation of the mandate of the purging committee.¹⁶³ The newly created Bureau of Disciplinary Police Affairs (Didapol), meanwhile, announced to investigate at least 900 members of the police force.¹⁶⁴

Post-Electoral Human Rights Violations

Last month, the electoral fraud of 2017 was commemorated. It was the beginning of two months of violent and murderous repression. On December 3, COFADEH commemorated Raúl Antonio Triminio Cisnado, who was murdered by the Military Police exactly one year earlier.¹⁶⁵ His as all other post-electoral assassinations remain unpunished.¹⁶⁶ So far there has been only one hearing in the case of a young man tortured by four members of the Military Police.¹⁶⁷ Padre Melo presents the impunity reigning in these cases and the general behavior of the JOH regime in 2018 as an attempt of "pacification" by the JOH regime. "[P]acification" is the concept that most accurately characterized the year 2018. It was imposed by the military-police force and legal deterrence, and with the international endorsement as a backdrop, alongside the extreme fragility, confusion and vacillations of the Honduran political opposition, more concerned in counting and adding votes than in saving the rule of law and democracy."¹⁶⁸ On December 27, the Alignment against the Reelection (CCC) and the National Committee for the Liberation of the Political Prisoners held a press

158 <https://tiempo.hn/renuncias-abogado-ex-primer-dama/>

159 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/13/destituyen-a-la-directora-de-medicina-forense-julissa-villanueva/>

160 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/13/destituyen-a-directora-de-medicina-forense-julissa-villanueva/>

161 <https://tiempo.hn/autoridades-del-mp-juramentan-a-nuevo-director-interino-de-medicina-forense/>

162 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/05/congreso-nacional-de-honduras-aprueba-ascensos-a-oficiales-de-las-fuerzas-armadas-en-dudosa-votacion/>

163 <https://confidencialhn.com/proponen-extender-mandato-de-junta-depuradora-policia-hasta-enero-de-2022/>

164 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1242424-410/al-menos-900-policias-agentes-seran-investigados-por-didadpol>

165 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/un-ano-sin-justicia-por-el-asesinato-de-raul-antonio-triminio-cisnado-a-mano-de-la-pmp/>

166 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/un-ano-de-silencio-de-las-autoridades-en-la-desaparicion-forzada-de-manuel-de-jesus-bautista-salvador/>

167 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/acusan-a-cuatro-policas-militar-de-tortura-e-intento-de-asesinato-contrajoven-progreso.net/>

168 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/la-pacificadora-covuntura-hondurena-de-2018-y-los-tropiezos-de-sus-protagonistas/>

conference demanding a stop to the persecution, freedom for the political prisoners and justice for the "martyrs".¹⁶⁹

Repressions

Ever since the electoral fraud last year, inhabitants of Choluteca went to the streets twice a week to protest the JOH regime, 104 times in total this year.¹⁷⁰ On December 31, C-Libre denounced that the last protest of the year was once more was violently repressed by state security forces.¹⁷¹

Assassinations

An army official shot dead a 30-year old man, Dennis Edgardo Álvarez, who mistook his car for the identically looking car of the army official.¹⁷² On a parking lot of a mall, Álvarez walked to what he believed his car and was immediately shot in the head when he opened the car door.¹⁷³

Penitentiary System

On December 4, a confrontation between inmates in the so-called high-security prison El Pozo took place.¹⁷⁴ The deputy director of the National Penitentiary Institute first claimed that everything is "under control"¹⁷⁵ before he later confirmed that there had been a confrontation.¹⁷⁶ Shortly afterwards, four inmates in a youth detention center escaped one of which was later recaptured.¹⁷⁷ And as in previous months, the transfer of prisoners between the different facilities took place.¹⁷⁸

The National Penitentiary Institute (INP) announced an increase of employed prison guards for a total of 1017 guards.¹⁷⁹ Its The deputy director German McNiel also claimed that they increased the daily expenditure for food to 30 Lempiras per inmate.¹⁸⁰ On December 29, they further announced the implementation of new technological security measures to block calls from inside prisons.¹⁸¹ Interestingly, the same announcement had already been made in 2014, but soon afterwards it became clear that it did not really work. This time, the announcement only mentioned the so-called high-security prisons El Pozo and La Tolva.

169 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/libertad-para-los-presos-politicos-y-justicia-para-los-martires-de-ayer-y-de-hoy/>

170 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2373-hubo-104-protestas-en-2018-gobierno-de-joh-no-logro-desarticular-manifestaciones-en-choluteca>

171 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/criminalizacion-de-la-protesta-publica/934-policias-y-militares-reprimen-protesta-numero-104-en-choluteca>

172 <https://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/1240252-410/muere-joven-evangelico-militar-confunde-delincuente-dennis-alvarez>

173 <https://confidencialhn.com/muere-joven-que-fue-acribillado-por-militar-en-centro-comercial-de-comayagua/>

174 <https://confidencialhn.com/honduras-descartan-rina-en-penal-de-ultra-alta-seguridad-el-pozo/>

175 <https://tiempo.hn/subdirector-inp-desmiente-fuga-el-pozo/>

176 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/04/conato-de-amenamiento-en-carcel-de-ilama-santa-barbara/>

177 <https://confidencialhn.com/se-fugan-cuatro-infractores-de-carcel-juvenil-sampedrana-y-detienen-a-uno-de-ellos/>

178 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/26/trasladan-38-reos-hacia-tamara-y-el-porvenir/>

179 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/16/97-nuevos-agentes-daran-seguridad-a-centros-penales/>

180 <https://tiempo.hn/a-30-lempiras-aumento-costo-de-alimentacion-diaria-por-cada-recluso-segun-inp/>

181 <https://confidencialhn.com/implementaran-sistemas-de-bloqueo-de-llamadas-en-el-pozo-y-la-tolva/>

Militarization

December began with a IACHR hearing on the militarization of public security in the Americas. COFADEH co-requested the hearing and informed about the situation in the Northern Triangle.¹⁸² The IACHR announced that in 2019 they would increase their work on the demilitarization of the region and they presented a priority action plan.¹⁸³ In Honduras, CESPAD organized a forum on "The Military in Honduras, from the democratic transition in the 90s to the current authoritarian democracy".¹⁸⁴ In their participation, the political analyst Raúl Pineda Alvarado highlighted the undemocratic character of the Armed Forces¹⁸⁵ and the sociologist Eugenio Sosa explained how the Secrecy Law protected the Armed Forces and granted them impunity.¹⁸⁶

International Community

Even though the pressure on the JO regime from the street continued this month, it benefits from ongoing support internationally. Taiwan donated \$1 million to Honduras which will be used for the controversial intervention committee of the public health sector (see last month's monitor on the committee).¹⁸⁷ The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) granted Honduras a \$53.8 million credit for the construction of new hospital to attend medical emergencies.¹⁸⁸ The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE) announced support for setting up the Honduras-El Salvador customs union¹⁸⁹ and it signed a \$44 million contract for infrastructure.¹⁹⁰

Israel

A Honduran delegation visited Israel this month. HispanTV believes that this increases the likelihood that, just as Guatemala, Honduras will move its embassy to Jerusalem. The JOH regime seems to want to further benefit from its military ties with Israel.¹⁹¹ According to various Honduran media outlets, Honduras presented some conditions for transferring its embassy to Jerusalem.¹⁹² But it was also interpreted as a move to please the Trump administration (see also next sub-section).¹⁹³

US

Given everything that had happened in Honduras since November 2017, Criterio rightly pointed out the problems with the US donating plane to the Honduran Air Force (FAH).¹⁹⁴ But December also

182 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/denuncian-ante-la-cidh-la-militarizacion-de-la-seguridad-publica/>

183 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/la-desmilitarizacion-en-latinoamerica-sera-una-prioridad-para-la-cidh-en-2019/>

184 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/06/el-poder-omnipotente-de-los-militares-de-honduras/>

185 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/06/ff-aa-no-son-institucion-para-salvaguardar-la-democracia-raul-pineda-alvarado-video/>

186 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/06/ley-de-secretos-fue-aprobada-para-dar-impunidad-a-los-militares/>

187 <https://confidencialhn.com/un-millon-de-dolares-se-invertiran-para-la-transformacion-del-sector-salud/>

188 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/13/bid-presta-a-honduras-538-millones-para-construir-hospital-de-trauma/>

189 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/17/bcie-apoyara-union-aduanera-entre-honduras-y-el-salvador/>

190 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/17/gobierno-construira-ruta-entre-anillo-periferico-con-el-tizatillo/>

191 <https://www.hispantv.com/noticias/honduras/396873/israel-embajada-jerusalen-hernandez-netanyahu>

192 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/26/honduras-estaria-poniendo-condiciones-para-trasladar-embajada-a-jerusalen/>

193 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1245268-466/honduras-inicia-acercamientos-para-establecer-sede-en-jerusal%C3%A9n>

194 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/05/ee-uu-dona-avion-a-militares-de-honduras-en-medio-de-senalamientos-de-narcotrafico/>

showed that the US has not made up its mind regarding Honduras and there are different signs coming from the Trump administration and the State Department. The former made headlines again at the end of the month, when Trump tweeted ".....Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador are doing nothing for the United States but taking our money. Word is that a new Caravan is forming in Honduras and they are doing nothing about it. We will be cutting off all aid to these 3 countries - taking advantage of U.S. for years!"¹⁹⁵ Hugo Noé Pino, former president of the Central Bank of Honduras, reacted as follows: "I believe that if the Trump administration wants to help reduce migration, it could begin by stopping to support an illegal, illegitimate government with little credibility like Honduras currently has."¹⁹⁶ On December 27, Carlos H. Reyes denounced in a press conference that the US maintains its support of JOH for geopolitical reasons.¹⁹⁷ But no one knows how long this support will continue. The president of the Monarca wing inside the National Party, Roberto Ramón Castillo, said the same day that they would be hard hit by future accusations of drug trafficking and extradition demands by the US.¹⁹⁸

There were also good news from the US this month. Fair Trade US revoked the fair trade certificate of the Irish international company Fyffes who continues to make negative headlines in Honduras for wage theft and labor rights violations.¹⁹⁹ Just on December 13, workers on Melon fields denounced that a Fyffes subsidiary violates labor rights in Honduras in collusion with the JOH regime.²⁰⁰

EU

December started with an open letter to EU ambassador Alessandro Palmero expressing concern regarding the violent repression by state security forces on November 26 and the situation of the journalist Geovanny Sierra.²⁰¹ ²⁰² While we have not witnessed a public reaction to this, the EU sent this month an expert delegation to supervise the work by the intervention committee of the RNP (see sub-section on electoral reforms).²⁰³ Two of the three members of the committee later traveled to Europe to present their project to the European parliament. They estimated its cost at 23 million Euros.²⁰⁴

On December 08, the JOH regime announced the opening of an embassy in Austria as well as a representation at the UN system in Vienna.²⁰⁵ The Spanish ambassador Guillermo Kirkpatrick announced this month that the new cooperation plan starting next year will be focused on human

195 <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1078638249562775552>

196 <https://hondudiario.com/2018/12/29/es-contradictorio-pensar-que-se-va-a-suspender-ayuda-de-ee-uu-a-honduras/>

197 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/27/ee-uu-sostiene-al-regimen-de-herandez-ante-una-possible-invasion-a-venezuela-carlos-h-reyes/>

198 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3147-partido-nacional-sera-azotado-por-extradiciones-advierte-roberto-ramon-castillo>

199 <https://laborrights.org/releases/fyffes-must-bargain-independent-union-honduras>

200 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/13/meloneras-del-sur-violentan-derechos-laborales-en-complicidad-con-el-estado-hondureno/>

201 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/01/envian-carta-al-embajador-de-la-union-europea-por-agresion-al-periodista-geovanny-sierra/>

202 <https://tiempo.hn/carta-embajador-ue-agresion-contra-periodista/>

203 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1239712-466/la-ue-inicia-veedur%C3%ADa-para-el-proyecto-de-identificaci%C3%B3n-nacional>

204 <https://confidencialhn.com/interventores-piden-20-millones-de-euros-para-nueva-identidad/>

205 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/08/agencias-de-naciones-unidas-con-sede-en-austria-ratifican-su-apoyo-a-honduras/>

rights.²⁰⁶ Also this month, HonduraAction, a project financed by the EU embassy, proposed to create an Anti-Corruption Citizen Platform.²⁰⁷

Drug Trafficking

Drug trafficking is a recurring theme in Honduras' media landscape, but the arrest of JOH's brother Tony Hernández in the US last month dramatically increased its coverage. Before zooming in on his case, there are other drug trafficking-related events worth highlighting. Javier Suazo published an interesting article on how the IMF lacks awareness (or prefers to look the other way) to the reality of Honduras as a narco-state and how this affects its political economy.²⁰⁸ To avoid talk of Honduras as a narco-state, the head of the Armed Forces, René Ponce Fonseca, believes that threats are the way forward. On December 3, he publicly threatened anyone linking them with drug trafficking and organized crime.²⁰⁹ Pinu congressman Luis Redondo did not let himself be intimidated and publicly did so.²¹⁰

Not just to turn away attention from his brother, JOH portrays his – superficial - fight against drug trafficking as a badge of honor. This month, this narrative received further blows when La Prensa cited a DEA report highlighting the ongoing importance of Honduras in the cocaine trade.²¹¹ According to the political analyst Raul Pineda, Honduras has become a drug trafficking sanctuary and he highlighted the fact that Costa Rica and Panama, two countries without armies, had decommissioned substantially more drugs than heavily militarized Honduras.²¹²

As in previous months, Hondurans on the US extradition list were arrested. On December 5, Osman Donay Martínez Chorti was arrested in Copán. He is presumably linked with the Valle Valle cartel.²¹³ Another presumed member of this cartel, Orlando Pinto was arrested in Guatemala shortly afterwards.²¹⁴ At this time, the Liberal congressman Fredy Nájera was already in the US where he declared himself guilty of drug trafficking. According to his testimony, he made use of the military base El Aguacate in Olancho, near the Nicaraguan border.²¹⁵ Radio Globo director David Romero Ellner then linked Libre congressman and brother of Manuel Zelaya, Carlos Zelaya, to his activities. Carlos Zelaya formally accused him of defamation and asked him to present proof. Romero Ellner reacted by saying that if a court will ask for it, he will present proof.²¹⁶

On December 18, El Tiempo made public that the MP would initiate the prosecution of the current head of the police, general José David Aguilar Morán, as well as five former directors, among them

206 <https://confidencialhn.com/cooperacion-espanola-anuncia-apoyo-financiero-en-ddhh-para-honduras/>

207 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/03/proponen-la-creacion-de-plataforma-anticorruccion-ciudadana-en-honduras/>

208 <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/196810>

209 <https://confidencialhn.com/ffaa-dispuestas-a-querellarse-contr-quienes-denuncian-vinculos-con-el-narco/>

210 <https://tiempo.hn/como-guachimanes-de-grupos-criminales-califica-luis-redondo-a-miembros-de-la-ff-aa/>

211 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1239121-410/dea-honduras-sigue-siendo-puente-transito-cocaina>

212 <https://confidencialhn.com/honduras-se-convirtio-en-un-santuario-para-narcotraficantes-analista/>

213 <https://confidencialhn.com/capturan-extraditible-ligado-al-cartel-de-los-hermanos-valle/>

214 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/17/capturan-en-guatemala-a-orlando-pinto-supuesto-socio-de-los-valle-valle/>

215 <http://elpulso.hn/la-querrela-de-carlos-zelaya-rosales-el-aguacate-y-el-viejo-cuento-del-vo-no-fui/>

216 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/11/jefe-de-la-bancada-del-partido-libre-querrela-al-periodista-david-romero/>

Ricardo Ramírez del Cid.²¹⁷ The latter then appeared in a TV interview linking two Nationalist bigwigs - Óscar Álvarez (former Minister of Security) and Armando Calidonio (mayor of San Pedro Sula) - to the drug cartel Los Cachiros.^{218 219} Los Cachiros have been held responsible, among many other things, of ordering the 2009 murder of the Honduran anti-drug czar Julián Arístides González. Del Cid confirmed that the police was also involved in the murder.²²⁰ Last but not least, he stated that the order for the murder of the journalist in 2012 came from high up and it was linked to organized crime as well.²²¹ Radio Progreso linked his statements with statements made by another former head of police, general Henry Osorto Canales, to paint a broader picture of the links between drug trafficking and state officials. "Osorto Canales said that in recent years the drug trafficking business was monopolized by a cartel endorsed and protected by politicians; it was led by Tony Hernández, brother of Juan Orlando Hernández".²²²

Tony Hernández

Alberto Arce published a great overview of Tony Hernández's arrest and its implications.²²³ While it made international headlines, the MP in Honduras did not feel compelled for weeks to seize his goods as stipulated by the Domain Deprivation Law.²²⁴ This was a stark contrast to the case of the Rosenthals, a Liberal family, when the MP and OABI immediately seized all their goods and properties leading to the closure of El Tiempo. On December 11, Tony Hernández appeared in court in New York pleading not guilty.²²⁵ As his bail was denied, has to continue await trial in custody.²²⁶ Almost a week later, a month after his arrest, the MP started to seize his goods and property²²⁷. In total, they seized one house, four cars and five bank accounts.²²⁸ On December 27, Criterio reprinted articles from February 2016 when 20 cocaine packages were decommissioned in Costa Rica. They had the label "TH" on them. According to US prosecutors, Tony Hernández used his initial to mark the cocaine trafficked by him.²²⁹

Varia

National Dialogue

As we already reported in last month's monitor, the National Dialogue definitively failed on November 26, when the participants did not come to an agreement for the umpteenth time.

217 <https://tiempo.hn/lluvia-requerimientos-actual-jefe-y-5-exdirectores-de-la-policia/>

218 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3136-ultima-hora-exdirector-de-policia-confirma-que-oscar-alvarez-y-armando-calidonio-tienen-nexos-con-los-cachiros>

219 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/19/exjefe-policia-revela-que-oscar-alvarez-y-armando-calidonio-tenian-vinculos-con-los-cachiros/>

220 <https://reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2018/12/18/calidonio-y-oscar-alvarez-trabajaban-con-los-cachiros-y-mi-destitucion-ocurrio-por-investigar-el-crimen-contr-el-periodista-alfredo-villatoro/>

221 <https://reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2018/12/18/calidonio-y-oscar-alvarez-trabajaban-con-los-cachiros-y-mi-destitucion-ocurrio-por-investigar-el-crimen-contr-el-periodista-alfredo-villatoro/>

222 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/ministros-fiscales-cupula-policia-y-militar-fueron-principales-complices-de-tony-herandez-dice-ex-general/>

223 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/02/honduras-es-un-poema-narcopolitico/>

224 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/a-dos-semanas-de-captura-de-tony-herandez-fiscalia-sigue-sin-asegurar-bienes/>

225 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1241077-466/tony-hern%C3%A1ndez-acudir%C3%A1-este-martes-a-su-primera-audiencia>

226 <https://confidencial.hn.com/tribunal-de-nueva-york-deniega-fianza-a-tony-para-defenderse-en-libertad/>

227 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/autor-login/125-diciembre2018/3714-se-autoriza-iniciar-aseguramiento-de-bienes-a-juan-antonio-herandez>

228 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3134-honduras-a-medias-incautan-bienes-a-tony-herandez>

229 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/27/cocaina-con-la-marca-th-fue-descubierta-por-policia-tica-en-el-2016/>

Nevertheless, UN representative did not want to give up and claimed that an agreement was still possible.²³⁰ On December 10, the National Dialogue officially concluded and every faint of optimism disappeared. Criterio published the following headline "FAILURE! Dialogue concludes without any agreements in Honduras"²³¹ and even El Heraldo struggled to find something positive to write.²³² While acknowledging the importance of dialogue for "the democratic development of a country", Radio Progreso explained why the Honduran setting had failed to bring forward a solution to the current crisis. "By simple logic, the same ones indicated in cases of corruption and with links with arms and drug trafficking, are the promoters and defenders of the implementation of a dialogue that, like almost two hundred years ago, once again excluded the great impoverished majorities of Honduran history. In the dialogue, the same political-party domes were set up to resolve, according to them, the deep crisis provoked by them."²³³ Salvador Nasralla blamed the failure to the intransigence of the JOH regime and he also warned of the limits of the proposed electoral reforms for not account for the fact that the TSE is still controlled by "a network of corrupt officials" (see also next sub-section).²³⁴

Electoral Reforms

Electoral reforms were part of the National Dialogue. As the former's failure was evident for a while, talks about electoral reforms were continued in the Nationalist-controlled Congress. This month, the topic made headlines, because a report by the OAS on recommendations for electoral reform was made public.²³⁵ It includes recommendations on the institutional setting, the electoral process as well as the system of the political parties. They also reiterated their recommendation from 2014 to limit campaign spending.²³⁶ Another focus is the reform of the National Registry of Persons (RNP). An EU expert delegation arrived in Honduras this month to supervise the work by the intervention committee of the RNP.^{237 238}

Throughout the month, several political figures made public statements regarding the process. Congress' president Mauricio Oliva reiterated that the Honduran people should be consulted regarding the presidential reelection²³⁹ – a demand he ignored when it came from Libre before the illegal reelection of JOH. Libre congressman Ramón Soto announced that they would not support any electoral reform if it does not include a two-round presidential election.²⁴⁰ Coup general and founder of the Honduran Patriotic Alliance party, Romeo Vásquez, supported the electoral reforms in Congress, but demanded that Article 37 of the Constitution be changed so that members of the

230 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1239086-466/igor-garafulic-cree-que-si-habra-consensos-el-jueves-en-dialogo>

231 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/11/fracaso-sin-acuerdos-concluye-dialogo-en-honduras/>

232 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1241443-466/sin-acuerdos-formales-concluy%C3%B3-el-di%C3%A1logo-nacional>

233 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/7064-2/>

234 <https://tiempo.hn/dialogo-politico-oea-errores-nasralla/>

235 <https://www.oas.org/documents/spa/press/informe-propuesta-electoral-honduras.pdf>

236 <https://tiempo.hn/establecer-limites-a-gastos-de-campana-politicas-recomienda-nuevamente-la-oea-a-honduras/>

237 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1239712-466/la-ue-inicia-veedur%C3%ADa-para-el-proyecto-de-identificaci%C3%B3n-nacional>

238 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1245772-466/misi%>

239 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1241799-466/honduras-mauricio-oliva-dice-que-temas-como-la-reelecci%C3%B3n-los-resolver%C3%A1-el>

240 <https://confidencialhn.com/libre-declinar%C3%A1-reformas-si-no-hay-segunda-vuelta/>

armed forces are allowed to vote.²⁴¹ Congress will discuss the reforms between January 20-24, 2019.²⁴²

Migration

On December 1, Criterio criticized that the Honduran public turned away its attention from the fate of the Honduran migrants in Mexico.²⁴³ Almost two months after the first caravan had taken off, media attention was clearly lower, but throughout December, events related to migration took place that were taken up. Also on December 1, El Tiempo reported that the new Mexican president AMLO signed an agreement with his Northern Triangle counterparts to reduce "irregular migration".²⁴⁴ Shortly afterwards, Honduran migrants in Mexico were transferred from Tijuana to a 20km inwards recreation center called El Barretal.²⁴⁵ It was estimated that of the over 6000 migrants having arrived in the last weeks in Tijuana, less than half arrived in El Barretal. A lot of them disappeared facing the dilemma of choosing between staying in Tijuana applying for a humanitarian visa or trying to enter the US.²⁴⁶ By December, participants of the migrant caravan presented some 3700 asylum requests in the south of Mexico and another 590 in Tijuana. An additional 2500 humanitarian visa had been requested, 1000 of which were granted by mid December.²⁴⁷

As in previous months, international media outlets covered the topic looking at possible root causes. The Washington Post told the story of Santos Chirino, who had fled to the US from gang violence but was extradited in 2016. On return to Honduras, he was murdered. His two children then fled to the US hoping to be spared their father's fate.²⁴⁸ The Yes Magazine concentrates on climate change as a driver, presenting Central America as "ground zero for climate change".²⁴⁹ Reuters published an article on political persecution as a reason to flee Honduras. "The Pineda family trudged northward for more than a month with a caravan of Central American migrants who are now stuck at the U.S. border. But they were on the run in Honduras much longer than that due to fears of political persecution."²⁵⁰ Jen Moore of Mining Watch Canada and Karen Spring of the Honduras Solidarity Network contributed to the topic of the root causes by focusing on the role of Canada.²⁵¹ Marlon Ochoa and Russel Garay summarized the lesson's to be drawn from the migrant caravan. "If something has become clear in the almost two months since the caravan of migrants left Honduras, migration in the northern triangle is not a luxury. It is, on the contrary, a forced situation that hides tragic material realities. The stories of the caravan refer to populations left to their fate by

241 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3140-general-golpista-romeo-vasquez-negocia-voto-de-militares>

242 <https://tiempo.hn/mauricio-oliva-reformas-electorales-2019/>

243 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/01/caravana-de-migrantes-parece-ser-tema-olvidado/>

244 <https://tiempo.hn/para-eliminar-la-migracion-irregular-firman-plan-de-desarrollo-integral/>

245 <http://elpulso.hn/luvia-y-desilusion-disuelven-caravana-de-migrantes-en-tijuana/>

246 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/migrantes-en-tijuana-ante-el-dilema-de-quedarse-en-mexico-o-buscar-apoyo-en-estados-unidos/>

247 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/migrantes-sus-dificultades-y-oportunidades-en-tijuana/>

248 https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/asylum-deported-ms-13-honduras/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.0cdb171182bb

249 <https://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/why-the-migrant-caravan-story-is-a-climate-change-story-20181127>

250 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-honduras/hondurans-who-fled-political-violence-fear-for-lives-if-sent-home-idUSKBN1OF0IH>

251 <https://ricochet.media/en/2467/canadas-role-in-creating-the-refugee-crisis-in-central-america>

governments incapable and instrumentalized for electoral purposes, located on the deadly edge of neglect and vulnerability."²⁵²

Special focus was also granted to the situation of young and unaccompanied migrants. "Those who survive the journey are not out of danger: bureaucratic hurdles can delay them from pleading their case to US officials – or even prevent them from seeking asylum altogether. Meanwhile, they are forced to wait in border cities that have become battlefields in Mexico's raging drug war."²⁵³ Two young Honduran migrants, both below 18, were murdered in Tijuana mid December. According to witnesses, it was a robbery gone horribly wrong.²⁵⁴ According to El Heraldo, US border control had captured 52'000 Honduran children in the last five years.²⁵⁵

Criterio published an important article on the situation of migrants deported to Honduras.²⁵⁶ In one tragic case, the 28-year old Nelson Roberto Espinal Matamoros was murdered in Tegucigalpa just one week after he had been deported back to the country from Mexico.²⁵⁷

One effect of migration widely felt in Honduras is the growing amount of remittances sent to the country. In 2018, \$4.4 billion were sent to Honduras, 9.6% more than in 2017. 80% of the remittances are sent from Hondurans in the US and they make up almost 20% of the GDP.²⁵⁸ But remittances also have a dark side. Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle highlighted their importance for the JOH regime. "In fact, remittances have become the central pillar of our economy. Failures here and there, successful migrants sustain the Honduran economy! Which the parasitic State depletes in such a way that every day it becomes more anemic."²⁵⁹

General Budget 2019

In last month's human rights monitor, we already covered the various problems with the General Budget for 2019. On December 12, Congress approved it in just one sitting.²⁶⁰ Libre immediately denounced it as an act of corruption due to complete lack of transparency and the absence of any public participation.²⁶¹ Their criticism was shared by the Central-American Fiscal Studies Institute (Icefi).²⁶² FOSDEH denounced that congresswo/men with open judicial investigations should not have voted and that the budget did not reflect the reality of the majority of Hondurans.²⁶³ Congress' own Health Commission rejected the budget assigned to the public health system.²⁶⁴ Radio Progreso

²⁵² <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/23/caravana-migrante-el-sintoma-de-un-pais-sin-alternativa/>

²⁵³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/18/unaccompanied-children-tijuana-us-immigration>

²⁵⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-mexico-hondurans/officials-say-two-honduran-migrant-youths-killed-in-mexico-idUSKBN1OI07R>

²⁵⁵ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/minisitios/hondurenosenelmundo/1245957-471/estados-unidos-detuvo-a-52000-ni%C3%B1os-hondure%C3%B1os-en-solo-cinco-a%C3%B1os>

²⁵⁶ <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/09/hondurenos-repatriados-a-la-deseesperanza/>

²⁵⁷ <https://confidencialhn.com/honduras-asesinan-a-una-persona-deportada-desde-la-caravana-inmigrante/>

²⁵⁸ <http://www.latribuna.hn/2018/12/15/honduras-capto-44484-millones-en-remesas-96-mas-que-en-2017/>

²⁵⁹ <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/17/remesas-y-presupuesto-conectando-los-puntos-entre-paradojas-aburridas-para-gente-despierta/>

²⁶⁰ <https://tiempo.hn/en-solo-debate-cn-aprueba-presupuesto-general-de-la-republica-para-el-2019/>

²⁶¹ <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/13/el-presupuesto-es-un-acto-de-corrupcion-del-gobierno-de-joh/>

²⁶² <http://elpulso.hn/finanzas-plantea-un-retroceso-tributario-para-2019/>

²⁶³ <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/14/fosdeh-presupuesto-de-2019-esta-descontextualizado-de-la-realidad-de-honduras/>

²⁶⁴ <https://confidencialhn.com/comision-de-salud-del-legislativo-repudia-baja-asignacion-para-el-sistema-sanitario/>

summarized the budget as a tool of further repression²⁶⁵ and feminist and women's rights organization denounced the lack of funding to investigate femicides.²⁶⁶ Ignoring all criticism, the budget was published in La Gaceta on December 24.²⁶⁷

Electric Energy

The Energy Company Honduras (EEH) has made negative headlines throughout these last months. On December 4, two Libre congressmen presented a motion in Congress based on a citizen's initiative demanding the derogation of the contract between the State of Honduras and EEH.²⁶⁸ Radio Progreso published an important summary on the failures of EEH. "Since the Energy Company Honduras, EEH assumed the collection of energy tariffs, complaints about its service have increased, as a result of high charges, plus harassment for subscribers to change to prepaid meters or so-called smart meters. In a recent analysis on Radio Progreso, the economist and researcher of the Social Forum for External Debt of Honduras, Fosdeh, Ismael Zepeda, said that all these abuses respond to the manufactured weakening of the public [sector], making believe that private means efficient, without knowing that we lose an institutionality that should be effective in providing quality services for citizens."²⁶⁹

Javier Suazo fears that instead of learning from its mistakes, the JOH regime will continue the disputed privatization process which started in in May 2014 with the approval of the General Electric Industry Bill. Next year it is planned to culminate by partitioning the National Electric Energy Company (ENEE) in three parts.²⁷⁰ ENEE itself also made headlines this month due to links to a questionable company called Logix Source Direct Honduras.^{271 272}

Privatizations

The failures of privatizations are not only evident in the Honduran energy sector exemplified by the EEH (see above), but also in infrastructure projects. On December 14, Congress derogated a contract with the Colombian company Adasa who had a concession to build a highway between the Sula Valley and Atlántida.²⁷³ According to the Secretary of Finance, Rocío Tábora, the cancellation may cost Honduras up to \$90 million.²⁷⁴ The initial contract may also be linked to corruption. On December 1, the CNA announced to investigate infrastructure contracts worth more than 2 billion Lempiras handed out by subsidiaries of the Infrastructure and Public Services Secretariat (Insep). According to the CNA, Insep split up contracts into smaller parts to avoid public scrutiny.²⁷⁵ The

265 <http://wp.radioprogressohn.net/presupuesto-nacional-2019-busca-fortalecer-la-represion-ciudadana/>

266 <https://confidencialhn.com/piden-al-gobierno-hacer-efectivo-el-desembolso-para-investigacion-de-femicidios/>

267 <https://tiempo.hn/presupuesto-2019-publicado-la-gaceta/>

268 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/04/presentan-ante-el-congreso-nacional-iniciativa-ciudadana-para-derogar-contrato-a-eeh/>

269 <http://wp.radioprogressohn.net/el-jugoso-negocio-de-la-energia-en-honduras/>

270 <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/197049>

271 <https://confidencialhn.com/empleados-de-la-enee-denuncian-que-embargo-de-logix-les-impide-trabajar/>

272 <https://confidencialhn.com/dueno-de-logix-hallo-en-honduras-a-traves-de-demandas-como-volverse-multimillonario/>

273 <https://confidencialhn.com/adios-adasa-parlamento-elimina-concesion-del-inconcluso-corredor-turistico/>

274 <https://confidencialhn.com/estado-hondureno-pagaria-hasta-dos-mil-millones-por-rescision-de-corredor-turistico-finanzas/>

275 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1242846-410/cna-detecta-12000-millones-en-contratos-fraccionados-en-insep>

problems with privatizations were also the topic of a recent report by Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. He heavily criticized the World Bank and IMF's aggressive promotion of it, arguing that widespread privatization of public goods in many societies is "systematically eliminating human rights protections and further marginalising those living in poverty."²⁷⁶

Poverty

On December 12, JOH announced a "historic" agreement regarding a 38.5% raise in the minimum wage over five years in the maquiladora industry.²⁷⁷ Javier Suazo explained that if one deducts inflation, there isn't much left of the "historic" raise.²⁷⁸ As a result, the minimum wage is still far below the price of a general goods basket, currently at 13'000 Lempiras.²⁷⁹ Even worse, the talks about a raise in the minimum wage outside the maquiladora sector broke down on December 19.²⁸⁰ Labor unions announced protests for January 3.²⁸¹

Radio Progreso reminded us that talk about extreme poverty in Honduras should be juxtaposed with talk about extreme wealth. "In most forums and public and private reports, the reality of extreme poverty is often accentuated. Why not accentuate extreme wealth with the same force? What is worse for society?: The extreme poverty that results from economic, political and social relations, or extreme wealth as the main trigger of the first?"²⁸²

Institutionalized Religion

Civil society organizations filed a complaint at the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court against the nomination of religious ministers for special commissions looking into the health and education sector. They denounced that these nominations violate various rights and that the nominated religious ministers belong to structures that have and continue to emit public statements which "injure the human dignity of LGTBI people and women".²⁸³ The same month, Radio Progreso challenged JOH on his misuse of the Christian religion. "The most effective way to hide the absence of God, is to present his name as a justification for what we do. In this case, no public official has used the name of God more than Juan Orlando Hernández. If he were sincere, he would be the most devout and spiritual official, however, we already know what this man seeks and defends. From that example, nothing is more manipulable than the name of God, and for certain groups is the most effective name to do business or to hide misdeeds, both in politics and especially within religious circles, as pope Francisco reminds us."²⁸⁴

276 <https://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2018/12/imf-and-world-banks-support-for-privatisation-condemned-by-un-expert/>

277 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1242143-410/aumento-salario-minimo-honduras-maquila-trabajadores>

278 <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/197192>

279 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/aumento-salarial-en-la-maquila-hondurena-es-miserable-aseguran-obreras/>

280 <https://confidencial.hn.com/suspenden-por-hoy-discusion-del-salario-minimo-en-honduras/>

281 <https://tiempo.hn/sindicatos-de-trabajadores-anuncian-huelgas-a-partir-del-3-de-enero-por-salario-minimo/>

282 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/riqueza-extrema-12-de-diciembre-2018/>

283 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/10/impugnan-nombramiento-de-ministros-religiosos-en-comisiones-de-salud-y-educacion/>

284 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/el-nombre-de-dios-y-el-nombre-de-los-pobres-19-de-diciembre-de-2018/>

Education

JOH presented a new Secretary of Education on December 26: Arnaldo Bueso...a forest engineer.²⁸⁵

Public Health

Honduras' public health system is in constant crisis mode as part of a strategy to lower public resistance against privatization efforts. This strategy became evident once more this month, when the labor union of the Health Secretariat made public that 800 million Lempiras of 2018's health budget had not even been spent this year.²⁸⁶ Instead of tackling the root causes, the JOH regime pretends to tackle the problem by replacing the Secretary of Health. On December 2, Alba Flores was presented as the new secretary.²⁸⁷ The president of the Medical Association of Honduras (CMH), Suyapa Figueroa, denounced the nomination. Flores is part of the problem, as has been shown by her previous work at the head of the San Lorenzo Hospital.²⁸⁸ The same day of the nomination, labor unions in the health sector announced strike measures for the first week of January.²⁸⁹

And Light at the End of a Month

As the year comes to an end, Radio Progreso highlights some "small victories by a great people" in 2018, such as community resistance against extractive projects in Guapinol or the struggles of the student movement.²⁹⁰

285 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/26/de-cobrar-matricula-por-tenencia-de-pericos-a-rectorar-la-educacion-en-honduras/>

286 <https://criterio.hn/2018/12/19/en-medio-de-crisis-denuncian-que-secretaria-de-salud-no-ejecuto-l-800-millones-del-presupuesto-2018/>

287 <https://tiempo.hn/alba-flores-nueva-ministra-de-salud/>

288 <https://tiempo.hn/suyapa-figueroa-nueva-ministra-de-salud-no-representa-beneficios-para-la-poblacion/>

289 <http://www.hondurastierralibre.com/2018/12/honduras-empleados-de-la-salud-anuncian.html>

290 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn/pequenas-victorias-de-un-gran-pueblo/>



Another Month at the Honduras Forum Switzerland

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-

Upcoming Activities:

-

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