



Another Month in Honduras...

Human Rights Monitor – March 2020

COVID-19..Welcome to another month in Honduras. What else is there to say? The worldwide pandemic reached Honduras this month, where it met an autocratic regime, widespread corruption and an already overwhelmed health system which is already suffering from a severe dengue crisis.

In solidarity,

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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
FPIC	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
UFERCO	Special Prosecuting Unit against Corruption Networks
UNAH	National Autonomous University of Honduras
ZEDE	Zone for Employment and Economic Development

The COVID-19 Crisis

The worldwide pandemic reached Honduras this month. Before focusing on this, it is important to highlight that Honduras suffers at the same time from a dengue crisis. Dengue cases in the country have increased alarmingly compared to the previous two years, and authorities predict that this will continue in the coming months despite prevention measures. "We had around 45 cases by this date in 2018, in 2019 we had 500 cases, today we have 8,000, the number of people with dengue has increased 20 times," said the head of the Permanent Contingency Commission (Copeco), Gabriel Rubí.¹ At least nine people have died in the first to months of dengue,² seven of them under 15 years of age. By mid-March, there were already 10,090 cases and 940 are severe dengue. At least nine people had died by then.³ "We must not forget that we are in a dengue epidemic in which we have practically entered a plateau and we have not managed to lower the numbers of dengue cases that continue to be reported in the metropolitan region," said Roberto Cosenza, undersecretary of health.³

Additional, there has already been a widespread water crisis made worse by pandemic.⁴ OACNUDH insists that the Honduran State must guarantee access to water, especially in these times of crisis where water plays also an important role regarding personal hygiene.⁵ ⁶ Nevertheless, some 30% of Hondurans do not have access to water, the remaining 70% has access but it is not always clean drinking water.⁷ Even worse, in the midst of this crisis, SANAA announced more water rationing.⁸

On March 11, the Health Secretariat confirmed the first two confirmed COVID-19 cases.⁹ Criterio denounced that the JOH regime failed to located the other passengers of the planes in which the two patients arrived in Honduras.¹⁰ By the end of the month, the number of confirmed cases had grown to 172¹¹ and 11 people had died.¹² Among those who have died is the doctor Denisse Roxana Murillo Martínez.¹² According to the president of the Association of Professional Nurses of Honduras, Eda Hernández, 40 nurses have so far been infected.¹²

The epidemiologist Elsa Palou estimated that some 35'000 Hondurans will need to be hospitalized and 7000 will need intensive care which would bring the Honduran healthcare system to a collapse.¹³ Honduras has a low testing capacity of just a bit over 100 tests per day. So the actual

1 <http://elpulso.hn/casos-de-dengue-crecen-exponencialmente-en-2020/>

2 <https://confidencialhn.com/salud-confirma-la-novena-muerte-por-dengue-hemorragico-en-honduras-en-lo-que-va-de-2020/>

3 <http://elpulso.hn/menores-de-edad-son-los-mas-afectados-por-dengue/>

4 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/toque-de-queda-afecta-distribucion-de-agua-en-la-capital/>

5 <https://twitter.com/ONUDDHH/status/1242180849854005257>

6 <https://oacnudh.hn/no-se-podra-para-el-covid-19-sin-proporcionar-agua-a-las-personas-en-situacion-de-vulnerabilidad-expertos-de-la-onu/>

7 <http://elpulso.hn/sin-acceso-al-agua-no-se-puede-frenar-el-covid19/>

8 <http://elpulso.hn/si-logramos-rationar-el-servicio-de-agua-podriamos-llegar-hasta-agosto/>

9 <https://radioprogreso.hn/instante/dos-casos-por-coronavirus-en-honduras/>

10 <https://criterio.hn/gobernacion-aun-no-ubica-a-pasajeros-que-viajaron-junto-a-pacientes-con-coronavirus/>

11 <https://criterio.hn/honduras-reporta-172-casos-de-covid-19/>

12 <https://confidencialhn.com/afirman-que-unas-40-enfermeras-tienen-coronavirus-piden-a-las-autoridades-mas-insumos-medicos/>

13 <https://confidencialhn.com/al-menos-35-mil-personas-tendrian-coronavirus-en-honduras/>

number of positive cases is likely much higher. Testing capacity may soon increase though as the BCIE donated 150'000 testing kits to Honduras.¹⁴

Initial Response and the Health Sector

The same day of the first confirmed cases, the Finance Minister announced a 640 million Lempiras budget to tackle the looming health crisis, 440 million of which were meant to hire more staff.^{15 16} Already last month, the JOH regime approved extra funds (see previous Monitor) and doubts were raised if they would be used for that purpose.¹⁷ The Pan American Health Organization, meanwhile, also offered help for Honduras.¹⁸ JOH asked multilateral banks for more financial support.¹⁹ Furthermore, he announced that he will use this crisis to transform the public health system. Last time he announced that he faced months-long protests from the streets.²⁰ As a result, the Platform for the Defense of Public Health and Education announced "a confrontation with JOH".²¹

As some first reactions, flights of public officials were canceled.²² Classes at schools and universities were suspended, initially for the next 14 days. People from Europa, China, Iran and South Korea have to self-isolate if they come to Honduras for 14 days.²³ Health workers also reacted immediately. Employees of the National Cardiopulmonary Institute held a protest to demand medical supplies from health authorities for the COVID-19 cases.²⁴ Their calls would be repeated and remained mostly unanswered throughout the month. On various occasions, medical staff threatened to stop their work if the JOH regime would not equip them with the basic inputs for protection and prevention.²⁵ In one occasion, doctors of the Mario Catarino Rivas Hospital in San Pedro Sula, asked the JOH regime for the emergency purchase of biosecurity supplies and when they failed to comply, the doctors informed that they would be leaving the hospital, only attending in the emergency room.²⁵ In Tegucigalpa, medical students in social service reported that they were withdrawing from hospitals for the same reason²⁶ and later on the dental students joined.²⁷

Apart for protective gear, Honduras also lacks ventilators needed for artificial respiration. JOH then boasted of having bought some, just to have the medical professionals tell him that they are

14 <https://confidencialhn.com/bcie-entrega-al-ejecutivo-hondureno-unas-150-mil-pruebas-para-diagnosticar-el-coronavirus/>

15 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/listos-640-millones-de-lempiras-para-atender-coronavirus-finanzas.html>

16 <https://confidencialhn.com/autorizan-640-millones-de-lempiras-para-afrontar-coronavirus/>

17 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1237814667755417600>

18 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn.net/instante/ops-ofrece-ayuda-a-honduras-para-combatir-el-coronavirus/>

19 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/herandez-pide-a-bancos-multilaterales-ser-mas-generosos-con-honduras-ante-coronavirus.html>

20 <https://tiempo.hn/joh-anuncia-su-nuevo-intento-por-transformar-el-sector-salud-en-plena-crisis-covid-19/>

21 <http://elpulso.hn/la-plataforma-anuncia-una-verdadera-confrontacion-contra-joh/>

22 <http://elpulso.hn/que-se-queden-en-casa-aqui-venimos-a-legislar-por-el-pais-juan-flores/>

23 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn.net/instante/restringen-ingreso-de-extranjeros-al-pais/>

24 <http://elpulso.hn/empleados-de-salud-sin-agua-ni-insumos-para-hacerle-frente-al-coronavirus/>

25 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3771-urgente-medicos-hondurenos-dejan-hospitales-por-falta-de-insumos-en-bioseguridad>

26 <https://confidencialhn.com/por-falta-de-insumos-para-combatir-coronavirus-medicos-internos-del-catarino-rivas-solo-atenderan-emergencias/>

27 <https://tiempo.hn/unah-vs-estudiantes-de-odontologia-se-retiran-de-su-servicio-social/>

inadequate for the current situation.²⁸ An official at the Health Secretariat later conceded this.²⁹ Coincidentally or not, the same official, Roxana Araujo, was later released from her position.²⁹

In the midst of the crisis, staff at the Mario Catarino Rivas Hospital went on strike to protest against the fact that they had not been paid for three months – where was all the money meant to address the crisis going?³⁰ The JOH regime seems to have other priorities. The president of the Medical College of Honduras, Suyapa Figueroa, denounced that the JOH regime was equipping state security forces with protection against the virus, but not healthcare workers.³¹ ³² On March 31, Figueroa denounced that the biomedical equipment and biosafety supplies for health workers bought by the JOH regime two weeks before never made the way to them.³¹

State Reaction

On March 13, Congress approved in record speed without consulting other sectors, e.g. the medical sector, the Special Law for Economic Acceleration and Social Protection against the Effects of the Coronavirus COVID-19, which included the disbursement of \$420 million (10,500 million Lempiras) for the construction of 94 hospital centers and the acquisition of goods and services for the so-called Public Health Services Network.³² Suyapa Figueroa, president of the Medical Association of Honduras, denounced: "Congress behaves like a criminal structure and does not care about taking advantage of a situation like the coronavirus epidemic to approve diversions of public funds, to encourage the outsourcing of health services as we have already denounced." She fears that this will serve as another step to privatize public health. In one month, the JOH regime destined almost 20 billion Lempiras to the corona crisis without much oversight. As a result, there is widespread criticism. "Luis Redondo, deputy from the Innovation and Unity Party-Social Democrat (PINU) assures that this is a business to get funds, because they are going to benefit the private sector through trusts from which they will get a percentage for the management of the funds, "so this is a kind of privatization", concluded the deputy. On the other hand, Doris Gutiérrez, also a member of this same party and of the Transparency Front of the National Congress, alerted the Medical Association, the Association of Economists and labor unions of the government's intention to outsource the health system, and that with the disbursement of the 420 million dollars that the investment in the construction of these hospitals would imply, the pension fund of the Honduran Institute of Social Security would be put at risk."³²

Just one day later, the JOH regime declared Red Alert for all 18 departments for 14 days which included the prohibition of events larger than 50 people.³³ ³⁴ Soon afterwards, they announced additional measures: the closure of borders (except for Hondurans, permanent and temporary residents, diplomats) and non-essential businesses for seven days as well as public transport.³⁵ ³⁶

28 <https://www.radioprogreso.net/instante/colegio-medico-denuncia-mala-compra-de-ventiladores-mecanicos/>

29 <https://confidencialhn.com/por-admitir-la-poca-utilidad-de-ventiladores-mecanicos-joh-destituye-a-roxana-araujo/>

30 <https://confidencialhn.com/trabajadores-del-hospital-mario-catarino-rivas-en-paro-por-no-pago-de-salarios/>

31 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3819-honduras-medicos-sin-bioseguridad-tendrian-que-irse-de-hospitales>

32 <https://contracorriente.red/2020/03/13/covid-19-llega-a-honduras-en-medio-de-crisis-sanitaria/>

33 https://twitter.com/COPECO_HONDURAS/status/1238915018034380806

34 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/gobierno-reafirma-ordenanza-de-suspension-de-ferias-actos-publicos-y-celebraciones.html>

On March 17, the JOH regime took another step declaring a state of exception including a lockdown suspending constitutional rights.³⁵

The lockdown was first released a bit on March 18. Hondurans were allowed to buy groceries between 7am and 2pm and the lockdown took place again at 4pm.³⁶ Of course, this did not work well, as everyone went out at the same time after days locked-up at home.³⁷ The president of the Medical College of Honduras (CMH) Suyapa Figueroa, criticized the general approach of the JOH regime to the crisis.³⁸ Later, the state of exception was again prolonged to March 29 increasing the total lockdown to the whole country and extending the suspension of constitutional rights. Nevertheless, this time small shops were allowed to stay open. "BANASUPRO's [National Supplier of Basic Goods] mobile units will circulate through neighborhoods and colonies to attend citizens who require basic products and hand gel. Supermarkets, pharmacies, grocery stores, tortilla shops, bakeries and home delivery services are authorized to deliver products after presenting their identification card and delivery order to the police authority."³⁹

On March 24, the JOH regime announced that it would hand out food for 3.2 million people so that people can stay at home.⁴⁰ This was later dubbed Operation Honduras Solidarity. The proclaimed objective was to get food to 800'000 Hondurans families. According to the JOH regime, this cost them about 1600 million Lempiras. Calculations by ConfidencialHN and Radio Globo found that the net worth of the items is only about 1000 million Lempiras. What happened to the remaining 600 million Lempiras? They also denounced that the food would not last the promised 30 days.⁴¹ As part of the same operation, the JOH regime later announced that it will hand out \$14.4 million to municipal governments to hand out supplies.⁴² Criterio later presented two possible underlying motivations for JOH's move to transfer the responsibility for the Honduras Solidarity program: i) to avoid the discontent of the population crying out for food and water and whose demands are mostly unmet; or ii) to politically benefit the mayors of the National Party.⁴³ ConexiHon that the indigenous communities are being ignored by the Honduras Solidarity campaign.⁴³

At the end of the month, the JOH regime prolonged the curfew for another two weeks to April 12.⁴⁴ Furthermore, there are now three windows under the week people can go out to buy groceries or go to the pharmacy, but only if their ID-card ends in a certain number. In the end, everyone has one possibility per week to leave and buy things between 9am and 3pm.⁴⁵

35 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/restringe-garantias-constitucionales-ciudadanas/>

36 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/habilitan-horarios-para-abastecimientos-de-productos-en-ciudades-con-toque-de-queda-absoluto/>

37 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3788-contradictorio-tras-encierro-de-tres-dias-capitalinos-saturan-calles-y-comercio>

38 <https://confidencialhn.com/califican-de-erroneas-las-medidas-del-ejecutivo-nacionalista-ante-emergencia-por-coronavirus/>

39 <https://criterio.hn/amplian-toque-de-queda-a-toda-honduras-y-hasta-el-domingo-29-de-marzo/>

40 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1366569-466/joh-explica-c%C3%B3mo-entregar%C3%A1n-alimentos-a-tres-millones-de-hondure%C3%B1os>

41 <https://confidencialhn.com/al-descubierto-la-farsa-del-ejecutivo-saco-solidario-costara-a-cada-hondureno-1249-lempiras/>

42 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1368171-410/honduras-144-millones-dolares-alcaldias-entregar-comida-covid>

43 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/dh/57-pueblos-indigenas/1491-pueblos-originarios-y-ancestrales-sin-acceso-a-la-honduras-solidaria>

44 <https://confidencialhn.com/extienden-toque-de-queda-en-honduras-hasta-el-proximo-12-de-abril/>

45 <https://tiempo.hn/toque-de-queda-cerraran-negocios-y-detendran-personas-que-circulen-sin-justificacion/>

Human Rights

As mentioned above, on March 17, the JOH regime took another step declaring a state of exception including a lockdown suspending constitutional rights.⁴⁶ Even before this, the corona crisis was already used as an excuse for a further dive into authoritarianism. ConexiHon had denounced that the National Police in Choluteca used the situation to restrict access to justice. "The official authorities of the southern zone, without prior warning, were forced to deny the right of access to justice to individuals not wearing a face mask, a precautionary measure."⁴⁷ But this was just the beginning. C-Libre listed some of the constitutional rights being suspended, e.g. the right of assembly, but also also the protection of one's home meaning that the JOH regime can raid houses.⁴⁸ COFADEH denounces "the militarization of the COVID19 pandemic".⁴⁹ The UN human rights experts rightly "urged States to avoid overreach of security measures in their response to the coronavirus outbreak and reminded them that emergency powers should not be used to quash dissent".⁵⁰

Not one day went by and the JOH regime made use of the state of exception. They arrested social movement leader in Choluteca, Aleyda Huete, on March 17.⁵¹ Her husband, a political prisoner, has been imprisoned since last December.⁵² Huete was later released after paying bail and she has to await trial with alternative measures to imprisonment. She is accused of "illegal possession of homemade weapons" and storage of explosive devices to the detriment of the internal security of the State of Honduras".⁵³ Huete later denounced that she had been receiving death threats and that she feared being arrested again.⁵⁴

In Tegucigalpa, according to El Libertador, the Armed Forces invaded 240 houses in search of suspected COVID-19 cases.⁵⁵ COFADEH's Bertha Oliva denounced the measures taken by the JOH regime as "disproportionate and arbitrary".⁵⁶ Lawyer and human rights defender Edy Táborá pointed out that the national emergency has mutated into a state of siege without considering that in contexts like the present one it is urgent to guarantee indispensable rights and free information, and denounced that the executive decree that declared the curfew responds to an authoritarian act.⁵⁶ There were also reports on human rights violations by the Lempira Network of Human Rights Defenders⁵⁷ OACNUDH announced that they keep monitoring the human rights situation during this state of exception.⁵⁶

Legal scholar Joaquín Mejía questions the legality of restricting freedom of expression as part of the state of exception. "In the light of the above, which imperative public interest is served by the

46 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/restringe-garantias-constitucionales-ciudadanas/>

47 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/dh/1438-covid-19-derecho-de-acceso-a-la-justicia-bloqueado-por-falta-de-mascarillas>

48 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/dh/1448-covid19-honduras-sin-garantias-constitucionales-y-toque-de-queda>

49 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/rechazamos-la-militarizacion-de-la-pandemia-covid19/>

50 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25722&LangID=E>

51 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/mirada-al-sur/1452-incesante-persecucion-politica-contrala-lideresa-surena-aleyda-huete>

52 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/alerta-peligro-integridad-de-defensora-de-ddhh-capturada-en-choluteca/>

53 <http://im-defensoras.org/2020/03/alertadefensoras-honduras-detienen-de-manera-arbitraria-y-criminalizan-a-la-activista-aleyda-huete-en-el-marco-del-toque-de-queda-por-covid-19/>

54 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/aleyda-huete-denuncia-amenazas-contrasu-vida/>

55 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3781-urgente-240-casas-invadidas-por-militares-en-la-capital>

56 <https://twitter.com/ONUDDHH/status/1240027254698188801>

suspension of the right to freedom of expression, is its restriction proportional and necessary to combat the Coronavirus, and how does its limitation fit in with the objective of combating this pandemic? In my opinion, this restriction does not meet the requirements of necessity, appropriateness, legitimacy and proportionality, taking into account the importance of freedom of expression in times of democratic normality and, above all, in times of crisis such as the one we are facing today as a society.^{57 58} This was also criticized by the Committee to Protect Journalists.⁵⁹ Radio Progreso and Pasos de Animal Grande reported on how much more difficult the work for journalists in Honduras had become.^{59 60} On March 19, both OACNUDH and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression of the IACHR, Edison Lanza, asked the government to revise its restrictions.⁵⁹ Finally on March 26, the JOH regime backtracked from suspending freedom of expression as well as the detention of someone for more than 24 hours without being transferred to a competent authority.⁶⁰ Just two days before, Evelyn Johana Castillo, a member of the Women's Network of Ojojona, in the department of Francisco Morazán, had been arrested and held for more than 24 hours under constant threat.⁶⁰

During the last two weeks of March, there were various protests through out Honduras, mostly by people demanding food and water. The Honduras Solidarity Network denounced various acts of repression by state security forces.⁶¹ On March 23, more than 60 people were arrested in San Pedro Sula and at least 43 in El Progreso.^{62 63} A day later, El Heraldo counted already over 500 arrests.⁶⁴ COFADEH summarized the situation as follows: "It is impossible to comply with the curfew if the people die of hunger".⁶⁵ The coordinator of the Association for Participatory Citizenship (ACI-PARTICIPA), Hedme Castro, denounced that the prosecution of people who bother the government is on the rise. "She says that the state looked at the opportunity to take advantage of the curfew and the lifting of constitutional guarantees to arbitrarily capture the defenders from the southern zone."⁶⁵ Covering the protests and the state repression, journalist from Channel 6 were harassed by the police and they even physically attacked the journalist Paola Cobos.⁶⁵ On March 28, ACI Participa documented 31 protests in six departments with at least 300 arrests.⁶⁵ El Tiempo even wrote of 413 arrests.⁶⁵

Social Movements and the Crisis

On March 21, Honduras' social movements, indigenous and human rights organizations reacted to the current situation with a press release proposing that i) the Medical College of Honduras assumes the role of the Emergency Health Coordination; ii) the implementation of an audit system for the funds approved in these last days; iii) to strengthen the municipal and community organization, for

57 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/opiniones/1451-es-legitima-y-proporcional-la-suspension-del-derecho-a-la-libertad-de-expresion-en-el-contexto-de-la-crisis-del-coronavirus>

58 <https://joaquinmejiaivera.blogspot.com/2020/03/dudas-y-preocupacion-con-respecto-al.html>

59 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/1460-preocupacion-internacional-se-restringe-la-libertad-de-expresion-en-honduras-ante-coronavirus>

60 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/denuncias/item/2754-jefa-de-la-posta-de-policia-de-ojojona-mantuvo-por-mas-de-24-horas-a-defensora-de-la-red-de-mujeres>

61 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1242169230692241410>

62 <https://confidencialhn.com/variados-detenido-por-movilizar-durante-toque-de-queda-en-san-pedro-sula/>

63 <https://tiempo.hn/el-progreso-43-personas-detenido-por-incumplimiento-en-toque-de-queda/>

64 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1366808-466/honduras-detenido-24-marzo-toque-queda-coronavirus>

65 <https://tiempo.hn/413-personas-arrestadas-24-horas-irrespetar-toque-de-queda/>

example to audit local expense or to promote education; and iv) to demand sufficient water supply for hospitals and health centers.^{66 67} Various feminist and women's rights organization published a joint press release demanding an adequate reaction to the current crisis which means, for example, "[t]o address the current situation from a comprehensive perspective of collective care and human rights, taking into account the health, social and economic dimensions, from an intersectional approach in terms of class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and gender."⁶⁸ Feminist and women's rights organization voiced their fear that the lockdown would lead to more violence against women.⁶⁹

On March 26, Honduras' social movements, indigenous and human rights organizations published a second joint statement. They demanded among other things the participation of the professional sectors in solving the crisis, e.g. the Medical Association of Honduras, and transparency and accountability. They further demand safe passage for HRDs to document the situation in the country.⁷⁰ In a press conference at the end of the month, the Human Rights Roundtable "denounced the reduction of civic space and the repression of the work of HRDs; the unnecessary and disproportionate use of force; cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; setbacks to workers' rights such as dismissals and unjustified suspension of labor contracts; and the politicized distribution of humanitarian aid".⁷⁰ But there were also good news. The Court of Appeals in Choluteca issued a final dismissal in favor of the HRD Aleyda Xiomara Huete (see above).⁷¹

Crisis = Corruption

Journalist Claudia Mendoza denounced that the JOH regime used the pandemic to rob from the people.⁷² The CNA agreed warning of the state reaction to the health crisis being another source of corruption.⁷³ ContraCorriente wrote about the deadly mix of the corona pandemic and Honduran corruption.⁷⁴ The fact that the son of a state official was found to sell overpriced disinfectant online is almost a detail.^{75 76} On March 25, the Health Secretary Alba Consuelo Flores conceded that Honduras does not have the conditions to build hospitals to help prevent the spread of the Coronavirus even though Congress recently approved some \$502 million to build hospitals as a reactions to the pandemic.⁷⁷ Last but not least, there were also several irregularities reported regarding the Honduras Solidarity Operation (see above).

66 <https://twitter.com/COPINHONDURAS/status/1241156768518025216>

67 <https://radioprogreso.hn/instante/demandan-integrar-grupo-auditor-para-fondos-publicos-usados-en-la-emergencia/>

68 <http://im-defensoras.org/2020/03/pronunciamiento-covid-19-ante-la-crisis-urge-frenar-el-autoritarismo-y-defender-la-vida-el-cuidado-los-derechos-y-la-dignidad-humana/>

69 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2746-instituciones-no-atienen-denuncias-se-dispara-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-en-la-emergencia-del-covid-19-en-honduras>

70 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/monitoreo-de-compromisos-internacionales/item/2756-mesa-de-derechos-humanos-demando-al-gobierno-de-joh-que-el-estado-de-emergencia-por-covid19-no-debe-restringir-derechos-fundamentales>

71 <http://defensoresonline.com/dictan-sobreseimiento-definitivo-a-la-defensora-de-ddhh-aleyda-huete/>

72 <https://criterio.hn/coronavirus-la-pandemia-perfecta-para-robar-en-honduras/>

73 <https://twitter.com/cnahonduras/status/1240676986433032193>

74 <https://contracorriente.red/2020/03/20/a-la-pandemia-se-suma-la-corrupcion-en-honduras/>

75 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3797-hijo-de-funcionario-hondureno-exitoso-vendedor-de-gel-antibacterial>

76 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3798-tienda-de-celulares-vendio-gel-antibacterial-a-fredy-hijo-de-funcionario>

77 <https://confidencialhn.com/se-resquebraja-discurso-del-regimen-salud-asegura-no-tener-condiciones-para-construir-hospitales/>

Extractivism Never Sleeps

Blatantly highlighting its real priorities, the JOH regime announced a digital platform where extractive companies could present their environmental licenses and other documents allowing them to continue with their work. This is even more problematic because at the same time, the JOH regime had suspended the Access to Public Information Law, arguing the same health emergency.⁷⁸ In response to the decision, Arcah denounced that "once again it is evident how hostile the dictatorship is against the communities and the common goods of nature".⁷⁸ This was also denounced by MADJ and CESPAD.^{79 80}

COVID-19 and the Economy

The corona crisis also had a direct impact on the Honduran economy. Initially, the maquila industry continued to work which caused some criticism. Then, the Secretary of Labor, Carlos Madero, announced that they received the information a bit late, but that they would also stop working. The JOH regime announced a preliminary package of measures for micro and small businesses and the tourism industry.⁸¹ The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE) also announced \$8 millions for the region.⁸² On March 17, JOH announced new plans to support the economy: four measures in total, all of which funded by the Honduran Bank for Production and Housing (Banhprovi).⁸² The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (BCIE) also announced financial support worth \$50 million.⁸³ The IMF will disburse \$143 Million to Honduras to fight the corona crisis.⁸⁴ The JOH regime also asked international lenders to let them suspend debt payments for the time being.⁸⁵

On March 18, the STIBYS labor union denounced that their workers were exposed to the virus forced to continue working and they demanded a stop for workers in the sugary drinks and alcoholic drinks industry.⁸⁶ Radio Progreso reported on attempts by the Southern Apparel and New Holland maquilas to convince the Ministry of Labor to suspend their labor contracts. Some 9000 workers would be affected.⁸⁶ ContraCorriente also covered the topic highlighting how these attempts ignore Honduras' labor law.⁸⁷ FOSDEH published a list of recommendations on the economy.⁸⁸ On March 27, the labor union Sitraina denounces the reaction by the JOH regime to the corona crisis and "the malice with which both national and foreign employers are acting", suspending work without pay of thousands of employees.⁸⁸ Two days later, some 4000 workers were suspended for 120 days by the maquiladora Empire Electronics Honduras.

78 <https://twitter.com/COPINHONDURAS/status/1244411366473183232>

79 <https://madj.org/index.php/2020/03/30/el-saqueo-extractivo-podra-continuar-en-tiempos-de-cuarentena-en-honduras/>

80 <http://cespad.org.hn/2020/03/30/alerta-el-covid-19-no-es-obstaculo-para-que-la-elite-siga-entregando-los-recursos-naturales-al-gran-capital/>

81 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/gobierno-anuncia-paquete-de-medidas-economicas-para-sector-micro-y-turismo.html>

82 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/con-prestamos-gobierno-de-joh-piensa-aliviar-crisis-economica-del-covid-19/>

83 <https://www.proceso.hn/politica-nacional/36-proceso-electoral/bcie-otorgara-a-honduras-50-millones-de-dolares-para-mitigar-impacto-del-coronavirus.html>

84 <https://tiempo.hn/honduras-fmi-143-millones-covid-19/>

85 <https://confidencial.hn.com/finanzas-pide-a-organismos-internacionales-suspension-de-pagos-para-atender-pandemia/>

86 <https://radioprogreso.hn/instante/unos-9-mil-trabajadores-de-maquila-a-punto-de-perder-su-empleo/>

87 <https://contracorriente.red/2020/03/26/empresas-maquiladoras-suspenden-contratos-en-crisis-por-covid-19/>

Human Rights and Their Defenders

OACNUDH presented its new ad-interim representative, Isabel Albaladejo Escribano.⁸⁸ She met with the Human Rights Minister Karla Cueva⁹⁰ as well as different other groups.⁸⁸ In a meeting with human rights defenders, she reiterated "their commitment to accompany them in the defence and protection of #DDHH".⁸⁸ She also signed an Addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding with the Human Rights Secretariat.⁸⁹

UPR

Honduran human rights organizations and social movements organized as the Coalition against Impunity held a forum on the upcoming Universal Periodic Review on Honduras at the UN. They presented a report⁹⁰ ⁹¹ on the human rights situation in Honduras including several recommendations on various issues.⁹² ⁹³ The UPR session on Honduras should have taken place in May but was later postponed to November due to the corona crisis.

Assassinations

On March 6, the renowned teacher, writer and opponent of the dictatorship, Víctor Manuel Rodríguez Paz, was murdered in the city of Santa Bárbara.⁹⁴ "Although the investigating authorities have not commented on the motive for the crime, which was executed this morning, social leaders in the area do not rule out that it is an attack against the teachers and the opposition to the regime led by Juan Orlando Hernandez."⁹⁵

Attacks, Criminalization and Harassment

These last months, city Councillor and environmental defender Marlon Calles has suffered various incidents. OACNUDH lamented the most recent act of intimidation and harassment against him when his car was broken into and confidential documents were stolen. Calles should benefit from the protection mechanism for human rights defenders.⁹⁶ Later in March, COFADEH denounced that "the regime is taking advantage of the suspension of constitutional guarantees to attack and silence defenders and critical voices so that they do not denounce what is happening in the country, as is the case of Marlon Calles, councilman of the Mayor's Office of Marcala, La Paz, who received a

88 <https://twitter.com/ONUDDHH/status/1237910130924097536>

89 <https://twitter.com/ONUDDHH/status/1237837685852602368>

90 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Informe-EPU-Coalicio%CC%81n-Contra-la-Impunidad.pdf>

91 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/noticias/1117-honduras-frente-al-epu-2020>

92 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/honduras-saldra-aplazada-en-el-epu-concluyen-organizaciones-de-sociedad-civil/>

93 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/que-diremos-frente-al-epu-2020/>

94 <https://tiempo.hn/acribillan-a-reconocido-maestro-y-escritor-en-santa-barbara/>

95 <https://defensoresenlinea.com/santa-barbara-crimen-contra-docente-es-un-atentado-hacia-el-magisterio/>

96 <https://twitter.com/ONUDDHH/status/1234515080626212864>

summons to appear before the Municipal Justice Judge".⁹⁷ Pasos de Animal Grande the ongoing profiling at the UNAH of students by the police.⁹⁸

Indigenous Peoples

Selin Eliazar Fúnez Bonilla had been accused of being one of the people responsible for the murder of the three indigenous Tolupán defenders María Enriqueta Matute, Armando Fúnez Medina and Ricardo Soto Fúnez on August 25, 2013. This month, out of the blue, a court in Yoro decided to acquit him.⁹⁹ 100 The same month, Pasos de Animal Grande denounced that the general Finlander Armijo Uclés had returned with more force against the indigenous Tolupán after the justice of the area sentenced him for threats and damages last November. Additionally, the IACHR issued precautionary measures in favor of 18 members of the Locomapa tribe and these were transferred to the National Protection Mechanism, but there have been serious drawbacks in their implementation and the JOH regime has not been able to protect the indigenous defenders in an adequate manner.⁹⁹

The New York Times reported on the struggles of the indigenous peoples for their land in Central America this month. "Faced with government inaction, some activists try to reclaim ancestral lands on their own. Often, they pay a high price." In the case of Honduras, they write: "Worldwide, Central and South American Indigenous groups are the most under attack, according to the Business & Human Rights Resource Center, which maintains a database of attacks and killings of human rights activists. With 54 violent incidents against Indigenous groups fighting businesses last year, Central America led the world last year in the number of such confrontations, according to Adam Barnett, the group's spokesman. Honduras, he said, had the most."¹⁰⁰

The Case of Berta Cáceres

Honduras and the world commemorated Berta Cáceres this month on the fourth day of her assassination. "This crime represents the plan to try to destroy the territorial and articulating struggle for the re-foundation of Honduras, led by Berta Cáceres, and to sow fear in the hearts of those that fight for Honduras. However, their struggle has not stopped sprouting in thousands of expressions worthy of resistance by the Honduran people. It was a day after her crime that we, as COPINH, family members and organizations, set out to build justice for her, challenging the structural impunity of the country that has been complicit in the attacks on the people and their political persecution. (...) We have confirmed and fully denounce that the repressive State of Honduras, which violates human rights, does not intend to persecute the members of the Atala Zablah family; Daniel Atala Midence, Jacobo Atala Zablah, José Eduardo Atala Zablah and Pedro Atala Zablah, businessmen responsible for the crime of Berta Cáceres."¹⁰¹ Berta Zúniga, general coordinator of COPINH and Berta's daughter, also addressed the world. "As you know, these four years have meant, in the midst of the pain of losing such an important person, an intense work of

97 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/marlon-calles-me-quieren-callar-para-que-no-diga-lo-que-esta-pasando/>

98 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/es/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2716-agente-de-didadpol-llego-a-la-unah-a-levantar-perfiles-de-estudiantes-cuando-exigian-justicia-por-el-crimen-de-beta-caceres>

99 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/denuncias/item/2732-general-finlander-armijo-ucles-agudiza-la-violencia-contra-indigenas-tolupanes-en-locomapa-yoro>

100 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/world/americas/central-america-indigenous-conflicts.html>

seeking justice but also of continuing to walk in Berta's footsteps."¹⁰¹ OACNUDH participated at the commemoration of Berta on Tuesday and expressed solidarity with her family and COPINH.¹⁰²

The US embassy in Honduras also tweeted on this occasion, but not mentioning the need for justice.¹⁰³ US Senator Patrick Leahy tweeted an important comment on the Berta Cáceres case. "Berta Cáceres lost her life for speaking out in defense of the natural resources her people depend on. Rather than defend her rights, the Honduran Government vilified her and other environmental activists. The Honduran Government pledged that all those responsible for the premeditated murder of Berta Cáceres would be brought to justice. Four years later her family, the Honduran people, and the world are still waiting for justice. Berta Cáceres was one of many Honduran environmental activists who have been harassed, threatened, and killed. There is no better illustration of impunity than the failure of justice in these cases. The Honduran Government and Congress kicked out MACCIH and enacted laws designed to shield themselves from accountability for corruption and violations of human rights. The U.S. should not support such so-called 'partners.' The Office of the Honduran Attorney General needs strong international support in investigating and prosecuting cases of corruption and violations of human rights. That Office and honest judges are the only hope for justice in Honduras. The Honduran judiciary has prevented relevant evidence from being produced in court, which has impeded the prosecution and delayed justice for Berta Cáceres and her family. An independent judiciary is fundamental to democracy."¹⁰³ And a great lesson on how corporate media outlets work in Honduras - Proceso Digital just reported on the one statement regarding the international support for the MP and did not mention the rest. Worst of all, it did not even mention that the statement was linked to the Berta Cáceres case.¹⁰⁴ The case even entered US politics as Democratic primary challenger Androm Ghebregiorgis tweeted: "It is with a heavy heart that we honor the 4th anniversary of Berta's death. Shame on @RepEliotEngel for failing to push for the arrest of the intellectual authors of Berta's murder and for not passing the Berta Cáceres Act through his House Foreign Affairs Committee."¹⁰⁴

US Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur called on "my colleagues to support the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, to suspend US funding to Honduras for police & military operations until their government investigates reports of human rights abuses".¹⁰⁵ Congressman Eliot L. Engel, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, met with Attorney General Óscar Chinchilla. "I emphasized with the Attorney General that four years after the killing of environmental activist Berta Cáceres, each and every mastermind of her murder must be held accountable in a court of law. As I have done over the past four years, I will continue to push for justice for Berta and her family and a Honduras free from corruption and the horrors of criminal violence."¹⁰⁶ ¹⁰⁷ US congressman Hank Johnson commemorated Berta on the floor of

101 <https://copinh.org/2020/03/palabras-de-nuestra-coordinadora-general-bertha-zuniga-caceres/>

102 <https://twitter.com/ONUDDHH/status/1234880662571814912>

103 <https://twitter.com/SenatorLeahy/status/1234850976219246592>

104 <https://twitter.com/AndromForNY/status/1234615213795745794>

105 <https://twitter.com/RepMarcyKaptur/status/1235612653625569280>

106 <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/2020/3/engel-statement-on-meeting-with-honduran-attorney-general>

107 <https://twitter.com/HouseForeign/status/1235304956510511104>

Congress. "I continue my call for justice for Berta/her family & urge my colleagues to support the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act."¹⁰⁸

There was also a reaction from the other side of the Atlantic. European Parliamentarian Miguel Urbán Crespo denounced the "criminalization, persecution and assassination" of human rights defenders.¹⁰⁹ 19 national and international human rights organizations published a joint letter commemorating Berta Cáceres and denouncing that "the State of Honduras is still in debt, not only in the case of the Lenca defender Berta Cáceres, but in the cases of all the defenders who have been murdered, raped and criminalized and who have not yet obtained justice".¹¹⁰

LGBTQ

The LGBTQ community in Honduras also published a report for the UPR (see also UPR section above) in which it holds the State responsible for taking legislative measures that promote irrational hatred of people's sexual orientation and identity."¹¹¹ Pasos de Animal Grande reported on the live of trans women in Honduras and how they are made invisible due to the lack of legal recognition making, for example, access to education very difficult.¹¹²

Freedom of Expression and Journalists

C-Libre has documented 237 attacks against journalist in the last two years, mainly by the police (36%) and the Military Police (20%).¹¹³ And in some rare cases when state security forces are held responsible, they get off with mild sentences. Pasos de Animal Grande denounced that the Justice System protected a member of the police force who brutally attacked the journalist Dunia Montoya in 2015. He was only found guilty of less serious injuries against her. "The court was careful not to send him to prison if he had been convicted of Abuse of Authority and Injury, since by accumulating the crimes he would be behind bars as he should be if there was the rule of law in Honduras."¹¹⁴

Pasos de Animal Grande also reported on the difficult situation of journalists in the south of Honduras. "It could be a mere coincidence, but threats, harassment, tailing by unknown men and cars without license plates, as well as the reopening of a trial, have occurred against critical journalists, in the preamble to the launch of the presidential candidacy of the President of the National Congress, Mauricio Oliva, last Sunday, March 8, 2020. Journalists Leonel García of Nacaome Valle and Leonardo Pineda of Choluteca's Channel 21 were followed by unknown men in

108 <https://twitter.com/RepHankJohnson/status/1235969279423627265>

109 <https://twitter.com/MiguelUrban/status/1234569198736748544>

110 <https://www.cejil.org/es/4-anos-del-asesinato-bera-caceres-politicas-extractivistas-honduras-mantienen-grave-riesgo>

111 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/denuncias/item/2719-segun-arcoiris-estado-de-honduras-promueve-el-odio-irracional-contra-la-comunidad-lgtb>

112 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2727-la-realidad-invisibilizada-en-honduras-de-las-mujeres-trans>

113 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/1425-estado-de-honduras-responde-con-violencia-y-criminalizacion-a-periodistas>

114 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2730-sistema-de-justicia-protector-a-policia-que-ataco-en-2015-a-periodista-dunia-montoya>

cars with tinted glass and no plates, while Jairo López faces the reopening of a trial and the umpteenth smear campaign on social networks."¹¹⁵

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) took up the case of the Honduran journalist and director of El Perro Amarillo, Milton Benítez. "On February 19, El Perro Amarillo, an independent online broadcaster, published leaked recordings that allegedly showed officials in the national prosecutor's office hiding evidence in organized crime cases and working with criminal groups. Since the leaks were published, social media users have threatened El Perro Amarillo's director Milton Benítez and other journalists on the team, Benítez told CPJ in a phone interview. In one video, which CPJ reviewed but has since been set to private, a Facebook user named Luis Rodríguez said that Benítez is on a list of journalists to be killed in 2020. The video had been viewed more than 50,000 times before it was set to private. (...) CPJ called the Honduran attorney general's office and Danilo Morales, the director of the protection mechanism, for comment, but no one answered the calls."¹¹⁶

There was an attack against journalist Carlos Augusto Lara in Tocoa, Colón. Unknown attackers came to his house, shot at it and tried to murder him when stopped by a police patrol that was close by.¹¹⁷ The journalist Ricardo Patiño was forced out of a session of the municipal corporation of Tela, Atlántida at the request of Councilman Mario Fuentes. According to Patiño, this action is the result of a series of investigations in which Councilman Fuentes, the former mayor of the municipality between 2014-2018, was exposed to acts of corruption.¹¹⁷ A member of the Armed Forces attacked social communicator Yesking Mairena in Sabá, Colón.¹¹⁷ And last but not least, the photo-journalist Alex Fernando Destephen Soto, working for Criterio, was attacked when covering the marches on the International Women's Day on March 8.¹¹⁷

Violence against Women

Honduras commemorated the international women's day. COFADEH denounced that violence against women is state policy in Honduras. "In the struggle for land, 720 women defenders face legal proceedings, 159 are widowed and their children face lack of education, 35 have been displaced by violence, 44 victims of threats, information theft and persecution of their children and 7 have been killed."¹¹⁸ There was also a call for a national emergency to be declared due to the high levels of femicide¹¹⁹ and Reporteros de Investigación highlighted the link between femicides and the JOH regime.¹¹⁸ Every 21 hours, a woman is murdered in Honduras.¹¹⁹ This month, in less than 24 hours, three women were murdered in Tegucigalpa.¹²⁰ "In the last 10 years, 23,605 complaints of sexual violence have been received and 65 births of girls under the age of 18 are registered daily, according to figures from the Rights Here and Now Honduras Platform".¹²¹

115 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/amenazas-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/item/2726-reinician-las-amenazas-en-el-sur-tres-periodistas-han-sido-objeto-de-seguimientos-y-campanas-de-desprestigio>

116 <https://cpj.org/2020/02/journalists-at-honduran-outlet-el-perro-amarillo-r.php>

117 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/portada-alertas/1133-desconocido-agrede-y-dana-equipo-de-trabajo-de-fotoperiodista-durante-cobertura-noticiosa>

118 <https://www.reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2020/03/06/los-femicidios-del-grupo-de-juan-orlando-herandez/>

119 <https://www.proceso.hn/portadas/10-portada/cada-21-horas-asesinan-una-mujer-en-honduras-ov-unah.html>

120 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/en-menos-de-24-horas-tres-mujeres-son-asesinadas-en-tegucigalpa.html>

121 <https://criterio.hn/honduras-un-pais-peligroso-para-ser-nina/>

Nevertheless, organizations trying to defend these rights or rather have them first established in Honduras suffer attacks. "The defenders of the organization Ecumenical Right to Decide have suffered a scale of attacks that has been progressively increasing, the aggression started being verbal and now one of their members has been shot with a gun. The incident occurred on 31 December 2019. Elmin Barahona, an alleged bodyguard for the MP, was denounced as the attacker at the MP, according to the reports. The MP should investigate whether it was really this person who committed the offense."¹²²

OACNUDH observed the marches and protests in Honduras on women's day. The office highlighted the importance of "the inclusion of women in political decisions, the right to life and to sexual and reproductive health, as well as to a life free of violence".¹²³ The Gender Equality Board (MIG) of the donor body G-16 published a press release. "MIG recognizes that Honduran women face many challenges to the effective enjoyment of their rights, such as effective political participation and limited access to sexual and reproductive health, among others. On this emblematic date, we wish to draw attention to the various gender-based forms of violence that strongly affect women and girls in the country, as well as to recognize the role of the women's and feminist movement in Honduras. (...) With regard to the normative framework, it is necessary to adopt laws that allow a comprehensive approach to the phenomenon of violence against women, such as the Law on Domestic Work, the Law on Political Violence against Women, the Comprehensive Law against Violence against Women, which includes the figure of shelters for women survivors of violence. (...) MIG believes that, in view of the major challenges in this context, it is necessary to redouble efforts to investigate and prosecute cases of femicide, strengthening technical capacities and allocating budgets effectively and in accordance with the requirements of the special units for the investigation of violent deaths of women and femicide attached to the Public Prosecutor's Office and the investigative agencies. (...) No measure can be successful without addressing the underlying causes of violence against women, in particular patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes, gender inequality and without redoubling efforts to combat the multiple discrimination suffered by women belonging to indigenous peoples, Afro-Hondurans, LGBTIQ and other vulnerable groups."¹²⁴

Political Prisoners

The Coalition against Impunity presented the cases of the political prisoners at the IACHR this month.¹²⁵ 28 people from Las Vegas, Santa Barbara are still being criminalized for a fire during a anti-JOH protest in 2018. COFADEH denounced irregularities during the trial.¹²⁵ But there were also some good news. Defensores en Línea reported on the successful campaign to have the charges against one of the many criminalized protesters from the post-electoral crisis dropped - José David Alvarado Rodríguez who was 15 years old when arrested by the police in December 2017. "The

¹²² <https://www.reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2020/03/09/supuesto-agente-asignado-al-ministerio-publico-ataco-a-defensoras-ecumenicas-por-el-derecho-a-decidir/>

¹²³ <https://twitter.com/ONUDDHH/status/1237196825947488256>

¹²⁴ <https://oacnudh.hn/comunicado-2/>

¹²⁵ <http://defensoresenlinea.com/mp-obstruye-audiencia-contra-defensores-criminalizados-de-las-vegas/>

defense demonstrated before the judge that the Public Ministry acted on the presumption of guilt and indiscriminately against the population that peacefully protested in defense of the Constitution of the Republic."¹²⁶

Extractive Industries

These last month, a disputed construction project negatively affecting the National Park La Tigra near Tegucigalpa made negative headlines. This month, the Nationalist-controlled Congress spoke out in favor of it.¹²⁷ The local communities and environmental defenders announced new protests.¹²⁸ La Tigra additionally suffers from unregulated agriculture activities.¹²⁹

Mining

The Guapinol case was very prominent again this month and the imprisoned defenders were greeted by an international wave of solidarity. There was even some international coverage this month by The Nation.¹³⁰ At the beginning of the month, their legal representatives officially requested at the MP a reconsideration of the alternative measures to imprisonment. The defenders have been imprisoned for 195 days.¹³¹ US congresswoman Marcy Kaptur tweeted: "I have closely monitored the Guapinol Water Defenders case in #Honduras. I call for their immediate release and urge the appeals court to act swiftly to ensure due process. No person should be jailed for defending access to safe community water sources."¹³² The Central American Alliance Against Mining, ACAFREMIN wrote an open letter to Rolando Argueta, president of the Supreme Court of Justice, asking him to revoke the preventive detention measure against them.¹³²

By March 13, the time limit has passed for the Court of Appeals to give a resolution to the Appeal for Review of Measures.¹³³ As a response, the Municipal Committee for the Defense of the Commons Public Goods from Tocoa, Colón presented a challenge to the Supreme Court demanding a guarantee of the right to health and life of the eight defenders.¹³⁴ Several international human rights organizations published a press release in support of them.¹³⁵ UN Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky tweeted at the Judicial Power in Honduras: "Heed the call of the #UNHCHR and take urgent measures to mitigate the impact of #COVID19 for ppl in detention. Free the #Guapinol Water Defenders in Honduras now!"¹³⁵ German parliamentarians also called for their freedom. "We respectfully request that the writ of habeas corpus be immediately resolved and that the honorable

126 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/defensa-logra-sobreseimiento-definitivo-de-menor-acusado-de-hurto-durante-crisis-post-electoral/>

127 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3753-no-hallan-como-destruir-la-tigra-congreso-apoya-construccion-de-residencial>

128 <https://criterio.hn/ambientalistas-anuncian-protestas-ante-viabilidad-del-congreso-de-proyecto-residencial-de-la-tigra/>

129 <http://elpulso.hn/el-15-de-zona-nucleo-en-la-tigra-devastada-por-actividades-agricolas/>

130 <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/honduras-mine-conflict/>

131 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/contexto/item/2720-abogados-piden-al-fiscal-oscar-chinchilla-reconsiderar-las-medidas-cautelares-para-defensores-de-guapinol>

132 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/alianza-centroamericana-contra-mineria-pide-libertad-para-defensores-del-rio-guapinol/>

133 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/denuncias/item/2731-abogados-denuncian-injustificadas-demoras-del-sistema-de-justicia-para-resolver-recursos-a-favor-de-defensores-de-guapinol>

134 <http://www.pasosdeanimalgrande.com/index.php/en/denuncias/item/2744-grito-de-auxilio-en-la-crisis-sanitaria-responsabilizan-al-poder-judicial-de-lo-que-pueda-sucedder-a-los-ocho-defensores-de-guapinol-que-están-en-prisio>

135 <https://twitter.com/janschakowsky/status/1243969171899265024>

members of the Court of Appeals issue a ruling in accordance with international standards regarding the application of preventative detention and, therefore, revoke this measure ordered against the water defenders, guaranteeing their rights in accordance with the international obligations of the Honduran State."¹³⁶ Only at the end of the month, the Supreme Court of Justice nominated a judge who began to conduct interviews with the imprisoned human rights defenders as part of the process to resolve the habeas corpus petition.¹³⁷ Their loved expressed fear for their safety.¹³⁸

Hydroelectricity

The people in Arizona, Atlántida accompanied by MADJ denounce a recent visit by staff from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), "who for the second time are serving as an intermediary for the interests of extractive companies and their projects that are harmful to our lives and our environment by disrespecting our sovereign decision to declare ourselves free from extractive activities." They have been protesting for years against the hydroelectric company INGELSA and their project on the Jilamito River.¹³⁹

Corruption and Its Enemies

The National Anti-Corruption Council (CNA) signed an agreement with the Municipal Association of Honduras (AMHON) to fight corruption at the municipal level.¹⁴⁰ On this occasion, the CNA also criticized the lack of political will by the MP to investigate cases of corruption.¹⁴¹ Last but not least, they also announced to investigate the disputed housing project in the National Park La Tigra (see last month's monitor).¹⁴²

The Onslaught against the Anti-Corruption Bodies

Even when the MACCIH was still in Honduras, there was well-deserved criticism towards the anti-corruption efforts in Honduras, especially that it did not go after the really powerful actors and that there was not follow-up after an initial, media-accompanied, accusation. One exception was the trial and successful sentencing of the former first lady, Rosa Elena Bonilla de Lobo. But it is as if someone awaited an international health crisis sucking up all the media attention to announce that....the conviction has been annulled and has to be repeated.¹⁴³ The director of the CNA, Gabriela Castellanos, denounced that the court "washed its hands from the corruption epidemic".¹⁴⁴ 145 Lawyer and former Libre congressman Jari Dixon reacted: "[T]here is still doubt, uncertainty, there is still a bad taste in the mouth, they expelled the MACCIH and everything related to corruption issues is falling apart".¹⁴⁴ InSight Crime commented: "The Supreme Court of Honduras has thrown

136 <https://radioprogreso.net/instante/parlamentarios-alemanes-demandan-libertad-de-defensores-del-rio-guapinol/>

137 <https://radioprogreso.net/portada/nombran-juez-ejecutora-para-habeas-copus-en-favor-de-presos-politicos-y-ambientalistas-de-rio-guapinol/>

138 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/esposa-de-presos-politico-por-defender-el-agua-y-la-vida-teme-por-su-salud/>

139 <https://madj.org/index.php/2020/03/15/comunidades-denuncian-presiones-del-bid-en-arizona-para-el-desarrollo-de-hidroelectrica/>

140 <https://criterio.hn/honduras-25-alcaldias-se-comprometen-a-combatir-la-corrupcion/>

141 <https://confidencial.hn.com/jefa-del-cna-hace-recuento-de-negligencia-de-fiscalia-por-casos-de-corrupcion/>

142 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/cna-abrira-investigacion-en-proyecto-habitacional-bosques-de-santa-maria.html>

143 <https://www.radioprogreso.net/instante/repeticion-juicio-contra-ex-primera-dama/>

out an historic anti-corruption conviction against a former first lady, laying bare the uphill battle the country faces after the dismantling of its internationally-backed anti-graft body."¹⁴⁴

CESPAD published a 30+-pages report on the lessons to be drawn from the MACCIH and the current perspectives to fight corruption in Honduras.¹⁴⁵ In it, they offer three possible post-MACCIH scenario for Honduras. "For the First Scenario to become a reality, CESPAD proposes that Honduran institutions should take on the challenge of fighting corruption, especially the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Specialized Prosecutorial Unit against Networks of Corruption (UFERCO). But for this scenario to become concrete, CESPAD analyses, at the same time, some additional requirements are further discusses in the document. In the Second Scenario, CESPAD proposes the emergence of a new citizen's movement against corruption, which manages to install a new international mission. As in the first scenario, the factors that must exist in order for this to happen are analyzed. Finally, in a Third Scenario CESPAD assesses the consolidation of the setback in the fight against corruption. In other words, the networks of corruption and impunity continue to be active, they keep the state captured and corruption and impunity grow much faster. "From the perspective of the fight against corruption and impunity, this is the least desirable scenario but unfortunately it has some probabilities and, to a large extent, will depend on the future of UFERCO, the role of the international community, civil society and the citizenry in general", says the analysis of CESPAD."¹⁴⁵

IHSS

The trial against the 14 former IHSS board members started this month.¹⁴⁶ ¹⁴⁷ A court also confirmed the 15-year prison sentence against Mario Antonio Rojas Rodríguez.¹⁴⁸

Pandora

UFERCO questioned the relaxation of precautionary measures against an accused in the Pandora case. "Without prior hearing and unilaterally, precautionary measures were changed to allow Felix Francisco Reyes Pacheco, owner of Aviation Partners, to leave the country. He is accused of the crime of money laundering in the notorious Pandora case."¹⁴⁹ In an analysis of the case, CESPAD interpreted the action by UFERCO as a positive sign of its political will to continue the fight against corruption in Honduras.¹⁵⁰

144 <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/honduras-anti-corruption-conviction/>

145 <http://cespad.org.hn/2020/03/24/los-tres-probables-escenarios-en-honduras-que-plantea-el-cespad-en-el-contexto-post-maccih/>

146 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/este-lunes-2-de-marzo-arranca-juicio-oral-a-exdirectivos-del-ihss.html>

147 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/author-login/153-febrero2020/5541-unaf-comienza-juicio-contra-exdirectivos-del-ihss-por-millonarias-trasferencias-irregulares>

148 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/author-login/154-marzo2020/5601-sala-penal-confirma-sentencia-de-15-anos-de-reclusion-contra-mario-rojas-en-el-caso-ihss>

149 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/author-login/154-marzo2020/5658-uferco-ve-con-extraneza-la-flexibilizacion-de-medidas-cautelares-a-implicado-en-el-caso-pandora>

150 <http://cespad.org.hn/2020/03/30/coronavirus-uferco-y-las-implicaciones-en-el-caso-pandora/>

Impunity Pact

The preliminary hearing against the Nationalist congresswoman Sara Medina in the Impunity Pact corruption was held this month.¹⁵¹

State Security Forces

ContraCorriente covered the failed purge of the National Police Force with a very telling image: "It is to honor and glorify the name of Christ," said Police Commissioner Leonel Saucedo on Sunday, February 9, before leaving the stage of the International Christian Center (CCI) where minutes earlier the evangelical pastor and member of the Special Commission for the Process of Purification and Transformation of the National Police, Alberto Solórzano, had led a prayer on his behalf. A week earlier, Saucedo had been promoted to the rank of Commissioner General of the National Police. Two days after the religious act in which he participated thanking God for his promotion along with the police purger, he was arrested by the Technical Agency of Criminal Investigation (ATIC), a specialized agency of the Public Prosecutor's Office, for presuming him responsible for the crime of money laundering since he could not justify approximately 16 million lempiras contained in his bank accounts." The article also highlights the complete lack of political will by the JOH regime to purge the police. Speaking about the previous Commission of the Reform of Public Security, Josué Murillo said: "When Juan Orlando saw that they were independent and were targeting the roots of the problem, he dismissed them, annulled the reform commission and formed this purging commission."¹⁵²

Repressions

COFADEH, the Committee for the Liberation of Political Prisoners and the Alignment against Continuity published an urgent action denouncing the repression and criminalization of protests in Honduras and especially the role of the Investigative Police Unit (DPI).¹⁵³

Assassinations

A police agent was sent to pre-trial detention accused of murder.¹⁵⁴ A former member of the Armed Forces was sentenced to 11 years in prison for murdering a Honduran citizen in September 2019 while on duty.¹⁵⁵ The MP will file an appeal against the acquittal of the Military Police officers César Augusto Madrid Vásquez, Milton Ignacio Corrales Sánchez and Marco Antonio Ramos Sosa who were prosecuted for the crimes of attempted murder and abuse of authority.¹⁵⁵

151 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/el-jueves-daran-resolucion-de-la-audiencia-preliminar-a-la-diputada-sara-medina.html>

152 <https://contracorriente.red/2020/02/29/la-depuracion-que-triunfo/>

153 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/accion-urgente-2/>

154 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/autor-login/153-febrero2020/5556-prision-preventiva-contr-policia-por-homicidio-de-un-companero>

155 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/autor-login/154-marzo2020/5626-mp-presentara-recurso-de-casacion-por-absolucion-de-tres-policias-militares-acusados-de-tentativa-de-homicidio-y-abuso-de-autoridad>

Penitentiary System

Six inmates fled from the militarized Támara prison¹⁵⁶ and two Military Police agents were found guilty for having led an inmate escape.¹⁵⁶ On March 4, representatives of the Coalition against Impunity participated at the thematic session on human rights violations of inmates at the IACHR.¹⁵⁷ The same month, the Constitutional Chamber demanded the elimination of two punishment rooms installed in the so-called maximum security prison La Tolva, where prisoners were isolated and punished.¹⁵⁸ They also asked for improvements at the youth detention center Renaciendo.¹⁵⁹

Due to the corona crisis, the National Penitentiary Institute (INP) canceled family visits¹⁶⁰ and later on, additional measures were established.¹⁶¹ "The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, called on governments to take urgent action to protect the health and safety of people who are detained or held in other closed facilities, as part of the overall efforts to curb the COVID-19 pandemic. (...) The High Commissioner called upon Governments and relevant authorities to act swiftly to reduce the number of prisoners and noted that a number of countries had already taken positive steps in this regard. The authorities should consider ways of releasing individuals who were particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, including older and sick prisoners, as well as less dangerous detainees. The authorities should also continue to address the specific health needs of women prisoners, including pregnant women, prisoners with disabilities and minors."¹⁶¹

Militarization

In the annual ranking prepared by the portal "Global Firepower" on the military power of nations, Honduras appears as the second "strongest" in Central America, occupying position 110, surpassed by Guatemala which is positioned at number 92 on the list. A report by the Association for a More Just Society (ASJ) revealed that public defense spending increased by 228.1 percent between 2010 and 2020.¹⁶²

International Community

Some weeks ago, the JOH regime talked about negotiations with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) regarding opening an office in Honduras. This month, Security Minister Luis Suazo announced that such an office should be opened soon as Honduras had made their request official.¹⁶³

156 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/autor-login/154-marzo2020/5637-declaran-culpables-a-dos-policias-militares-por-evasion-de-imputado-acusado-de-asesinato>

157 <http://defensoresenlinea.com/situacion-de-privados-de-libertad-hondurenos-sera-expuesta-ante-la-cidh/>

158 <https://tiempo.hn/sala-constitucional-ordena-cierre-salas-de-castigo-la-tolva/>

159 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/conceden-exhibicion-personal-a-reos-en-carceles-la-tolva-y-renacer.html>

160 <https://confidencialhn.com/suspenden-visitas-en-centros-penitenciarios-para-evitar-contagio-de-coronavirus/>

161 <https://oacnudh.hn/hay-que-tomar-medidas-urgentes-para-evitar-que-el-covid-19-cause-estratos-en-las-prisiones-bachelet/>

162 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3761-honduras-es-la-segunda-potencia-militar-en-la-region>

163 <https://www.proceso.hn/politica-nacional/36-proceso-electoral/honduras-y-la-onu-negocian-para-abrir-una-oficina-anticorrupcion-en-el-pais.html>

US

US Acting Assistant Secretary for U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Michael G. Kozak, met with Attorney General Óscar Chinchilla praising his work and claiming that under his leadership Honduras will effectively fight against corruption and impunity. This omits that he had been in charge for years and his track record on both corruption, especially when it concerns the JOH regime, and impunity is dismal. Another case in point, his refusal to investigate the drug trafficking links of JOH (see JOH sub-section below).^{164 165}

EU

The MP inaugurated the Integrated Expedite Center on Interinstitutional Justice (CEIN).¹⁶⁶ The Spanish ambassador Guillermo Kirkpatrick de la Vega was presented and emphasized that CEIN should "provide professional and personalized attention to victims of gender-based violence and discriminated groups".¹⁶⁷ It is the second such center in Honduras supported by the EU and Spain.¹⁶⁸

Drug Trafficking

Tony Hernández

The New York federal prosecutor's office asked Judge Kevin Castel to sentence JOH's brother and convicted drug trafficker Tony Hernandez on May 15.¹⁶⁹ Shortly afterwards, the date was finally set, to June 5, 2020.¹⁷⁰

Varia

JOH

The main focus on the JOH regime in this month's monitor will be in the COVID-19 Crisis section above, here is what happened before its outbreak in Honduras this month.

JOH and his drug trafficking ties returned to the international headlines in March. "Geovanny Fuentes allegedly paid at least approximately \$25,000 to Juan Orlando Hernández in exchange for protection from law enforcement and access to a cocaine laboratory strategically located near Honduras's largest port, according to a criminal complaint. Hernández ordered Fuentes to report directly to his brother, former congressman Tony Hernández, it adds."¹⁷¹

164 <https://twitter.com/WHAAsstSecty/status/1235991023232471040>

165 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/eeu-cree-que-uferco-y-mp-seran-eficaces-frente-a-la-corrupcion-si-recibe-fondos-y-apoyo-politico.html>

166 https://twitter.com/MP_Honduras/status/1235598373509632000

167 https://twitter.com/MP_Honduras/status/1235619470615470082

168 <http://www.elpais.hn/2020/03/05/honduras-abre-el-segundo-centro-integrado-de-justicia-con-apoyo-de-espana-y-la-ue/>

169 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3815-fiscalia-de-new-york-demanda-sentencia-de-tony-para-el-15-de-mayo>

170 https://www.facebook.com/54573802280890/posts/1323507887837229/?d=n&_fb_noscript=1

171 <https://www.univision.com/univision-news/latin-america/arrested-honduran-drug-trafficker-accused-to-conspiring-with-president-of-honduras>

"U.S. prosecutors said Tuesday that Honduras' president met a drug trafficker around 2013 and took \$25,000 in exchange for protecting the trafficker from law enforcement. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York issued a statement referring to President Juan Orlando Hernández only as a "high-ranking Honduran official" or as "CC-4," a co-conspirator. But in court documents, it identified "CC-4" as president of Honduras and brother of former congressman Juan Antonio Hernández Alvarado, who was convicted on drug charges last year. In previous filing, U.S. prosecutors have described "CC-4" as the winner of the 2013 presidential elections."¹⁷² In a press release, the JOH regime rejected the accusations.¹⁷³

But already the next day, InSight Crime published additional information. "US authorities allege that a recently arrested drug trafficker relied on protection from Honduras President Juan Orlando Hernández and his brother Tony to manufacture hundreds of kilograms of cocaine per month, broadening the scope of the narco-politics nexus in the Central American nation. (...) The latest criminal complaint in the United States suggests that political powers in Honduras didn't just turn a blind eye to help facilitate the trafficking of Colombian cocaine shipments through the country and into the United States, but also provided cover for domestic drug production for more than a decade. In fact, the depth of corruption appears to have reached the top of the Hernández family and the president himself. (...) As head of state, President Hernández currently enjoys immunity from US prosecution. However, when he leaves office in 2022, the latest criminal complaint suggests that authorities in the United States may now be laying the groundwork for a potential future criminal prosecution against him."¹⁷⁴ InSight Crime also reported on Honduras change from a transit to a drug producing country. "Over the last decade, Honduras has seen a proliferation of laboratories capable of transforming coca leaf into cocaine hydrochloride. This means that Honduras, once only a transit point for drugs, is becoming a cocaine producer. (...) This evolution from a transit country to a cocaine producer has a lot to do with the protection drug traffickers have received from the government. (...) Meanwhile, the most recent revelation of the existence of a laboratory belonging to drug trafficker Geovanny Fuentes, is also believed to have received protection from President Hernández."¹⁷⁵

Also in March, the US went after once again after Venezuela's president Nicolas Maduro for drug trafficking, while still ignoring the wrongdoings of JOH, Nevertheless, Jeff Ernst highlighted how the charges against Maduro underscored the links between the Honduran state and drug trafficking. "Narcos extradited from Honduras have reported numerous cocaine shipments from the Apure region of Venezuela, where the Soles allegedly operated. Tony Hernandez used to send drugs from his lab in Colombia through Apure."¹⁷⁶

El Pulso talked with political analyst Raúl Pineda about the possibility of impeaching JOH. "The correlation of political forces in Congress does not allow one to imagine that an impeachment will

172 <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-03-03/us-prosecutors-tie-honduras-president-to-drug-trafficker>

173 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/casa-presidencial-rechaza-senalamientos-del-capo-fuentes-ramirez-que-vinculan-a-hernandez-al-narco.html>

174 <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/honduras-drug-lab-presidential-protection/>

175 <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/honduras-transit-nation-cocaine-producer/>

176 <https://twitter.com/jeffgerst/status/1243352000139603970>

be initiated because one does not have the number of votes and a surprisingly indifferent attitude of the opposition to this situation".¹⁷⁷ Pinu congressman David Reyes, meanwhile, commented: "There are already too many testimonies from drug dealers who are linked to the Hernandez family, both Tony and Juan Orlando. Without a doubt this puts us to shame internationally, it puts us to shame as a country, as citizens, but I am also ashamed that the citizens do not react".¹⁷⁸ Libre congresswo/men tried to question Attorney General Óscar Fernando Chinchilla for not investigating Juan Orlando Hernandez's ties to organized crime. ""Let the system of administration of justice in this country explain to the Honduran people what it has been doing in recent years. It is time for the Attorney General to tell us how it is possible that New York prosecutors are investigating drug traffickers in Honduras and the Attorney General's Office has no investigation".¹⁷⁹ Their motion was suspended by Nationalist congressman Antonio "Toño" Rivera.¹⁷⁹

In an overview of the close links between drug trafficking and the JOH regime and his predecessors, ContraCorriente somberly concluded: "For now, Trump wins and Hernandez wins, while they still can. Only a year went by before Tony Hernandez was captured and we were writing about the "narco-state". Now, 2020 is the year of stabilization before the new elections, the National Party candidacy of the president of the National Congress, Mauricio Oliva, a faithful collaborator of Hernández, revives characters like Oscar Álvarez, former minister of security in 2004, when narco-activity gained momentum, and raises the promise of a clean slate. At the extreme of the possibilities, another option is projected: the establishment of a dictatorship."¹⁸⁰

This month, Honduras also discussed the election of the human rights commissioner CONADEH. Trying to further expand his control, JOH had Larissa Karina Pineda de Suazo, the wife of the current deputy minister of security Luis Suazo, apply for the position.¹⁸¹ Shortly afterwards, CONADEH's current head Roberto Herrera Cáceres announced his interest to run again. Both outcomes would be good for JOH. The lawyer Ramón Barrios opposed the reelection of Herrera Cáceres because "he never defended the interests of the people". At the same time, Barrios also denounces that "most of the candidates for the Human Rights Commissioner have a strong affinity with the governing party, so in that position a real human rights defender will not be elected, but someone who looks after the government's interests because, in addition, the nationalist congresswo/men have a majority in the National Congress".¹⁸¹

On March 5, Reporteros de Investigación voiced the fear of another reelection bid by JOH supported by an alliance with the Armed Forces and organized crime. "One of the high-ranking police sources, in retirement, warned that serious acts, executed by the pact between the MS [Mara Salvatrucha] and the military forces to change the voting intention, could happen near the general elections. That is why Hernandez needs military forces loyal to him, a weak or non-existent police

177 <http://elpulso.hn/no-existen-condiciones-para-aprobar-juicio-politico-contra-joh/>

178 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/tarde-o-temprano-justicia-norteamericana-tocara-la-puerta-de-joh/>

179 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/3759-diputado-ono-rivera-opuesto-a-investigacion-de-narco-funcionarios>

180 <https://contracorriente.red/2020/03/12/honduras-un-estado-democratico-de-proteccion-criminal/>

181 <https://www.proceso.hn/politica-nacional/36-proceso-electoral/herrera-caceres-no-defendio-los-intereses-del-pueblo-segun-analista-politico.html>

force, and a conditioned press, all part of the same strategy, he said."¹⁸² JOH's call for maintaining the Security Tax, allowing unaccountable money flows towards the Armed Forces, also goes in this direction.¹⁸³ For the remainder of this month's reelection debate, see the Electoral Reforms subsection below.

The Central American Institute for Fiscal Studies (Icefi) published an evaluation of the two years of the second term of Juan Orlando Hernández, reviewing the fulfillment of the goals contained in the "Strategic Government Plan 2018-2022. Moving forward with a firm step". After analyzing what was proposed and what was achieved in the economic, social, fiscal and transparency areas, the Institute pointed out that "the results are worrying, mainly because of the consolidation of a fiscal policy that is not linked to the strengthening of democracy and is increasingly less able to address the causes of underdevelopment in Honduras."¹⁸⁴

Penal Code

The new Penal Code, to come into force in May, continued to make negative headlines. Human rights organizations denounced that it would eliminate crimes of sex tourism, procurement (of prostitutes) and illegal adoption. Furthermore, the retroactivity is going to favor members of organized crime that are in prison because the new Penal Code reduces their sentences.¹⁸⁵

Migration

Already back in February, local government representatives as well as national and international civil society organizations gathered in Santa Barbara with the aim of analyzing strategies and local mechanisms to respond to irregular migration. They highlighted the humanitarian crisis with over 100'000 Hondurans deported back to Honduras last year and stressed the need to recognize the human right to migrate. They also demanded a more decentralized government structure with the need "to design and implement a model of comprehensive care at the municipal level for this problem that includes humanitarian assistance, psycho-social care, technical-vocational training, support for entrepreneurship, employability, school reintegration, houses of refuge and protection, care for people with special abilities, all under a focus on rights and inclusion and action without harm, to ensure comprehensive and sustainable human development of people, especially our children and youth".¹⁸⁶ The number of deported Hondurans this January and February was 23.7% higher than in the previous year.¹⁸⁷ According to the US embassy, 17'236 Hondurans have been deported since October 2019.¹⁸⁸ Even worse, the deportations continued even after the corona crisis began.¹⁸⁹

182 <https://www.reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2020/03/05/juan-orlando-quiere-reelegirse-apoyado-en-pacto-con-la-mara-salvatrucha-fuerzas-militares-narcotrafico-y-una-policia-debil/>

183 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/debe-mantenerse-la-tasa-de-seguridad-defiende-herandez-ante-empresarios.html>

184 <https://criterio.hn/politica-fiscal-hondurena-es-cada-vez-mas-debil-y-menos-legitima-icefi/>

185 <https://criterio.hn/alerta-nuevo-codigo-penal-favorecera-a-trafficantes-de-personas/>

186 <https://criterio.hn/foro-internacional-de-la-migracion-pide-un-alto-a-la-indiferencia-contra-los-migrantes/>

187 <https://www.proceso.hn/migrantes/1-migrantes/deportacion-de-hondurenos-aumento-23-7-entre-enero-y-febrero.html>

188 <https://twitter.com/usembassyhn/status/1238872836724461570>

189 <https://www.proceso.hn/actualidad/7-actualidad/llegan-92-deportados-de-eeuu-en-medio-de-emergencia-por-covid-19.html>

Mixed news came out of the US. First a federal court halted the Trump administration's "Remain in Mexico" asylum policy, but only hours later the judges later granted a Trump administration request for an emergency stay "pending further order of this court."¹⁹⁰ "Despite the confusion, the temporary invalidation of MPP offered rare hope for about 2,500 migrants living in the insecure and insalubrious tent city along the Rio Grande in the city of Matamoros, a stronghold of the notorious Gulf cartel."¹⁹⁰ This hope was shattered later in March when the Supreme Court allowed the Trump administration to maintain the program that has forced about 60,000 asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their requests are heard.¹⁹¹ US congressmen Elitot T. Engel, Joaquin Castro and Albio Sires wrote a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo regarding the so called safe third country agreements with El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. They call them "illegal, dangerous and antithetical to American values".¹⁹¹

Electoral Reforms

Former presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla denounces a fraudulent process leading to the elaboration of the new identity card.¹⁹² They were a response to the electoral fraud in the past and therefore of great importance. Criterio also raised some questions.¹⁹³ A UNDP representative, meanwhile, says that it was a transparent process.¹⁹⁴ A few days later, Libre congresswo/men denounced that the bidding process to execute the new national identification had failed and that this endangered the new identity card.¹⁹⁵

Reelection was also a topic again this month. JOH commented on the need to regulate it, while pretending that everything has been decided already and a one-time reelection is possible.¹⁹⁶ The National Electoral Congress (CNE), meanwhile, did not agree. Its president Rixi Moncada also assured that they would not regulate reelection. "Moncada explained that this decision is the result of a majority vote by the authorities of the CNE; therefore, an administrative resolution was established against the presidential reelection so that they will not allow nominations for the presidency from persons who have already held office."¹⁹⁶ The National Party was not happy about this emitting a press release in which they attacked Moncada and staging a protest outside the CNE.¹⁹⁷ The next day, they accuse her of interference because the CNE decided that the presidential reelection cannot be regulated solely in statutes of the National Party.¹⁹⁸

CESPAD then published an analysis on the resurfaced presidential reelection debate. "In the first days of this month of March, the National Electoral Council (CNE) of Honduras, by a majority of votes, adopted the transcendental decision of the lack of "constitutional and legal origin of the

190 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/02/remain-in-mexico-asylum-seekers-at-border-see-hopes-raised-then-dashed>

191 <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/cache/files/4/9/492f9e39-7857-4be2-8dc7-559c1568b54b/EFC64B6EF370AF971FF6F511EF46A9D6.ele-castro-sires-letter-to-pompeo-safe-third-country-agreements.pdf>

192 <https://www.proceso.hn/politica-nacional/36-proceso-electoral/nasralla-denuncia-fraude-en-la-emision-de-tarjetas-de-identidades.html>

193 <https://criterio.hn/proceso-de-identificacion-en-honduras-y-sus-dudas/>

194 <https://www.proceso.hn/politica-nacional/36-proceso-electoral/nueva-tarjeta-de-identidad-se-realiza-con-altos-estandares-de-transparencia-delegado-del-pnud.html>

195 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/polemica-genera-licitacion-para-nueva-tarjeta-de-identidad/>

196 <https://criterio.hn/consejo-electoral-de-honduras-cierra-filas-contr-la-reeleccion-presidencial/>

197 <https://criterio.hn/partido-nacional-abre-frente-contr-presidenta-del-consejo-electoral/>

198 <https://www.proceso.hn/politica-nacional/36-proceso-electoral/partido-nacional-denuncia-intromision-de-rixi-moncada-en-asuntos-internos.html>

reform" requested by the National Party to its statutes, regarding the regulation of the issue of reelection. This decision goes beyond the denial of this type of reform to the governing party, as it is a determination that aims to establish the illegal nature of the reelection. The current president of this collegiate body, Rixi Moncada, has expressed it very clearly "an administrative resolution was issued against the presidential reelection and we have raised it by majority, arguing that the "artículos pétreos" [articles that are set in stone] of the Constitution of the Republic can only be reformed, repealed or modified by the people through a National Constituent Assembly or a popular consultation. The decision adopted by the CNE is a clear disregard for the ruling of the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ) that enabled the presidential reelection. Consistent with this position, the CNE has presented to the Commission on Electoral Reforms of the National Congress (CN) a set of 20 reforms, highlighting, among them: "the holding of a popular consultation to define the presidential reelection and the second round". The CNE bases the need for these reforms on the fact that "clean and transparent elections will only be possible if the required conditions are created". For some civil society organizations, the electoral reforms currently agreed upon are not substantive and are far from ensuring transparency in the next elections, especially if the second round is not included and if the issue of presidential re-election is not resolved."¹⁹⁹

Education

Inhabitants of Santa María, La Paz blocked a local road in a protest against a lack of teachers.²⁰⁰ At the UNAH, meanwhile, its labor union Sitraunah protested because 1200 workers still have not received their January and February salaries.²⁰⁰

Transport Sector

After the murder of another leader of the transport sector²⁰¹, cab drivers went on strike.²⁰² At least 28 members of the transport sector have been murdered so far this year.²⁰³ The striking cab drivers demanded the respect of the Transport Law and more protection measures for them.²⁰⁴ The same month, the private company COVI Honduras announced a price increase for its toll booths leading even El Heraldo to widely criticize it.²⁰⁴ The truck drivers denounced it and announced a protest.²⁰⁵

And Light at the End of a Month

COPINH celebrated its 27th anniversary this month.²⁰⁶ Congratulations.²⁰⁷

199 <http://cespad.org.hn/2020/03/09/analisis-consejo-nacional-electoral-la-reeleccion-presidencial-es-ilegal/>

200 <https://www.radioprogreso.hn/instante/sitraunah-demanda-pago-de-salarios-a-mil-200-trabajadores/>

201 <https://confidencialhn.com/rubro-de-taxis-anuncia-paro-para-el-proximo-lunes-por-inseguridad-de-sus-trabajadores/>

202 <https://criterio.hn/entre-taxis-caos-y-protestas-en-tegucigalpa/>

203 <https://radiohn.hn/al-menos-28-transportistas-han-sido-asesinados-en-los-primeros-tres-meses-de-2020/>

204 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1360459-466/aumenta-precio-peaje-honduras-covi>

205 <https://confidencialhn.com/transportistas-de-carga-pesada-advierten-paro-nacional-por-incremento-del-peaje/>

206 <https://copinh.org/2020/03/estamos-de-aniversario/>

207 <https://madj.org/index.php/2020/03/28/celebramos-a-copinh-27-anos-de-lucha-incansable/>

Another Month at the Honduras Forum Switzerland

Past Activities:

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Upcoming Activities:

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