

Another Month in Honduras...

Human Rights Monitor – January 2019

The new year began as the old one ended, with protests against the JOH regime and demands for his resignation. While the number of participants were lower than after the electoral fraud in 2017, state security forces still used violence to repress them. To quell future protest, the Honduran courts tried to silence critical voices, from journalists to opposition politicians. The courts also continued in their role of guaranteeing impunity in high-profile corruption case. Welcome to another month in Honduras.

In solidarity,

Daniel Langmeier

Honduras Forum Switzerland

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Abbreviations

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

The new year began as the old one ended, with protests against the JOH regime and demands for his resignation. Almost as far went the demand by the Nationalist leader Ramon Castillo, when he asked for the replacement of the complete presidential cabinet.¹ At the same time, the lingering dispute between JOH and the former president Pepe Lobo became more public. In the past, Lobo denounced JOH for putting his wife on trial and accused his government of corruption. This month he doubled down on Twitter. "It is not spending millions on publicity that decreases people's animosity to a ruler, it is better to reflect, ask God to give him humility, strength, wisdom and the courage to change what should change. Deeds not words!"²

But the main pressure still came from the street and the opposition parties. Before the week of protest started leading up to the anniversary of JOH's illegal second inauguration, some introspection took place. Sociologist Eugenio Sosa reflected the use of the "Fuera JOH" slogan, which for him had become an 'empty signifier'. "In other words, there is a [public] consciousness that you have to get rid of something or someone who does a lot of damage, but you do not know what or who will replace it. But it is assumed that we will be better with what follows. Empty signifiers are key to political mobilization, but they are not political projects in themselves."³ Radio Progreso, meanwhile, contemplated the challenges faced by social and popular movements⁴ and Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle did the same thing for the political opposition.⁵

Reasons to protest the regime did not disappear in the new year. CESPAD, for example, criticized the unilateral focus on the homicide rate by the JOH regime when it comes to security. "The official's thinking reduces security to violent deaths, avoiding facts such as extortion, kidnappings, (...). The corporate media validated the official data and presented it as the only truth, forgetting the rigor of ethical and professional journalism that must validate the data with other sources of information. Although in Honduras there is a Secrecy Law that prevents access to public information, the media may have resorted to context analysis or interview victims of violence, to counteract the statements of Julián Pacheco with the true sense of citizen security, which implies ensuring coexistence and peaceful development in a society, preventing crime."⁶ The former president of the business lobby COHEP, Juliette Handal, presented the constant use of intervention committees as proof of the regime's dysfunction.⁷ Last but not least, FOSDEH denounced that the JOH regime communicated false public debt levels, instead of \$11 billion, it has already passed \$15 billion.⁸

1 <https://tiempo.hn/ramon-castillo-secretarios-estado-resultados/>

2 <https://tiempo.hn/pepe-lobo-a-joh-es-mejor-reflexionar-y-pedirle-a-dios-humildad/>

3 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/03/mas-alla-del-fuera-joh/>

4 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/movimiento-social-hondureno-frente-al-reto-de-luchar-contra-el-continismo-de-joh/>

5 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/08/aclarar-dilemas-de-la-oposicion-o-erigir-castillos-en-el-aire/>

6 <http://cespad.org.hn/2019/01/09/cronologia-en-un-contexto-de-violencia-multidimensional-politica-de-seguridad-de-honduras-se-limita-al-supuesto-control-de-los-homicidios/>

7 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/13/gobierno-de-honduras-no-funciona-y-tiene-70-juntas-interventoras-que-tampoco-funcionan/>

8 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/13/deuda-de-honduras-supero-los-15-mil-millones-de-dolares-en-2018/>

On January 9, the platform Citizen Action against the Dictatorship (ACCD) held a press conference to call out to the Honduran people to join them in the streets demanding the end of the JOH regime.⁹ Among those who spoke during the press conference was also the former Liberal presidential candidate Luis Zelaya. "The resignation of Juan Hernández is imperative to return peace to Honduras".¹⁰ The former Attorney General Edmundo Orellana Mercado accompanied the call with some hopeful words. "The support of this government will not depend on the future of the government of the United States, it will depend on the Honduran people, and the Honduran people are outraged".¹¹ The labor union STIBYS also joined their call.¹² Announcements of protest were further accompanied with legal actions. ACCD presented another challenged at the MP for Attorney General Óscar Chinchilla due to his failure to prosecute JOH in the Pandora corruption case.¹³

The protests started on January 19.¹⁴ A day later, another protest was held outside the MP,¹⁵ where ACCD presented another petition to Attorney General Óscar Chinchilla demanding an investigation of JOH. "He [Juan Orlando Hernández] being the president of the Council of Defense and National Security, where all the policies are designed to fight crime in all its manifestations, we do not believe that this situation should be ignored and rather; with sufficient reason we believe that he consented, promoted and even benefited from the illicit activities of his brother Antonio 'Tony' Hernández."¹⁶ On January 21, COPINH joined by other organizations and local inhabitants occupy the border location El Florido in Copán between Honduras and Guatemala.¹⁷ Similar events took place at the border to Nicaragua, where the ARCAH Movement blocked the border demanding the resignation of JOH as well as the liberation from their land of mining concessions.¹⁸ The following day, a protest took place outside the US embassy to denounce their ongoing support of the JOH regime.¹⁹ At the same time, protests took place in other parts of the country^{20 21} and even abroad. During MAG+S, a youth summit, in Panama, a group of young Hondurans presented their country in songs on stage. They ended their performance with the protest song "JOH es pa' fuera que vas" accompanied by a banner "Fuera JOH".²²

During the week of protest in Honduras, the US Department of Justice emitted a press release involving further JOH allies²³ in drug trafficking.²⁴ As a response, ACCD demanded his resignation

9 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn/convocan-a-protestas-para-sacar-a-juan-orlando-herandez-del-poder/>

10 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/09/es-imperativa-la-renuncia-de-joh-para-devolverle-la-paz-a-honduras-luis-zelaya/>

11 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/09/este-gobierno-no-se-sostiene-no-importa-que-trump-venga-aqui-con-sus-locuras-edmundo-orellana-mercado/>

12 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/16/stibys-convoca-a-movilizacion-el-20-de-enero/>

13 <https://confidencialhn.com/cuestionan-a-chinchilla-por-no-proceder-contr-joh-en-trama-pandora/>

14 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/20/hacen-a-un-lado-las-canas-y-el-cansancio-para-sumarse-a-la-lucha/>

15 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/20/hondurenos-exigen-la-salida-de-la-narco-dictadura-de-juan-herandez/>

16 <https://tiempo.hn/accion-ciudadana-presenta-segunda-solicitud-al-mp-para-investigar-a-joh/>

17 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/21/aduana-de-el-florido-copan-amanece-tomada-por-el-copin/h/>

18 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1088827883190145025>

19 <https://www.hispantv.com/noticias/honduras/409226/protesta-eeuu-herandez-migrantes-crisis>

20 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/continuan-protestas-para-exigir-la-salida-de-la-dictadura-en-honduras/>

21 <https://tiempo.hn/video-libre-comienza-las-protestas-en-la-paz-choluteca-y-tegucigalpa/>

22 <https://tiempo.hn/fuera-joh-se-grita-en-panama-antes-de-la-llegada-del-papa-y-en-londres-es-la-entonacion-de-extranjeros/>

23 <http://cepr.net/blogs/the-america-blog/honduras-flawed-election-the-case-of-el-paraiso>

24 <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/second-former-honduran-mayor-charged-conspiring-import-cocaine-united-states-and>

in front of the Supreme Court.²⁵ The former presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla denounced the bad example set by the US to stand by JOH even though there is reason to believe that he is linked to drug trafficking and his name appears in many corruption cases.²⁶ But the Trump administration seemed to be too busy with Venezuela to care. Back in Honduras, ACCD met with the UN human rights office in Honduras where they denounced that some of its members had received death threats.²⁷

On the day of the inauguration, protest took place throughout Honduras and even in Congress where Libre congresswo/men walked out as a sign of protest wearing "Fuera JOH" t-shirts.²⁸ According to the Honduras Solidarity Network, there were "at least 63 protests of different types (road blockades, gatherings, rallies, etc) in 14 departments".²⁹ C-Libre denounced that the Security Secretariat had announced repression of what they label "acts of vandalism".³⁰ There fear was justified as already the previous days, protests in the south of Honduras, at the border with Nicaragua in El Paraíso as well as in Choluteca, were repressed by state security forces.³¹ On the day of the inauguration, repression continued^{32 33 34} with some sectors, e.g. journalists, especially targeted (see section of Freedom of Expression as well as the section on State Security Forces). It even continued the day after, on Monday January 28, with the illegal detention of two UNAH students.³⁵ At the end of the month, COFADEH denounced that some people still remained detained for exercising their right to peaceful protest.³⁶

On the occasion of the anniversary, several analysts and organizations published comments. Radio Progreso spoke with sociologist Eugenio Sosa about the JOH regime and why it has stayed in power.³⁷ Bladimir López Sánchez, political analyst at CESPAD, summarized the first year of JOH's second term, the reconfiguration of Honduras' political forces or the profound crisis of legitimacy of the JOH regime.³⁸ MADJ looked ahead to the struggles to come. "After a year of self-imposed narco-dictatorship, MADJ shouts "FUERA JOH" with even greater power, but we reiterate that we want him out and imprisoned, for being one of the main leaders of a criminal and corrupt political-economic class which has assaulted all the powers and constitutional institutions of the State to take over the goods and resources that must be public and for the collective benefit."³⁹ For this to be successful, Honduras will need an united opposition as Carlos H. Reyes explained.⁴⁰

25 <https://tiempo.hn/accion-ciudadana-sigue-con-sus-protestas-frente-a-csj-exigen-salida-de-joh/>

26 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/23/ee-uu-da-mal-ejemplo-al-mundo-al-defender-a-un-narcotraficante-salvador-nasralla/>

27 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/24/accion-ciudadana-contra-la-dictadura-denuncia-amenazas-a-sus-miembros/>

28 <https://tiempo.hn/seguidora-de-joh-pobreza-subido/>

29 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol>

30 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/criminalizacion-de-la-protesta-publica/940-secretaria-de-seguridad-anuncia-represion-a-manifestaciones-proximas-al-27-de-enero>

31 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/criminalizacion-de-la-protesta-publica/941-fuerzas-policiales-reprimen-protestas-al-sur-y-oriente-del-pais>

32 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/27/policia-reprime-manifestaciones-con-gas-y-bala-viva/>

33 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/dh/39-conflictos/938-jornada-de-protestas-en-honduras-deja-detenido-y-afectados>

34 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/represion-policia-militar-marco-jornada-de-protestas-contra-el-regimen-de-hernandez/>

35 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/28/policia-detiene-a-dos-estudiantes-de-derecho-de-la-unah/>

36 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/continua-la-persecucion-contra-jovenes-de-la-oposicion/>

37 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/la-posicion-paso-de-ser-una-amenaza-de-desestabilizacion-a-un-factor-importante-de-estabilizacion-senala-eugenio-sosa/>

38 <http://cespad.org.hn/2019/01/27/honduras-a-un-ano-del-golpe-electoral-que-ha-cambiado/>

39 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/27/a-1-ano-de-dictadura-insurreccion-permanente/>

40 <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/197830>

Human Rights and Their Defenders

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders published the World Report on the Situation of HRDs. The subsection on Honduras is one of the longest in the report. Another point is worth highlighting: "In the last five years almost half of the Special Rapporteur's communications have been sent to the Americas with Honduras receiving more than any other State in the region. Many of the communications concern the killing of defenders. Each time the Special Rapporteur has expressed concern at the dangerous environment in which human rights defenders work and has condemned the killings, attacks, harassment and defamation of defenders which take place in a climate of growing violence and insecurity."⁴¹

Assassinations

Last month, COFADEH published an alert regarding the disappearance of the 32-year old Jessica Castillo Saucedo, daughter of a member of the campesino association "Las Delicias" which is affiliated with the CNTC. She was found murdered on January 1.⁴² The same month, the 32-year old Noel Isaac Del Cid was murdered by unknown assailants. He was the administrator of the Asentamiento Campesino La Confianza, a group belonging to the campesino organization MUCA.⁴³ Front Line Defenders documented 321 murders of human rights defenders worldwide in 2018, eight of them in Honduras making it once more one of the country with the highest murder rate of HRDs per capita.⁴⁴

Lawyers

On January 13, Leonardo Sarmiento, lawyer and son of a former Nationalist PARLACEN congressman, was murdered in Juticalpa, Olancho.⁴⁵ About 150 lawyers have violently lost their lives in Honduras since 2002, the majority of them, 130, since the coup d'état in 2009. Eight lawyers were murdered in 2018 and according to El Pulso, at least two of them had previously asked the State for protection.⁴⁶

Attacks, Criminalization and Harassment

Almost four years ago, in 2015, three Honduran UNAH students were criminalized and two years later sentenced for protesting for the right to a good education. Sergio Luis Ulloa, Cesario Alejandro Padilla and Moisés David Cáceres wanted to make use of a cassation appeal to challenge the sentence but the Honduran judicial system denied them this right.⁴⁷ COFADEH informed about another case of criminalization taking place in Santa Barbara against four persons, two of which are

41 <https://www.protecting-defenders.org/sites/protecting-defenders.org/files/UNSR%20HRDs-%20World%20report%202018.pdf>

42 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/sin-vida-encuentran-a-joven-que-estaba-desaparecida/>

43 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/se-teme-que-asesinato-de-campesino-dispare-de-nuevo-la-violencia-en-el-aguan/>

44 https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/global_analysis_2018.pdf

45 <https://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/1255876-410/matan-hijo-diputado-saul-sarmiento-olancho-honduras->

46 <http://elpulso.hn/dos-abogados-a-quienes-mataron-en-2018-habian-pedido-proteccion-al-estado/>

47 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/denuncias/item/2387-sin-acceso-a-la-justicia-tres-estudiantes-criminalizados-por-la-unah-porque-sentencia-esta-solo-en-audio>

indigenous Lenca human rights defenders. COFADEH denounced that protected witnesses were being used to directly frame the HRDs. "They want to criminalize the defenders to stop the work of these people, they want to cause them fear in the sense that if they continue doing their job, they will be criminalized".⁴⁸

Indigenous Peoples

January was an especially difficult month for OFRANEH. On January 10, OFRANEH warned of the imminent destruction of "one of the most biodiverse places on the north coast of Honduras" due to the construction of a thermal energy plant. MiAmbiente played a dubious role in granting the concession.⁴⁹ A few days later, their message became even more worried when they reported on a resolution by a Trujillo court on communitarian land possession. Honduras indigenous peoples have been protesting the Property Law since its elaboration and approval in 2004 for violating indigenous rights. The case looked at by the Trujillo court regards a decision based on this law about communitarian land in Guadalupe, Colón granted to a Canadian businessman. A local employee was accused of abuse of authority for granting the land to the businessman, but based again on the Property Law, she was acquitted. According to OFRANEH, this decision means the end of communitarian land in Honduras.⁵⁰ And then, on January 16, the coordinator of OFRANEH, Miriam Miranda, was stopped and harassed by the Military Police.⁵¹

Fortunately, there was also some good news in January. The sentencing hearing in the case of general Finlánder Armijo Uclés started this month. He had been found guilty of threats and damages against members of the indigenous Tolupan in San Francisco, en Locomapa.⁵²

The Case of Berta Cáceres

COPINH held a press conference in front of the Supreme Court to demand the cancellation of the concession for Agua Zarca.⁵³ When trying to deposit their demand, state security forces impeded them from entering the Supreme Court.⁵⁴ In the trial, the MP demanded life in prison for the seven men found guilty for the murder of Berta Cáceres.⁵⁵ The trial was further in the news due to the trial of María Luisa Borjas (see Freedom of Expression section). Borjas was found guilty of slander against the businessman Camilo Atala. Because she also mentioned him as one of the intellectual authors of the murder of Berta, his lawyer interpreted the sentence as a not guilty verdict of Atala, even though this was never investigated as part of the trial.⁵⁶ Olivia Zúniga Cáceres, daughter of Berta Cáceres, did not let herself be intimidated by the assassination of her mother nor the judicial

48 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/en-santa-barbara-hay-varios-defensores-de-ddhh-que-enfrentan-la-condicion-de-presos-politicos/>

49 <https://ofraneh.wordpress.com/2019/01/10/corredor-garifuna-sambo-corozal-zona-de-sacrificio-ambiental/>

50 <https://ofraneh.wordpress.com/2019/01/18/resolucion-del-juzgado-de-trujillo-y-el-fin-de-la-propiedad-comunitaria-en-hondura/>

51 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1085759282719674369>

52 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2377-general-finlander-armijo-enfrenta-cargos-por-agredir-a-indigenas-tolupanes-en-yoro>

53 <https://copinh.org/2019/01/fotos-y-video-conferencia-de-prensa-libertad-para-el-rio-gualcarque-10-enero-2019/>

54 <https://twitter.com/COPINHONDURAS/status/1083415927100788736>

55 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/author-login/126-enero2019/3727-mp-solicita-privacion-de-libertad-de-por-vida-contra-asesinos-de-la-lider-ambientalista-berta-caceres>

56 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1254420-410/me-asombra-la-celeridad-de-este-juicio-mar%C3%ADa-luisa-borjas>

persecution of Borjas, she publicly reiterated that the Atala Zablah family is responsible for the murder of her mother.⁵⁷

LGBTI

Pasos de Animal Grande informed this month about a soon to be published report by the Committee of Sexual Diversity in Honduras. It found signs of torture in at least 23 autopsies of victims identified by the LGBTI community in 2017. "The autopsies showed the types of torture practiced in crimes against LGTBI people, among which are highlighted violations against both men and women, hits to their faces, burnings, wounds in different parts of the body, or more than three bullets in different parts of the body."⁵⁸

Freedom of Expression and Journalists

One name has suffered regularly in this section as he continue to suffer repression and harassment form the JOH regime, the journalist Jairo López. He has been waiting for over two months to be assigned a new judge in a criminalization case against him by the Energy Company Honduras (EEH). As he has to travel weekly to sign an the court, this delay causes an additional burden on him.⁵⁹ Mid-January, López, who regularly reports on the bi-weekly, protests against the JOH regime in Choluteca, denounced that he had received a threat of being attacked and shot in the foot the next time he would cover the protests.⁶⁰ When he covered the protests on the second anniversary of JOH's illegal inauguration, López was not shot at, but illegally detained by the police. And as López should benefit from the protection mechanism, which includes in his case a guard, the guard accompanying him was also arrested. Both were released in the middle of the night after spending hours in a cell.⁶¹ Shortly after his release, a group of police agents arrived at his house shortly after his release intimidating his family.⁶² ⁶³ López announced that he would hold Mauricio Oliva Herrera, the current government and the protection mechanism responsible if something were to happen to him or his wife.⁶⁴

Another important development this month relates to the freedom of expression and its restriction by Honduran courts. On January 11, Supreme Court confirmed a sentence against journalist and director of Radio Globo, David Romero Ellner, for slander and defamation. He faces time in prison.⁶⁵ Romero denounced that JOH and the president of the Supreme Court, Rolando Argueta,

57 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/30/familia-atala-zablah-son-los-asesinos-intelectuales-de-mi-madre-olivia-zuniga-caceres/>

58 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2374-revela-informe-hay-una-practica-sistematica-de-la-tortura-contr-personas-lgtbi-en-honduras>

59 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/el-informador/item/2376-el-periodista-jairo-lopez-en-larga-espera-por-un-nuevo-juez>

60 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/el-informador/item/2379-terror-para-marchistas-dispararle-en-las-piernas-y-dejarlo-muy-golpeado-seria-el-plan-contr-periodista-jairo-lopez>

61 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2389-periodista-jairo-lopez-y-su-escolta-fueron-dejados-en-libertad-a-la-medianoche-de-este-domingo>

62 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2391-cada-minuto-cuenta-intensifican-la-persecucion-y-hostigamiento-con-el-periodista-jairo-lopez>

63 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2392-mesa-de-derechos-humanos-demanda-del-estado-hondureno-medidas-reales-de-proteccion-para-el-periodista-jairo-lopez>

64 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/30/si-me-pasa-algo-responsabilizo-a-mauricio-oliva-al-gobierno-y-al-mecanismo-de-proteccion-jairo-lopez/>

65 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/11/periodista-david-romero-esta-con-un-pie-en-la-carcel/>

ordered this sentence.⁶⁶ According to him and other observers, it represents payback for his coverage on corruption by both men and their allies.⁶⁷

Human rights scholar Joaquín Mejía Rivera criticizes that the sentence ignored Inter-American jurisprudence on freedom of expression. "The sentence against the journalist David Romero Ellner clearly reflects what the IACHR established in its preliminary observations of its visit to the country in August 2018: that in Honduras there is a "selective justice" that, on the one hand, acts in a delayed manner regarding human rights violations, but that, on the other hand, favors the interests of diverse actors linked to the public power."⁶⁸ As a further response, the Journalists Association of Honduras (CPH) once more demanded the decriminalization of crimes against honor.⁶⁹ A group of congresswo/men announced to present a bill decriminalizing slander and defamation.⁷⁰

C-Libre and Ciprodeh held a joint press conference denouncing the practice of misusing the law to silence critics. In total, the two organizations have documented at least 41 cases of this sort since 2003.⁷¹ Even CONADEH called the approach a "severe and disproportionate" measure.⁷² But instead of listening, the situation turned from bad to worse. The same month, journalist, Carlos Martínez, faced the second accusation for defamation by congressman Bernardo Enrique Yllescas.⁷³ Martínez told C-Libre: "We have a sensitive political class that intends to dictate to us how to practice journalism and which we must ask for permission to practice our profession; they practically believe that they can go to court with any journalist who is put in front and especially if this communicator does not bend to their will."⁷⁴

Shortly afterwards, it also affected Libre congresswoman and former police commissioner María Luisa Borjas. She had been accused of defamation by the businessman Camilo Atala.⁷⁵ On the day of her trial, even the Washington Post reported on it: "Days before Honduras' elections in 2017, a former high-ranking official in the national police, Maria Luisa Borjas, held a news conference at which she read from government investigative reports about three high-profile killings. Now, as an opposition lawmaker, she faces the possibility of a fine and, more significantly, the loss of her seat in Congress when she goes on trial Monday charged with defamation. Her alleged crime was essentially naming names — the suspected "intellectual authors" of a slaying contained in one of those reports — in a country where the powerful have long enjoyed impunity."⁷⁶

International coverage did not seem to bother the court and the judge found Borjas guilty. The Coalition against Impunity denounced in a press conference the ruling as a "political ruling" and

66 <https://tiempo.hn/confirman-condena-contra-david-romero-el-sostiene-que-fallo-es-politico/>

67 <https://confidencialhn.com/el-poder-quiere-encarcelar-a-romero-por-revelar-putrida-corrupcion-e-impunidad/>

68 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/12/sentencia-de-david-romero-ignora-jurisprudencia-interamericana-en-libertad-de-expresion/>

69 <https://tiempo.hn/despenalizar-injurias-pide-cph/>

70 <https://tiempo.hn/mario-villafranca-congreso-nacional/>

71 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/927-delitos-contra-el-honor-se-utilizan-para-criminalizar-periodistas-denuncian-organizaciones>

72 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/929-conadeh-medida-severa-y-desproporcional-encarcelar-personas-por-delitos-contra-el-honor>

73 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/procesos-legales/939-en-siete-meses-periodista-enfrenta-segunda-querrela>

74 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/939-hay-una-clase-politica-que-pretende-dictar-como-ejercer-el-periodismo>

75 <https://confidencialhn.com/querellada-por-banquero-insiste-en-que-no-ha-cometido-ningun-delito/>

76 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/honduran-lawmaker-faces-defamation-trial-after-naming-names/2019/01/28/2b23353c-22ba-11e9-b5b4-1d18dfb7b084_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.54d6cb9ebd49

they highlighted irregularities in the process involving the president of the judicial system and JOH ally Rolando Argueta.⁷⁷ Human right scholar Joaquín Mejía raised further doubt about the legitimacy of the ruling⁷⁸ and once more explained how it violates the Inter-American human rights system.⁷⁹

Assassinations

The 29-year old Paul Alexander Reyes Jonh, son of journalists Walter Reyes and Nancy John, was murdered in Tegucigalpa on January 11.⁸⁰ A day later, unknown assailants attacked the family of Radio América correspondent Leonardo Raudales - one person died and four were hurt when the attackers shot the car they were driving in.⁸¹

Violence against Women

Violence against women is widespread in Honduras as the first weeks of 2019 once more highlighted. In the first 16 days of 2019, at least 13 women were murdered.⁸² Women also suffer violence at home and Libre congresswoman Olivia Zúniga Cáceres courageously spoke publicly about the mistreatment, sexual violence, and discrimination she suffered from her former partner.⁸³ Violence is also a main driver of women leaving Honduras.⁸⁴ At the same time, the JOH regime fails to pay adequate attention to the problem. The Center for Women's Studies (CEM-H) denounced that only 40 million Lempiras had been approved to investigate femicide from the required 234.8 million Lempiras.⁸⁵

Protection Mechanism

A report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the World Report on the Situation of HRDs, includes a statement on the protection mechanism for HRDs. " It has yet to be fully implemented or adequately resourced and has not prevented the rise in attacks and the prevalence of impunity."⁸⁶ It does not help, that there are an increase of requests while its budget decreased.⁸⁷ Even worse, the mechanism was accompanied by the opening of the Public Prosecutor Office for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice Operators (FEPRODDEHH), which so far has failed to report on its work and it has not even published any statistics yet on the cases it attended.⁸⁸

77 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/941-fallo-politico-fue-dictado-por-presidente-de-csj-contra-comisionada-borjas>

78 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/opiniones/940-tres-cuestiones-que-hay-que-preguntarle-al-presidente-de-la-corte-suprema-de-justicia-rolando-argueta-juez-natural-que-hoy-condeno-a-maria-luisa-borjas-por-delitos-contra-el-honor-en-perjuicio-del-senor-camilo-atala>

79 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/30/un-nuevo-golpe-a-la-libertad-de-expresion-y-al-debate-democratico/>

80 <https://tiempo.hn/frente-a-su-casa-asesinan-a-hijo-de-periodistas-en-tegucigalpa/>

81 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/12/atentan-contra-corresponsal-de-radio-america-en-olancho/>

82 <https://joaquinmejiaarivera.blogspot.com/2019/01/13-femicidios-en-16-dias.html>

83 <https://tiempo.hn/diputada-olivia-caceres-denuncia-abusos-cometidos-por-su-exesposo/>

84 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/15/las-victimas-que-huyen-en-silencio-dejando-una-huella-de-dolor/>

85 <https://confidencialhn.com/piden-mas-presupuesto-para-investigacion-de-femicidios/>

86 <https://www.protecting-defenders.org/sites/protecting-defenders.org/files/UNSR%20HRDs-%20World%20report%202018.pdf>

87 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2382-incrementan-las-solicitudes-de-proteccion-por-agresiones-a-periodistas-y-defensores-de-derechos-humanos>

88 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/denuncias/item/2383-fiscalia-especial-de-proteccion-se-niega-a-dar-cuentas-de-su-trabajo>

Political Prisoners

It has been a year now that the political prisoner Edwin Espinal was detained and imprisoned. Óscar Esquivel dedicated an OpEd to him, "a symbol of struggle against the injustices in the country".⁸⁹ The general coordinator of COFADEH, Bertha Oliva, demanded from the president of the Judicial Power, Rolando Argueta, the liberation of the remaining political prisoners.⁹⁰

Extractive Industries

The extractive industries take many forms, from the traditional mining to more recent biofuel plantations. Some cases also highlight the inter-linkages between them. This month, Pasos de Animal Grande reported on the resistance by local communities in the south of Honduras against international investors in solar energy. In one specific case, Agua Fría, the Norwegian investors collaborate with the Honduran company PEMSA, which is linked to DESA, the company held responsible for ordering the murder of Berta Cáceres.⁹¹ The effects on such projects also share similarities. ContraCorriente reported on the dispossession of the inhabitants around the Guapinol River in the Aguán Valley focusing on the mining company Inversiones Los Pinares and the palm oil sector.⁹² Tourism is sometimes forgotten when we think about extractivism. A report by Giorgio Trucchi explains why this is wrong. "Honduran social activists in the Gulf of Fonseca question the Honduran government's discourse on the benefits of tourism development and denounce the brutality of the process of dispossession of the communities by these investments. (...) Also for Fabián Ávila [of the social movement ADEPZA], tourism could be something very important to improve the living conditions of the people. "We have always said: those of us who fight for the defense of the territory do not oppose development. We want development, we want work, we want tourists to arrive, enjoy the beauties of our island, these beautiful beaches, the Sea and the sun of southern Honduras. But it must be something that benefits everyone. We have lived here for decades and communities must be consulted and participate in these processes. We want a tourism that comes from within the communities. Tourism can no longer be built on dispossession and privatization. We are tired of this, "concluded Avila."⁹³

In most of these cases, local inhabitants were not consulted. An effort by the Convergence against the Reelection (CCC) shows what would happen if people were asked their opinion. As part of the resistance against the JOH regime, the CCC started a public consultation process last year. It continued this month in San Nicolás, Santa Bárbara. 1529 people (about 20% of all inhabitants) participated and with great majorities over 90% rejected the extractive development model promoted by the JOH regime, they denied living in a democratic state with rule of law and they demanded the resignation of JOH. In a fourth question about a local mining project, 96.34%

89 <http://elpulso.hn/edwin-espinal/>

90 <https://confidencialhn.com/defensora-de-ddhh-exige-liberacion-de-quienes-protestaron-tras-elecciones/>

91 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/el-informador/item/2375-deben-enfrentar-poderio-de-empresas-solares-pobladores-han-estado-mas-de-mil-dias-defendiendo-sus-territorios>

92 <https://contracorriente.red/2019/01/11/huir-del-despojo/>

93 <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/197692>

demanded its withdrawal.⁹⁴ But consultations such as these are still rare and legally-binding ones even rarer and so the extractive industry sector continues to cause problems as some further events of January 2019 highlight.

The mayor of San Luis, Santa Bárbara, denounced that the Forest Conservation Institute (ICF) approved a dubious management plan for their area affecting 15 communities.⁹⁵ In the south, communities continue to resist the solar energy project Los Prados.⁹⁶ Close by, inhabitants of Guanacastillo, Choluteca, denounced that a Spanish solar company promised them an improved school, new roads and much more to have their solar energy projects installed in the community but none of the promises had been kept.⁹⁷ There are also problems with wind energy projects in Honduras, especially the wind park in Santa Ana, Francisco Morazán, which started producing energy in 2011. Its construction was accompanied by irregularities; in 2015 the local mayorality was accused of misappropriation of money partly coming from the wind energy company and local inhabitants denounce the sound emissions.⁹⁸

Mining

The parish council and the parish of El Triunfo, Choluteca, wrote an open letter to the local bishop Guido Charbonneau after raising pressure from him to get rid of the local priests accompanying the people in their peaceful resistance against mining projects in the area.⁹⁹ Further north, 24 communities around Tocoa, Colón, participated in municipal summit against mining reiterating their demand that the mining company Inversiones Los Pinares leaves their region.¹⁰⁰

Corruption and Its Enemies

As 2019 began, UFECIC, the MP's anti-corruption arm, looked back at last year. In 2018, it presented together with the MACCIH 7 cases involving 88 people for a sum of over 1.5 billion Lempiras.¹⁰¹ There was also a useful update published on the work of the MACCIH in the last five months of 2018.¹⁰² Looking ahead, the head of UFECIC, Luis Javier Santos, revealed that they currently are investigating 10 cases of corruption regarding the public administration.¹⁰³ Later on, he even spoke of 18 investigations into public officials, while the National Anti-Corruption Council (CNA) announced three new high-impact cases.¹⁰⁴

94 <http://wp.radioprogreso.net/ciudadania-de-san-nicolas-rechaza-presencia-de-minera-en-el-municipio-y-se-pronuncia-sobre-la-continuidad-del-gobierno-del-juan-orlando-herandez/>

95 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/06/icf-otorga-arbitrario-plan-de-manejo-en-pulmon-ecologico-de-san-jose-de-colinas/>

96 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/mirada-al-sur/923-tres-anos-en-contra-de-concesion-fotovoltaica-se-mantiene-comunidad-surena>

97 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/el-informador/item/2385-cuando-llego-ofrecio-el-sol-y-la-luna-empresa-de-energia-solar-se-le-esconde-a-comunidades-para-no-cumplir-promesas>

98 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/investigaciones/932-parque-eolico-de-santa-ana-el-monstruo-que-nunca-duerme>

99 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/sigue-la-persecucion-y-hostigamiento-para-los-sacerdotes-de-la-zona-sur-que-apoyan-al-pueblo-en-su-lucha/>

100 <http://wp.radioprogreso.net/comunidades-de-tocoacolón-reafirman-su-rechazo-a-la-mineria/>

101 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1247348-466/ufecic-advierde-que-perseguir-a-m-a-m-corruptos-este-a-a>

102 <https://www.american.edu/centers/latin-american-latino-studies/upload/Edici%C3%B3n-Especial-MACCIH-Monitor.pdf>

103 <https://tiempo.hn/ufecic-trabaja-10-casos-que-involucran-a-funcionarios-y-ex-funcionarios/>

104 <https://tiempo.hn/ufecic-trabaja-en-18-investigaciones/>

The Supreme Audit Court (TSC) also appeared regularly in the headlines this month. It announced that so far they had audited at least 100 mayoralties after suspecting embezzlement of public funds.¹⁰⁵ But the court, i.e. its magistrate were also the target of criticism. The Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) uncovered irregularities regarding high travel expenses.¹⁰⁶ Then there is also a controversial reform taking place regarding the organic law of the TSC. The MACCIH published an analysis and while they highlighted some progress, they also criticized that "part of these reforms weaken the audit and control powers of the Court and the independence of the Public Ministry".¹⁰⁷ With the proposed reforms, the TSC would not be allowed to audit funds by Public Private Partnerships or by NGOs using state funds and would even violate the Inter-American Convention against Corruption.¹⁰⁸ ¹⁰⁹ The MACCIH met with the congressional group responsible for the reforms.¹¹⁰

Last month, the Minister of Health, Octavio Sánchez, was replaced, but some misdoings of his keep following him. The Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) he did not respect the protocol in nominating doctors favoring one group of candidates over others.¹¹¹ The new Minister of Health, Alba Consuelo Flores, motivated to present herself as the candidate of the clean slate, denounced it as an act of corruption.¹¹² Another controversy in the public health sector was made public shortly afterwards. Last September, over 300 doctors applied for a scholarship for a specialization in ophthalmology. In the final round, the doctors were asked questions regarding the LGBTI community and their political preferences.¹¹³ Additionally, the Supreme Audit Court (TSC) found 20 irregularities during the execution of an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) project for the Honduran public health sector.¹¹⁴

Further reports on irregularities and corruption concerned Hondutel¹¹⁵, the Supreme Court and high travel expenses¹¹⁶ ¹¹⁷, the National Institute for Vocational Training (Infop)¹¹⁸, and ENEE¹¹⁹. Given this monthly amount of cases, it is no surprise that Honduras remained with the same amount of points in the Perception of Corruption Index as in 2017, 29 out of 100. This gives it the 132th rank out of 180 countries.¹²⁰

105 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2019/01/09/cien-alcaldias-auditadas-por-sospechas-de-malversacion-2/>

106 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1252909-466/los-magistrados-del-tsc-reciben-hasta-1-35-mil-diaarios-en-viaticos>

107 https://www.oas.org/es/centro_noticias/comunicado_prensa.asp?sCodigo=C-002/19

108 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1253200-466/maccih-advierde-que-reformas-debilitar%C3%A1n-al-tribunal-superior-de-cuentas-y-el>

109 <https://confidencialhn.com/democracia-sin-frontera-alerta-que-desde-el-congreso-nacional-se-pretende-disminuir-al-tsc/>

110 <http://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/maccih-y-sociedad-civil-conocen-alcances-sobre-reformas-al-tsc-en-el-congreso.html>

111 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/02/exministro-de-salud-no-respeto-concurso-de-medicos/>

112 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/03/ministra-recien-nombrada-denuncia-corrupcion-de-extitular-de-secretaria-de-salud/>

113 <https://tiempo.hn/influencia-politica-becas-oftalmologia-honduras-medico-opina/>

114 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1247809-466/el-tsc-detecta-irregularidades-en-proyecto-para-hospitales>

115 <https://confidencialhn.com/70466-2/>

116 <https://confidencialhn.com/las-mejores-amigas-el-poder-detras-del-trono-en-corte-suprema-de-justicia/>

117 <https://confidencialhn.com/vida-de-potentados-asi-dilapidaron-el-dinero-los-magistrados-del-poder-judicial/>

118 <https://confidencialhn.com/corrupcion-y-conexiones-politicas-primo-en-instalacion-laboratorio-mecanico-del-infop/>

119 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1254204-466/honduras-hay-corrupci%C3%B3n-o-torpeza-en-compra-de-software-de-la-enee>

120 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/29/honduras-entre-los-mas-corrutos-de-america-latina-y-el-mundo/>

The Onslaught against the Anti-Corruption Bodies

Ever since the MACCIH started to work in Honduras, they have called for the approval of the Efficient Collaboration Bill to facilitate their work. On various occasions, opposition politicians have introduced the bill to Congress, but the Nationalists always found ways not to approve it. This month, the former Libre congressman Rasel Tomé called out to Congress to finally approve the bill this year.¹²¹ The MACCIH held also another forum on the bill hoping that civil society support would finally bring Congress to approve it.¹²² But instead of good news regarding the bill or the work of the MACCIH in general, voices warning of attacks against the MACCIH inspired by the events in Guatemala grew louder again this month.

Lester Ramírez of ASJ warned that the MACCIH could encounter the same fate as CICIG in Guatemala.¹²³ Libre Congressman Yahvé Sabillón, a member of the Parliamentary Front in Defense of the MACCIH, warned of new attacks against the institution and attempts to get rid of it.¹²⁴ The Liberal Party president Luis Zelaya, denounced that the fate of the MACCIH in Honduras is sealed by an unholy alliance of the National Party, Libre and part of the Liberal Party.¹²⁵ Last but not least, Eduardo Martell, member of the Central Committee of the Liberal Party, denounced that the agreed upon electoral reforms (see section further below) would bring the end of the MACCIH. He claimed that as part of the deals made to get through the, limited and widely criticized, electoral reforms was an agreement not to renew the contract with the MACCIH.¹²⁶ As a response to all this, the Canadian ambassador in Honduras, James K. Hill, wrote an article on the importance of the MACCIH to fight corruption. "At this historic moment for Honduras, the efforts of all the institutions that contribute to the fight against corruption must be redoubled, to show that there can be a positive and sustainable change restoring the confidence of citizens in public institutions."¹²⁷

UFECIC is also under pressure. The lawyer representing the family of the deceased former congressman Edwin Pavón holds UFECIC responsible for his client's death. Pavón was accused in the Open Chest corruption case and suffered a deadly heart attack on December 28, according to his lawyer because of the stress.¹²⁸

The work of both the MACCIH and UFECIC is further undermined by Honduras' biased Judicial Power. Time and time again, corruption cases brought forward by the two bodies were buried inside the judicial system. This month, CESPAD analyst Mario Sorto published an enlightening analysis on the role of the Supreme Court in corruption cases. "Although the articles of the Constitution that established that the main state officials could not be registered, detained or tried by any authority, were repealed, it is evident that the judicial system continues to guarantee impunity."¹²⁹

121 <http://www.proceso.hn/politica-nacional/36-proceso-electoral/rasel-tome-pide-a-bancadas-que-aprueben-este-2019-la-ley-de-colaboracion-eficaz.html>

122 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/30/la-maccih-urge-aprobacion-de-ley-de-colaboracion-eficaz-para-desmontar-la-corrupcion-narcotrafico-y-otras-redes-criminales/>

123 <https://radiohm.hn/2019/01/11/la-maccih-podria-correr-la-misma-suerte-de-la-cicig-advierten/>

124 <https://confidencialhn.com/advierten-que-clase-corrupcia-intenta-ponerle-fin-a-la-maccih/>

125 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/24/eliminacion-del-convenio-de-la-maccih-ya-fue-pactado-luis-zelaya/>

126 <https://contracorriente.red/2019/01/25/con-las-reformas-electorales-se-pacto-el-fin-de-la-maccih-eduardo-martell-partido-liberal/>

127 <https://www.facebook.com/notes/embajada-de-canada%C3%A1-en-costa-rica-nicaragua-y-honduras/la-maccih-pieza-clave-en-la-lucha-contr-la-corrupci%C3%B3n/2673254499381222/>

128 <https://tiempo.hn/familia-edwin-pavon-continuara-proceso-judicial-h/>

The Pandora Case

One of the accused in the Pandora case, Elvin Santos Lozano, was relieved of his pre-trial detention measures for health reasons last year. This month, the judge reordered house arrest for him.¹³⁰ Shortly afterwards, the court acquitted him.¹³¹ Libre congressman Jari Dixon, meanwhile, believes that there is much more to be uncovered in the Pandora case.¹³²

The Open Chest Case

On January 13 the Open Chest corruption case, involving 21 current and former congresswo/men, was discussed in court.¹³³ A few days earlier, El Heraldo had published new details about the Open Chest corruption case focusing on how the accused congresswo/men stole public funds.¹³⁴ But ignoring this as well as the gravity of the accusations in general, the sitting judge decided that the accused would not have to await trial in prison.¹³⁵ Motivated by this, the accused got more demanding. The former Nationalist congressman Óscar Álvarez, offered to pay 1.6 million Lempiras in bail to be allowed to leave the country.¹³⁶ Their defense teams also referred to the impunity act demanding that the charges against them were dropped. The judges denied this, letting the former Attorney General Edmundo Orellana to call this a "transcendental" decision.¹³⁷ One person missing this ruling was the Public Prosecutor (Procurador de la República). UFECIC denounced that he did not attend the hearing.¹³⁸ The month ended with the conclusion of the initial hearing. At the beginning of February, the sitting judge will present the resolution, i.e. if the trial against the 20 current and former congresswo/men continues.¹³⁹ The MP demanded the suspension of the current congresswo/men for the duration of a possible trial.¹⁴⁰

Impunity Pact

On January 23, a judge confirmed an upcoming trial against Nationalist congresswoman Sara Medina Galo in the Impunity Pact corruption case, but at the same time dropped the charges against the Nationalist vice-president of Congress Antonio Rivera Callejas.¹⁴¹ Callejas was the second Nationalist strongmen acquitted so far in this case, while the less powerful Nationalist

129 <http://cespad.org.hn/2019/01/31/por-que-los-altos-funcionarios-corruptos-en-honduras-no-estran-en-prision-el-rol-de-la-corte-suprema-de-justicia-csj-en-la-judicializacion-de-casos-de-corrupcion/>

130 <https://confidencialhn.com/dictan-arresto-domiciliario-para-elvin-santos-lozano/>

131 <https://tiempo.hn/caso-pandora-sobreseimiento-definitivo-para-elvin-santos-padre-por-lavado-de-activos/>

132 <http://www.hondurastierralibre.com/2019/01/honuras-existen-mas-nombres.html>

133 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1249777-410/exdiputado-corrupcion-cambiar-cheques-asociacion-planeta-verde-honduras->

134 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1248768-466/hasta-en-casinos-gastaron-fondos-los-implicados-en-el-caso-arca-abierta>

135 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/14/ninguno-de-los-sindicados-en-el-arca-abierta-ira-a-la-carcel/>

136 <https://radiohm.hn/2019/01/23/un-millon-600-mil-lempiras-propone-defensa-de-oscar-alvarez-para-cambio-de-medidas/>

137 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/23/decision-trascendental/>

138 <https://tiempo.hn/arca-abierta-ufecic-cuestiona-ausencia-procurador/>

139 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2019/01/30/fiscalia-pide-fianza-de-l-21-1-millones-a-diputados-ligados-en-caso-arca-abierta/>

140 <https://confidencialhn.com/piden-suspension-de-diputados-involucrados-en-trama-corrupcion-arca-abierta/>

141 <https://tiempo.hn/caso-fe-de-errata-sara-medina-a-proceso-y-sobreseimiento-a-rivera-callejas/>

congresswoman Sara Mediana will still face trial. Another Nationalist congressman, Román Villeda, had his preliminary hearing postponed to February 12.¹⁴²

While this case was still in court, a new Impunity Pact appeared on the horizon. Fosdeh denounced that the JOH regime and its allies in Congress reclassified the General Budget of the Republic as a state secret.¹⁴³ This was part of a wider attempt to shield information regarding the use of public funds.¹⁴⁴ While Congress approved this second Impunity Pact, the Constitutional Chamber rejected the first one as unconstitutional on January 31.^{145 146}

The Case against the Former First Lady Rosa Elena de Lobo

The new year began by de Lobo's legal team demanding a new court to judge her case, denouncing bias.¹⁴⁷ Their attempt was not successful and trial continued on January 28. But after a few moments, it was postponed once more as one of the accused, Saúl Escobar, appeared without legal representation.¹⁴⁸

The IHSS Case

There were two news-worthy events in the IHSS corruption case. A judge canceled the house arrest against one of the accused, the former COHEP president Óscar Galeano,¹⁴⁹ and another accused, Carlos Gustavo Corrales was provisionally acquitted.¹⁵⁰

State Security Forces

The new year began with an announcement by Security Minister Julián Pacheco. The National Police Force would aim to reach 205 agents per 100'000 inhabitants by the end of 2019.¹⁵¹ All the while, the purging of the police force will continue. The purging committee announced that at least 20 police officials would not be promoted in the next round promotions for facing open investigations by the committee.¹⁵² According to them, they had purged 5635 members of the National Police Force in their 31 months of existence.¹⁵³ Apart from this committee, there exists now also the Bureau for Disciplinary Police Matters (Didadpol). In its first five months, it had received 1266 complaints against police agents and officials. The human rights organizations COFADEH is one of the organizations referring most complaints.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴² <https://confidencialhn.com/reprograman-audiencia-preliminar-para-diputado-roman-villeda/>

¹⁴³ <http://www.web.elibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3202-ultima-hora-gobierno-declara-secreta-informacion-del-presupuesto-de-honduras>

¹⁴⁴ <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/31/congreso-de-honduras-aprueba-un-nuevo-y-escandaloso-pacto-de-impunidad/>

¹⁴⁵ <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/31/sala-constitucional-deroga-pacto-de-impunidad/>

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/125200-466/declaran-inconstitucional-reformas-a-ley-de-presupuesto>

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1250131-466/presentan-solicitud-inhibitoria-a-favor-de-la-ex-primer-dama-de-honduras>

¹⁴⁸ <https://tiempo.hn/reprograman-juicio-rosa-elena-de-lobo/>

¹⁴⁹ <https://confidencialhn.com/quitan-casa-por-carcel-a-implicado-en-licitacion-amanada-en-el-ihss-se-defendera-en-libertad/>

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1252528-466/corte-sobresee-a-acusado-en-el-desfalco-del-instituto-hondure%C3%B1o-de-seguridad>

¹⁵¹ <https://radiohm.hn/2019/01/01/policia-nacional-espere-tener-20-000-agentes-en-2019/>

¹⁵² <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1246782-410/depuracion-oficiales-descartados-ascensos-polic%C3%ADa-nacional->

¹⁵³ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1248444-466/un-total-de-5635-polic%C3%ADas-han-sido-cancelados-por-la-depuradora-en>

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1248111-466/honduras-unos-1266-polic%C3%ADas-han-sido-denunciados-en-cinco-meses>

But it is a long way from a complaint to prosecution or even sentencing. This month, a public prosecutor dropped the charges, without explanation, against three police agents in possession of prohibited weapons.¹⁵⁵ And sometimes, the complaints seem to be politically motivated. ConfidentialHN published findings that charges against nine police officials as part of the purge were fabricated based on rumors spread by the disputed former head of police Juan Carlos 'El Tigre' Bonilla. The article further claims that Omar Rivera and Carlos Hernández, two members of the purging body, 'are endorsing the hunt against the so-called "uncomfortable elements"'.¹⁵⁶ So it came as no surprise that the lawyer Rosme Lanza announced that at least 50 previously purged members of the police would be reintegrated.¹⁵⁷

El Pulso made public that the Naval Force of Honduras had received a three-month training by Colombian army representatives from last September to December 2018.¹⁵⁸ They will also receive a marine patrol boat bought from Israel for 1.4 billion Lempiras as part of a 5 billion Lempiras arm sale.¹⁵⁹ Soon afterwards, JOH announced that the National Police would receive 205 new cars and a new lab for criminal investigations.¹⁶⁰ Money seems to be abundant for state security forces, also thanks to the security tax ('tasa de seguridad'). It raised almost 21 billion Lempiras in the last seven years¹⁶¹ without much oversight¹⁶². The high number of mass killings taking place in January once more put in doubt its effective use.¹⁶³ InSight Crime also picked up the increase in mass killings. "Authorities in Honduras have touted a decline in homicides in recent years, but a series of massacres to start 2019 raises questions about the ongoing security situation in the Central American nation."¹⁶⁴

Post-Electoral Human Rights Violations

With the anniversary of the illegal second inauguration of JOH taking place in January, human rights organizations reminded us about the people murdered by state security forces to make JOH's power grab possible. January 1, MADJ commemorated the murder of Wilmer Adalberto Paredes Gámez one year earlier. He was responsible for the security of the protesters in San Juan Pueblo during the post-electoral period. He suffered violent repercussion for this and on December 16, 2017, he was brutally tortured by state security forces. Calls by national and international HRDs succeeded in getting him released from custody. But when MADJ asked for protection for him from the national protection mechanism, help was denied. Shortly afterwards, on January 1, 2018, Wilmer was assassinated. "Today we want his name and example to be the first light that illuminates this 2019 and the challenges we have before us. What is clear is that our blinding reality must be faced

155 <https://confidencialhn.com/fiscal-deja-libres-a-policias-que-transportaban-armas-prohibidas/>

156 <https://confidencialhn.com/persecucion-contra-expolicias-fue-por-chismes-del-tigre-bonilla-y-avalado-por-julieta-y-asj/>

157 <https://radiohm.hn/2019/01/30/al-menos-50-agentes-depurados-seran-reintegrados-anuncia-abogado/>

158 <http://elpulso.hn/armada-de-colombia-comparte-lecciones-con-honduras/>

159 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3156-honduras-pagara-1-400-millones-a-israel-por-fabricacion-de-buque-patrullero-2>

160 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1252318-410/presidente-hernandez-inaugura-laboratorio-criminal%C3%A1Dstica-tegucigalpa>

161 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1249386-466/m%C3%A1s-de-20900-millones-de-lempiras-ha-recaudado-el-tas%C3%B3n-en-7>

162 <http://www.fosdeh.com/2019/01/cual-es-el-coste-de-la-seguridad-y-la-defensa-en-honduras/>

163 <https://tiempo.hn/migdonia-ayestas-sobre-masacres-2019/>

164 <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/new-year-bloodshed-casts-doubt-honduras-security-gains/>

in that way, with determination and strength. No comfort, no waiting or delay. That we must fight against this reality until we return it to a state in which, controlled, without power, without the ability to continue humiliating our people, so that dignity is the only way of life possible."¹⁶⁵

His case as almost all others remain unpunished. So far, only one police official has been charged. On July 27, 2018, the MP pressed charges against the police sub-commissioner Raúl Martínez Alvarado for abuse of authority and torture during the post-electoral repression against the journalists Rony Jonathan Martínez and Cesar Omar Silva as well as Libre congressman Jari Dixon. This January, six months later, the initial hearing took place. "C-Libre positively assesses the accusation, however, considers that in this case there are evidentiary elements to accuse other police and military officials who participated in the assaults on the aforementioned victims as in the general attack against the peaceful protest."¹⁶⁶

Repressions

The inhabitants of Choluteca continued where they left of last year, with bi-weekly protests against the JOH regime. And as last year, protests were repressed by state security forces.¹⁶⁷ The use of violence by state security forces continued throughout the month, especially against the protests taking place in the week up to the anniversary of JOH's illegal second inauguration.^{168 169} The Security Secretariat presented the repression as viable answers to "acts of vandalism".¹⁷⁰ And while repression was widespread, some sectors were especially targeted. Women human rights defenders in El Progreso denounced attacks by TIGRES, DPI and police agents when documenting human rights violations.¹⁷¹ One HRD, Martha Lidia Maradiaga, was even arrested¹⁷² and the house of Libre leader Nick Madrid had been illegally raided by the police.¹⁷³ In Tegucigalpa, Defensores en Línea COFADEH documented the arrest of at least seven young protesters.¹⁷⁴ Another special target of state repression were journalists. Jairo López was detained by the police, again, even though he should benefit from the Honduran protection mechanism¹⁷⁵ and Issac Buezo, a cameraman for UNE TV, was shot at with a rubber bullet by a TIGRES.¹⁷⁶ According to Buezo, the agent aimed the shot directly at him.¹⁷⁷

165 <https://movimientoamplio.org/2019/01/el-legado-de-wilmer-paredes-la-digna-resistencia/>

166 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/18/exigen-sancion-para-policias-y-militares-agresores-de-protestantes-por-el-fraude-electoral/>

167 <https://tiempo.hn/video-protesta-en-choluteca/>

168 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/criminalizacion-de-la-protesta-publica/941-fuerzas-policiales-reprimen-protestas-al-sur-y-oriente-del-pais>

169 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/27/policia-reprime-manifestaciones-con-gas-y-bala-viva/>

170 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/criminalizacion-de-la-protesta-publica/940-secretaria-de-seguridad-anuncia-represion-a-manifestaciones-proximas-al-27-de-enero>

171 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/27/defensoras-de-ddhh-piden-respeto-a-su-labor-a-las-fuerzas-represivas-del-estado/>

172 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/27/policia-captura-periodista-y-defensora-de-derechos-humanos/>

173 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1089700469239308288>

174 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/la-policia-detiene-a-jovenes-que-se-manifiestan-de-manera-pacifica-en-tegucigalpa/>

175 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/denuncias/item/2388-detienen-a-periodista-jairo-lopez-y-su-escolta-cuando-cubria-las-protestas-contrajoh>

176 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/alertas/ataque-corporal/942-policia-agrede-a-camarografo-mientras-cubria-represion-a-protestas>

177 <https://tiempo.hn/policia-dispara-camarografo-de-unetv/>

Assassinations

Two active soldiers shot dead a 40-year old man, Carlos Alberto Cuellar Vásquez, in Gracias, Lempira. The National Police Force tried to present it as a brawl to which the soldiers were called to which then went out of hand and "one of the shots fired reached Cuellar hurting him badly and later causing his death". According to the victims sister, he died with 12 bullet wounds on his body.¹⁷⁸ A day later, the two soldiers were arrested.¹⁷⁹

Penitentiary System

On January 28, family members of detainees denounced that they were being harassed and their family members mistreated.¹⁸⁰ Deputy director of the National Penitentiary Institute (INP), German McNeil, belittled their protest.¹⁸¹ Also this month, new funds were authorized to finish the La Acequia prison near San Pedro Sula.¹⁸²

Militarization

On January 10, Security Minister Julián Pacheco said that the police were ready by 90% to take over public control.¹⁸³ This re-initiated a debate about the role of the Military Police and the Armed Forces in general. Against the opinion of most human rights organizations, Omar Rivera claimed that even though the police improved, the Military Police is still necessary for public security.¹⁸⁴ Maybe testing the ground, JOH suddenly announced an increase in Military Police agents.¹⁸⁵ A recent statement by the head of the Armed Forces highlights the close relationship between JOH and the army. René Ponce Fonseca said publicly that the slogan "Fuera JOH" is seen by them as a direct insult of the Armed Forces.¹⁸⁶

International Community

Hopes that the first anniversary of the illegal second inauguration of JOH accompanied by widespread protests would remind the international community about the true nature of the Honduran government were disappointed. This month alone, Taiwan donated \$3 million for agricultural education¹⁸⁷, the Honduran BID representative just announced a new \$90 million

178 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/20/militares-disparan-y-matan-a-hombre-en-gracias-lempira/>

179 <https://confidencialhn.com/detienen-a-dos-militares-por-la-muerte-de-una-persona-durante-una-confusa-turba/>

180 <https://tiempo.hn/familiares-de-reclusos-denuncian-abusos-graves-de-las-autoridades-en-centros-penales/>

181 <https://confidencialhn.com/familiares-de-reos-protestan-porque-no-toleran-nuevo-orden-penitenciario-inp/>

182 <https://www.laprensa.hn/sanpedro/1252186-410/autorizados-los-fondos-para-terminar-la-c%C3%A1rcel-de-la-acequia>

183 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1249805-410/julian-pacheco-ejercito-honduras-calles-seguridad-extradicion-narcos->

184 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1250111-410/polic%C3%ADa-militar-ejercito-criminalidad-inseguridad-pandillas-violencia-honduras->

185 <https://tiempo.hn/mas-policias-mas-militares-mas-inteligencia-e-invertir-en-mas-logistica-anuncia-job/>

186 <https://twitter.com/unetvhn/status/1090641671535161344>

187 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2019/01/03/taiwan-dona-3-millones-para-escuelas-agricolas/>

project on micro-enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises¹⁸⁸ and the BID further supports the new Honduran identity cards with \$20 million¹⁸⁹.

Israel

The close contact between the JOH regime and the Israeli government continued this month. JOH was in Brazil at the inauguration of Jair Bolsonaro where he met with Israel's prime minister Netanyahu and US Secretary of State Pompeo.¹⁹⁰ Shortly afterwards, an Israeli bureaucrat told a national newspapers that within two months, Honduras would open an embassy in Jerusalem.¹⁹¹ This announcement was expected after a trip by a Honduran delegation to Israel at the end of last year (see previous monthly monitor). Some observers believe that JOH hopes that Netanyahu will put in a good word with Trump¹⁹², others highlight the important arm deals.¹⁹³

US

The former presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla denounced the bad example set by the US to stand by JOH even though there is reason to believe that he is linked to drug trafficking and his name appears in many corruption cases.¹⁹⁴ US authorities seem to ignore such criticism. This month, US vice-president Mike Pence spoke with JOH by phone. "The Vice President reiterated the United States' commitment to building a closer relationship with the Hernandez Administration and disavowed any efforts by opportunistic political actors to distract from our priorities."¹⁹⁵ The phone call was followed up by a meeting between the head of the US Southern Command with the JOH regime¹⁹⁶ and a US-led workshop for the Honduran Armed Forces about...human rights.¹⁹⁷

Links to the US can also be seen in less obvious sectors. Honduras imported a record amount of US coal in 2018. "Honduras showed a 242 percent year-to-date increase in U.S. coal in the third quarter, making it the largest increase in coal of any country in 2018, according to new federal Energy Information Administration data released last week detailing production and exports from the past three quarters of the year."¹⁹⁸

EU

The EU supports the creation of the new Honduran identity cards with \$24 million out of a total of \$52 million.¹⁹⁹

188 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1248072-410/bid-aprobar-90-millones-dolares-honduras-para-pequena-empresa-mipymes>

189 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1252531-466/bid-y-ue-destinaran-l-1073-millones-para-la-nueva-identidad>

190 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1246505-466/israel-honduras-y-estados-unidos-definen-estrategia-de-seguridad-y-cooperaci%C3%B3n>

191 <https://confidencialhn.com/honduras-reafirma-que-trasladara-su-embajada-de-tel-aviv-a-jerusalen/>

192 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/02/hermanez-pide-a-netanyahu-que-medie-por-el-ante-trump/>

193 <http://wp.radioprogreso.net/acuerdos-para-el-traslado-de-embajada-a-jerusalen-se-reflejaran-en-convenios-de-compra-de-armas/>

194 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/23/ee-uu-da-mal-ejemplo-al-mundo-al-defender-a-un-narcotraficante-salvador-nasralla/>

195 <https://hn.usembassy.gov/readout-vice-president-pence-call-president-honduras-juan-orlando-hermanez/>

196 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1252395-410/jefe-comando-sur-eeuu-reitera-compromiso-honduras-trabajar-paz-seguridad>

197 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2019/01/28/comando-sur-y-las-ff-aa-en-conferencia-sobre-respeto-a-derechos-humanos/>

198 <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy/while-taking-trumps-barbs-honduras-has-been-good-for-his-pro-coal-agenda>

199 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1252531-466/bid-y-ue-destinaran-l-1073-millones-para-la-nueva-identidad>

Drug Trafficking

Two more Honduran drug traffickers got sentenced in the US this month: on January 16, Juan Ramón Matta Waldurra and on January 24, the former police agent Ludwig Criss Zelaya Romero.²⁰⁰ Meanwhile, the former Liberal congressman Fredy Nájera pleaded guilty in a US court for drug trafficking.²⁰¹ His sentence will be presented on April 22.²⁰² And on the last day of the month, a judge approved the extradition of Osman Donay Martínez Guevara to the US.²⁰³

Tony Hernández

Three months ago, Tony Hernández was arrested in the US. On January 2, US judge Kevin Castel denied him bail.²⁰⁴ He described him as very dangerous and someone who could use his freedom to intimidate witnesses.²⁰⁵ As the trial continued, new details came to light. A former police commissioner, Leandro Osorio, denounced that he had been separated from the National Police Force for having uncovered a drug lab operated by Tony Hernández in La Iguala, Lempira.²⁰⁶ According to ConfidencialHN, Tony Hernández had a meeting before his arrest with one of the main shareholders of the Mexican company Tradeco. The construction company had successfully sued the Honduran government and Tony Hernández then lobbied for Honduras taking up business with it once more.²⁰⁷

The situation of his brother continued to bother JOH this month. On January 21, the platform Citizen Action against the Dictatorship (ACCD) presented a petition to Attorney General Óscar Chinchilla demanding an investigation of JOH. "He [Juan Orlando Hernández] being the president of the Council of Defense and National Security, where all the policies are designed to fight crime in all its manifestations, we do not believe that this situation should be ignored and rather; with sufficient reason we believe that he consented, promoted and even benefited from the illicit activities of his brother Antonio 'Tony' Hernández."²⁰⁸ ²⁰⁹ But not just JOH is targeted. ConfidencialHN challenged both the Secretary of Security Julián Pacheco and the head of the Armed Forces Rene Ponce regarding Tony Hernández. Both men have praised their and their institution's work against drug trafficking but they only offered excuses when confronted with the fact that Tony Hernández was accused of having been active in drug trafficking since 2004 without their apparent knowledge.²¹⁰

200 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1246807-466/estados-unidos-sentencia-este-mes-a-criss-zelaya-y-a-matta-waldurraga>

201 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/09/fredy-najera-se-declara-culpable-por-narcotrafico-en-corte-de-nueva-york/>

202 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2019/01/09/el-22-de-abril-se-dara-a-conocer-sentencia-contr-fredy-najera/>

203 <https://tiempo.hn/poder-judicial-declara-solicitud-extraditar-valle/>

204 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/04/juez-nego-fianza-a-tony-hermanez-por-alta-peligrosidad-y-temor-de-fuga/>

205 <https://confidencialhn.com/tony-no-fue-liberado-por-ee-uu-porque-representa-peligro-para-la-comunidad/>

206 <http://www.hondurastierralibre.com/2019/01/honduras-fui-separado-de-la-policia-por.html>

207 <https://confidencialhn.com/antes-de-su-arresto-tony-habria-cabildeado-retorno-de-constructora-que-demando-al-estado/>

208 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/accion-ciudadana-contr-la-dictadura-accd-pide-al-mp-que-investigue-de-oficio-a-joh/>

209 <https://tiempo.hn/accion-ciudadana-presenta-segunda-solicitud-al-mp-para-investigar-a-joh/>

210 <https://confidencialhn.com/autoridades-se-derriten-en-justificaciones-por-no-proceder-contr-tony-hermanez/>

On January 22, The US Department of Justice emitted a press release informing that "charges have been filed in Manhattan federal court against former Honduran mayor Amilcar Alexander Ardon Soriano and, in a separate Superseding Indictment, Mario Jose Calix Hernandez. The charges in each indictment include conspiring to import cocaine into the United States and related weapons offenses involving the use and possession of machine guns and destructive devices. The United States is seeking the defendants' extraditions from Honduras and Guatemala."²¹¹ Both are members of the National Party and Calix Hernández is also accused of being linked to JOH's brother Juan Antonio "Tony" Hernández.²¹² ²¹³ Ardón Soriano, meanwhile, was directly involved in the 2013 electoral fraud in favor of JOH.²¹⁴ Back in the presence, Cáliz Hernández presented himself to the DEA office in San Pedro Sula for fear of being murdered.²¹⁵ Another presumed drug trafficker linked to Tony Hernández, Nery Orlando López Sanabria, currently held at the El Pozo prison denounced receiving death threats.²¹⁶

In January, several mass killings took place in Honduras. The former police commissioner María Luis Borjas held the JOH regime responsible for the violence as a response to the arrest of JOH's brother Tony Hernández. "I definitely think that security forces are behind these massacres, at this moment they are wiping the table clean, this always happens after the capture of a high cartel boss, as in this case, the capture of the brother of the president".²¹⁷ Shortly after these statements, Borjas was found guilty by a court for slander in a different case (see Freedom of Expression section) which could be interpreted as an attempt by the JOH regime to silence her.

Varia

Migration

Hondurans migrating or rather fleeing to the North continue to make national and international headlines in the new year. Radio Progreso wanted to start the year by dedicating some words to the children, the teenagers, the campesinas and campesinos, the unemployed forming the migrant caravans: "The migrants aspire to live a better life expressed in access to decent, safe and well-paid employment, to free and quality education, to health services that focus their attention on the human person and not become merchandise to make a few rich to the detriment of the majority. They aspire to have respected the right to access a piece of land, a home and live in a safe environment. These are the main demands of the caravan that today claims its rights in in foreign lands."²¹⁸

211 <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/second-former-honduran-mayor-charged-conspiring-import-cocaine-united-states-and>

212 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/23/socio-de-tony-herandez-y-excalcalde-de-el-paraiso-copan-se-entregan-a-justicia-de-ee-uu/>

213 <https://reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2019/01/23/unidad-de-terrorismo-y-narcoticos-internacionales-de-nueva-york-acusa-a-segundo-narco-alcald-comlice-del-hermano-de-presidente-de-honduras/>

214 <http://cepr.net/blogs/the-americas-blog/honduras-flawed-election-the-case-of-el-paraiso>

215 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1254207-466/trasciende-entrega-a-la-dea-de-mario-jos%C3%A9-c%C3%A1lix-hern%C3%A1ndez-alias-cubeta>

216 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/1254187-466/defensa-de-supuesto-narco-que-fingi%C3%B3-su-muerte-solicita-traslado-de-el>

217 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/15/las-masacres-obedecen-a-captura-de-tony-herandez-maria-luisa-borjas/>

218 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn/los-migrantes-de-la-caravana/>

As a new migrant caravan was about to take off from Honduras, the US launched a social media campaign²¹⁹ ²²⁰ trying to stop Hondurans from migrating and the Honduran ambassador to Mexico, claimed in Trump-like fashion against all evidence that no one participant of the previous migrant caravans made it to the US.²²¹ The Bureau for Children, Adolescents and Families (DINAF) threatened Hondurans thinking about participating with their children in the next caravan.²²² The Secretariat of Foreign Relations warned Hondurans not to "irregularly leave" the country.²²³ The New York Times explained these efforts by the JOH regime as follows: "The deeply unpopular presidents of Honduras and Guatemala, both tarnished by scandal, are eager to maintain the support of the Trump administration. Halting the caravan could help them do that."²²⁴

But the efforts failed and using the theme "In Honduras we are being killed"²²⁵ Hondurans wishing to form part of the next migrant caravan started gathering in San Pedro Sula on January 14.²²⁶ The next day, an initial group of some 1500 people took off.²²⁷ They encountered the first obstacle at the Guatemalan border Agua Caliente, where by then 2500 Hondurans were stopped by both the Honduran and Guatemalan police.²²⁸ Initially, the security minister Julián Pacheco had said that they wouldn't stop anyone migrating as it is a human right²²⁹, but soon afterwards the JOH regime confirmed having held back at least 60 minors.²³⁰

A day later, Radio Progreso reported that some 1700 men, women and children had successfully reached Guatemala.²³¹ The Guatemalan Institute of Migration published a press release announcing that they wouldn't impede Hondurans from entering and transiting the country.²³² And another day later, three days after having taken off from San Pedro Sula, the first members of the new migrant caravan²³³ had already reached Mexico.²³⁴ There, the Honduran migrants were instructed about the humanitarian visa²³⁵, which they widely applied for. By January 18, 2373 migrants had arrived, 1933 were from Honduras.²³⁶ A week later, the number of humanitarian visas requested by Hondurans in Mexico rose to 9120, more than during the first migrant caravan.²³⁷

219 <https://twitter.com/USAmbHonduras/status/1083095155488538624>

220 <https://twitter.com/usembassyhn/status/1083831793349001216>

221 <http://www.latribuna.hn/2019/01/05/embajador-de-honduras-en-mexico-califica-de-fracaso-caravana-de-inmigrantes/>

222 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3167-gobierno-castigara-hondurenos-que-huyan-con-menores-en-nuevo-exodo>

223 <https://confidencialhn.com/burocratas-y-policias-piden-a-hondurenos-desistir-de-caravana-migrante/>

224 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/13/world/americas/migrant-caravan-honduras.html>

225 <https://avispa.org/nuevo-exodo-migrante-de-15-mil-personas-esta-a-punto-de-salir-de-honduras/>

226 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/14/segunda-caravana-comienza-a-tomar-forma-en-san-pedro-sula/>

227 <http://elpulso.hn/para-la-nueva-caravana-no-hay-vida-mejor/>

228 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/15/2500-hondurenos-de-la-caravana-estran-varados-en-frontera-con-guatemala/>

229 <https://confidencialhn.com/seguridad-no-impedira-migracion-de-hondurenos-porque-es-derecho-humano/>

230 <http://elpulso.hn/gobierno-retiene-en-la-frontera-a-60-menores-de-edad/>

231 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/caravana-de-hondurenos-se-encuentra-en-guatemala-ilusionada-con-llegar-a-estados-unidos/>

232 <https://tiempo.hn/guatemala-confirma-que-centroamericanos-pueden-entrar-a-su-territorio/>

233 <https://contracorriente.red/2019/01/15/una-nueva-caravana-avanza/>

234 <https://www.laprensa.hn/mundo/1251038-410/primeros-migrantes-caravana-ya-estran-mexico>

235 <https://avispa.org/migrantes-son-recibidos-de-forma-organizada-en-mexico-y-les-dan-visa-humanitaria/>

236 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/gobierno-mexicano-anuncia-implementacion-de-protocolo-de-atencion-al-migrante-de-forma-organizada-y-legal/>

237 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/24/alarante-9120-hondurenos-han-pedido-asilo-humanitario-en-mexico/>

Back in Honduras, another caravan took off from San Pedro Sula.^{238 239} But compared to the previous caravans, these new ones were less structured.²⁴⁰ This may decrease the safety-in-groups-effect. The disappearance of migrants is a common-place tragedy. The Committee of Family Members of Disappeared Migrants of Honduras (COFAMIPROH), which was founded in 1999, had documented over 700 cases of disappeared migrants by 2018.²⁴¹

But even being aware of this, does not counteract the will to leave Hondurans for many people. Reasons to flee from Honduras are still very diverse ranging from poverty to violence or political persecution, Criterio for example published a long and haunting article on Honduran women forced to flee from an unbearable situation of violence.^{242 243} ContraCorriente summarized the reasons to flee as an "Exodus as a Form of Protest" against the failures of the JOH regime.²⁴⁴ CIPRODEH presented the migrant exodus as a sign of a humanitarian crisis and it demanded from the UN and international human rights bodies to recognize this in opposition to the JOH regime which continued to deny it promoting questionable tales of people returning on their own will to Honduras.²⁴⁵

Most Hondurans do not return on their own account to Honduras, but rather are deported. A total of 75'105 Hondurans were deported from the US (44'760) and Mexico (30'345) in 2018.²⁴⁶ Among them was a former Mara member turned informant for the FBI. "An immigration judge said he was "very sympathetic" to the teenager who cooperated with authorities only to be jailed with those he informed on. The judge nonetheless rejected his plea for asylum."²⁴⁷ Pasos de Animal Grande denounced that at least 324 Honduran women were deported from the US in 2018 even though they faced death threats in Honduras.²⁴⁸

Electoral Reforms

Over a year after the illegal reelection of JOH which once more highlighted the weaknesses of the Honduran electoral system, Congress finally started to officially discuss electoral reforms. Hopes were low, especially after a month-long discredited national dialogue had finished without substantial progress. Key discussion points were the presidential reelection, a two-round presidential election, the depoliticization of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) and the voting stations as well as the cleaning up of the National Registry of Persons (RNP).

238 <https://tiempo.hn/se-afianza-la-crisis-en-honduras-esta-noche-sale-la-cuarta-caravana-de-migrantes-para-estados-unidos/>

239 <https://confidencialhn.com/sale-otro-nutrido-grupo-de-hondurenos-en-caravana-hacia-ee-uu/>

240 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/more-than-10000-migrants-request-visas-as-caravan-hits-mexico/2019/01/23/340169b8-1f2b-11e9-a759-2b8541bbe20_story.html?utm_term=.45a9a4c2709f

241 <http://cespad.org.hn/2019/01/24/las-madres-de-los-migrantes-desaparecidos-de-honduras/>

242 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/15/las-victimas-que-huyen-en-silencio-dejando-una-huella-de-dolor/>

243 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/15/imagenes-y-relatos-que-plasman-la-expulsion-de-la-mujer-en-honduras/>

244 <https://contracorriente.red/2019/01/15/el-exodo-como-forma-de-protesta/>

245 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/22/ciprodeh-pide-a-la-onu-reconozca-que-en-honduras-existe-una-crisis-humanitaria/>

246 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3158-mas-de-75-000-migrantes-fueron-deportados-a-honduras-en-2018>

247 <https://www.propublica.org/article/ms-13-member-who-secretly-helped-police-is-deported>

248 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2384-en-riesgo-la-vida-de-324-mujeres-que-fueron-deportadas-de-estados-unidos>

The opposition parties emphasized on many occasions that the two-round presidential election was a priority for them. Therefore, it was not a good sign, when the National Party²⁴⁹ and the JOH regime²⁵⁰ both questioned the importance of this. As with the national dialogue, the strategy seemed to be to sabotage the electoral reforms and then blaming the political opposition for it.

At the end of the month, it became clear that the National Party did not even have to sabotage the reforms. The opposition caved in and approved a very limited electoral reform, even though just days before, both Libre and the Liberal Party had announced that they would not approve such limited reforms.²⁵¹ Not one of the previously mentioned priorities was discussed, which did not stop the Nationalist president of Congress to call the reforms the "the most profound in the history of Honduras".²⁵²

For many observers²⁵³, this was no surprise and many had already foreseen this at the beginning of the month. Sociologist Eugenio Sosa, for example, already knew on January 13 what would happen: "In conclusion, the political-electoral horizon does not envisage deep democratic reforms that imply that political parties are willing to "go to work", and above all lose control of bodies such as the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) and the National Registry of Persons (RNP) and build necessary rules for the democratization of the country, without giving advantage to a particular party. The political-electoral reforms that are visualized will be limited, to the extent of the new party reconfiguration, but also to the extent of the old electoral political behavior, which does not disappear automatically due to the emergence of new political forces."²⁵⁴

The reforms decided by Congress took the form of the abolition of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) and its replacement with a National Electoral Council and a Electoral Justice Tribunal to separate the organization of elections with the receiving of complaints about it.²⁵⁵ The former magistrate René Adán Tomé denounced this as unconstitutional.²⁵⁶ But neither his criticism nor the one coming from civil society – Radio Progreso summarized them as "a repartition of state bodies" between the political parties²⁵⁷ - was taken up and Congress ratified the reforms a week later on January 29.²⁵⁸ Even worse, the US²⁵⁹ the OAS²⁶⁰ and the UN representative Igor Garafulic²⁶¹ praised the reforms well-aware of their limits. A day later, both the OAS²⁶² and Garafulic²⁶³ added that they expect the reform process to continue.

249 <https://tiempo.hn/jorge-calix-para-aprobar-reformas-electorales-se-debe-convencer-al-partido-nacional/>

250 <https://confidencialhn.com/%e1%bb%fbefbal-cuestiona-a-mel-por-cambiar-de-cambiar-de-opinion-sobre-segunda-vuelta/>

251 <http://www.web.llibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3190-partido-liberal-no-apoyara-reformas-cosmeticas-de-mauricio-oliva>

252 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1251127-466/oliva-asegura-que-el-cn-aprobara-reformas-electorales-profundas>

253 e.g. <http://elpulso.hn/reformas-electorales-no-cambian-nada/>

254 <http://cespad.org.hn/2019/01/13/reformas-politico-electorales-en-honduras-a-la-medida-de-la-nueva-reconfiguracion-partidaria-pero-tambien-del-viejo-comportamiento-politico-tradicional/>

255 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/23/politicos-acuerdan-repartirse-puestos-en-organos-electorales-sin-hacer-reformas-estructurales/>

256 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/23/reformas-electorales-son-inconstitucionales-y-un-engano-para-el-pueblo-rene-adan-tome/>

257 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/con-reformas-electorales-politicos-se-reparten-instituciones-del-estado/>

258 <https://tiempo.hn/pleno-de-diputados-ratifica-reformas-constitucionales-electorales/>

259 <https://twitter.com/USAmbHonduras/status/1088592656438120448>

260 <http://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/reformas-electorales-un-paso-importante-para-elecciones-libres-justas-y-transparentes-oea.html>

261 <https://confidencialhn.com/garafulic-esta-satisfecho-por-reformas-electorales-hechas-en-el-parlamento/>

262 <http://www.web.llibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3197-oea-urge-a-congreso-de-honduras-aprobar-voto-electronico-y-segunda-vuelta-en-tres-meses>

263 <https://tiempo.hn/no-es-suficiente-cambiar-nombre-a-organismos-electorales-igor-garafulic/>

Libre's role in the process was especially criticized as there was hope that they would stay strong and demand profound reforms. Tomas Andino Mencía offered Libre two options for the days ahead: "The leadership of LIBRE has only two options: either stop playing along and really bet on making a unified fight against the dictator, or join his power block, being satisfied with the crumbs that are reserved for their good services."²⁶⁴ Being misunderstood as a general criticism of Libre, he clarified his position the next day. "In the face of such a dictatorship, we are at another level of struggle and we can not continue with the practices of the past. You can not continue to see the presidential office and congressional seats as the goals of political activity. These would be in a real democracy, which does not exist here. Today in Honduras the real goals should be: First, REMOVE JOH and, with him, the whole gang of officials, deputies and magistrates who are faithful to him. Second, the installation of a PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT integrated by all the forces that truly participate in the struggle against the dictatorship and have a broad level of convocation. And third, the call for an ORIGINAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, to organize the country we need."²⁶⁵ Honduras is far away from this. According to Radio Progreso, the National Party further increased its power with these reforms. "The National Party maintains its control of these structures, since the alliance that it maintains with Carlos Flores and the liberal bench of Elvin Santos in the National Congress, allows it to place two titular magistrates in these bodies, allowing them to control completely the decisions in the electoral and administrative field."²⁶⁶

Education

The new Minister of Education, the forest engineer Arnaldo Bueso, announced on his second day in office the dismissal of 360 employees of the Education Secretariat.²⁶⁷ Maybe it is his approach to accommodate the decreasing percentage of the general budget attributed to education. It sunk from 12% to 11% between 2014 and 2019.²⁶⁸ Reporteros de Investigación highlighted another approach to save money. Back in 2014, 119 teachers were illegally suspended and their case rests unpunished.²⁶⁹ Last but not least, why not just stop paying teachers. This is also being tried in Honduras and teachers reacted with protests outside the Secretary of Finance.²⁷⁰

Public Health

Already in the first days of the new year as well as the first day in office of the new Minister of Health, Alba Consuelo Flores, public health employees held strike actions.²⁷¹ Flores reacted by promising better working conditions²⁷² and tackling corruption.²⁷³ The employees were not

²⁶⁴ <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/28/reformas-electorales-de-la-oposicion-a-la-colaboracion-con-la-dictadura/>

²⁶⁵ <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/30/y-ahora-cual-es-la-ruta/>

²⁶⁶ <https://wp.radioprogreso.hn.net/con-nuevas-reformas-partido-nacional-mantiene-control-sobre-entidades-electorales/>

²⁶⁷ <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/02/ministro-de-educacion-anuncia-despidos-de-unos-360-empleados/>

²⁶⁸ <https://radiohm.hn/2019/01/12/en-mas->

²⁶⁹ <https://reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2019/01/18/cuatro-anos-cuatro-ministros-de-impunidad-y-el-calvario-de-la-profe-claudia/>

²⁷⁰ <https://confidencialhn.com/docentes-exigen-pago-de-vacaciones-frente-a-secretaria-de-finanzas/>

²⁷¹ <https://confidencialhn.com/empleados-sanitarios-inician-2019-con-asambleas-para-exigir-reajuste-salarial/>

²⁷² <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1246783-410/ministra-salud-evaluacion-personal-hospitales-publicos-honduras->

²⁷³ <https://confidencialhn.com/secretaria-de-salud-promete-combatir-corrupcion-hospitalaria/>

convinced and protests continued²⁷⁴ until January 9, when the Secretary of Health agreed to form a technical committee on wage adjustments.²⁷⁵

Even with labor struggles quieting down for a bit, the public health sector continued to make negative headlines in January. Patients relying on the IHSS denounced the bad quality of dialysis in Honduras which had led to an increased mortality.²⁷⁶ Doctor and vice-president of Congress, Denis Castro Bobadilla, criticized that too much money is being made in Honduras with dialysis so that there is no interest in improving kidney donations.²⁷⁷ A few days later, El Heraldo made public that between 2012 and 2016, the University Hospital bought expired drugs needed for biopsies worth 2.4 million Lempiras.²⁷⁸

But the most outrage was caused by a statement by JOH. He recommended eating healthy presenting it as a panacea against illness²⁷⁹...and this in a country facing a public health crisis, where two thirds live in poverty and over 15% face hunger according to the FAO. A country which has a below average ratio of hospital beds to inhabitants, 0.78 per 1000 inhabitants. In Latin America, the average is about 3 per 1000.²⁸⁰ A country which, according to FOSDEH, decreased the attribution to health substantially between 2014 and 2019: from 6.8% to 5.6%.²⁸¹

Poverty

Discussions about poverty and its representation or lack thereof in indicators are widespread in Honduras. This month, the former president of the Central Bank of Honduras, Hugo Noé Pino, challenged the narrative presented by the IMF about the Honduran economy and its potential to alleviate poverty. He criticized that it paints a too positive a picture of an economy focusing on the wrong indicators. As a result, the IMF narrative only serves a small elite and maintains the majority in abject poverty.²⁸² One case in point, is the inflation policy based on IMF recommendations which Javier Suazo criticized this month.²⁸³

At the end of 2018, heated discussions about the minimum wage were held. The results presented this month were disappointing. According to Criterio, they are disconnected from the cost of living in Honduras. The average minimum wage will rise to 9'443 Lempiras in a country where the monthly basket of basic good costs more than 12'000 Lempiras.²⁸⁴ FOSDEH agreed: "The problem is that in the country the adjustment is being made on the basis of an unrealistic index, when in reality due to the increase in prices for basic goods and other services, the current salary of people

274 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3162-honduras-secretarias-estatales-declaran-la-guerra-a-joh-por-alza-salarial>

275 <https://tiempo.hn/trabajadores-de-salud-acuerdan-mesa-tecnica-para-lograr-reajuste-salarial/>

276 <https://confidencialhn.com/denuncian-que-mala-calidad-de-dialisis-incrementa-las-muertes-de-enfermos-renales/>

277 <https://confidencialhn.com/mega-negocio-de-hemodialisis-frena-propuesta-de-banco-nacional-de-organos/>

278 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1251861-466/24-millones-de-lempiras-se-perdieron-en-reactivos-venidos-en-el-hospital>

279 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/05/hermanez-recomienda-comer-bien-a-los-hondurenos-para-no-enfermarse/>

280 <https://hondudiario.com/2019/01/10/conadeh-revela-que-honduras-esta-entre-los-paises-con-baja-cobertura-hospitalaria/>

281 <https://radiohm.hn/2019/01/12/en-mas-de-un-punto-se-redujo-presupuesto-de-educacion-y-salud-entre-2014-y-2019/>

282 <http://elpulso.hn/honduras-un-pais-cinco-estrellas-para-la-corrupcion-hugo-noe-pino/>

283 <https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/197463>

284 <https://criterio.hn/2019/01/08/salario-minimo-aprobado-hoy-en-honduras-esta-descontextualizado-del-costo-de-vida/>

does not adjust more than to survive."²⁸⁵ Accordingly, UNAH economist and head of faculty Henry Rodríguez estimated that poverty would increase this year again in Honduras.²⁸⁶

Climate Change

According to German Watch²⁸⁷, an organization that a yearly Global Climate Risk Index, Honduras was among the three most affected countries by extreme weather between 1998 and 2017.²⁸⁸

And Light at the End of a Month

At the end of January, Congress approved the Cinematography Act. Professor and Honduran filmmaker Servio Tulio Mateo portrays it as an important step for Honduran cinema.²⁸⁹

285 <http://wp.radioprogreso.hn/economia-familiar-en-picada-por-pirricos-salarios/>

286 <https://tiempo.hn/durante-2019-habran-110-mil-nuevos-pobres-en-honduras-senalan-expertos/>

287 <https://www.germanwatch.org/en/16046>

288 https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1247836-410/honduras-seguros-da%C3%B1os-climaticos-fenomeno-el_ni%C3%B1o-sequia-

289 <https://wp.radioprogreso.hn/nueva-ley-de-cinematografia-es-el-inicio-del-fomento-del-septimo-arte-en-honduras/>



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