

Another Month in Honduras...

Human Rights Monitor – March 2021

Two trials in the US made most headlines this month in Honduras and in both cases, the accused seemed to be mentioned less than Honduras president Juan Orlando Hernández. JOH seemed to be on the stand without physically being there. In the first case, Geovanny Daniel Fuentes Ramírez was found guilty for drug trafficking, in the second case, JOH's already convicted brother Tony Hernández was sentenced to life in prison plus 30 years. Back home, the primary elections took place, but two weeks later, at the end of March, the official results are still not published. The corona pandemic still has a tight grip on Honduras, but to make people forget about the events in the US, the JOH regime decided to open Honduras up for the Easter Holidays. So even more cases are to be expected for the coming weeks even though the hospitals are already full. Two defenders were murdered in March, Garífuna leader Martín Abad Pandey and environmental defender Juan Carlos Cerros Escalante. The latter should have benefited from protective measures. 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
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

1400 dengue cases have been documented so far this year in Honduras.¹

March started with 170'985 COVID-19 cases and 4174 confirmed deaths.² But the real number of deaths is likely more than twice as high having reached almost 10'000 deaths according to the Funeral Home Association.³ An even higher one came from health expert Marco Eliud Girón who claimed that already 1.2 million Honduras had been infected with COVID-19 and more than 25'000 died.⁴ On March 11, the Funeral Home Association reported 10'300 deaths due to COVID-19.⁵ The month ended with 189'043 COVID-19 cases and 4605 confirmed deaths.⁶

State Reaction

"The Ministry of Defense refuses to provide information on the costs of the treatment that President Juan Orlando Hernández allegedly received after his admission to the Military Hospital on June 17, 2020. This comes after official information obtained by Contracorriente indicates that there was no positive result for COVID-19 at the time his infection was announced."⁷

Health Sector

On March 1, Ela Alejandra Santos, a 29-year old nurse, died to COVID-19.⁸ Two days later, another health worker, microbiologist Eliza Berríos, died to COVID-19.⁹ On March 9, nurse Mayra Vallecillo died¹⁰ and on March 14, doctor Carlos Coello.¹¹ A day later, another nurse, Berta Rodríguez, died to COVID-19.¹² On March 25, doctor Daniel Walter Willy died to COVID-19. He died during the transfer from Puerto Lempira to Tegucigalpa.¹³ A day later, nurse Suyapa Castillo died.¹⁴

Last month, Honduras received some 5000 vaccine doses thanks to vaccine diplomacy from Israel. Their application led to some controversy. "The application in Honduras of the first doses of the vaccine against Covid-19 has generated a series of complaints about the poor selection of health personnel to undergo the immunization [with the vaccine doses donated by Israel, see last month]. Dr. Ligia Ramos, President of the Association of Physicians at the Honduran Institute of Social

1 <https://tiempo.hn/honduras-1400-dengue-en-2021-65-graves/>

2 <https://proceso.hn/honduras-acumula-4-mil-174-muertes-y-170-mil-985-casos-positivos-de-la-covid-19/>

3 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2728-urgente-casi-10-mil-hondurenos-han-muerto-por-covid>

4 <https://tiempo.hn/medico-muertes-millones-contagiados-covid19/>

5 <https://proceso.hn/funerarias-hondurenas-reportan-mas-de-10-mil-300-decesos-por-covid-19-en-un-ano-de-pandemia/>

6 <https://proceso.hn/honduras-acumula-4-mil-605-muertos-por-covid-y-189-mil-043-contagios/>

7 <https://contracorriente.red/2021/03/03/secretaria-de-defensa-oculta-costos-del-tratamiento-y-hospitalizacion-del-presidente/>

8 <https://proceso.hn/fallece-por-covid-19-enfermera-auxiliar-de-29-anos-en-tegucigalpa/>

9 <https://tiempo.hn/microbiologa-eliza-berrios-muere-por-covid-19/>

10 <https://proceso.hn/pierde-la-vida-por-covid-19-enfermera-que-laboraba-en-triaje-de-choloma/>

11 <https://confidencial.hn.com/otro-galeno-pierde-la-batalla-contr-el-coronavirus-en-el-seguro-social-de-la-capital/>

12 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1449994-410/muere-enfermera-auxiliar-covid-19-tegucigalpa>

13 <https://tiempo.hn/muere-por-covid-19-medico-walter-willy-la-mosquitia/>

14 <https://proceso.hn/fallece-por-covid-19-otra-licenciada-en-enfermeria-en-sps/>

Security, IHSS, in Tegucigalpa, points out that in that hospital, many administrative personnel who are not in the first line of Covid-19 were vaccinated."¹⁵

On March 5, the Russian ambassador to Honduras announced that the JOH regime bought 4.2 million doses of the Sputnik V vaccine.¹⁶ 17 160'000 doses should already arrive this month.¹⁸ According to the Finance Minister Marco Midence they would pay less than \$10 per dose. While the real price of a vaccine is a well-guarded secret by the pharmaceutical companies some recent leaks gave us a clue about how much they charge. \$10 for a country of the Global South seems expensive.¹⁹ ContraCorriente reported: "After delays in the acquisition of vaccines against COVID-19 and amidst criticism for the handling of the pandemic, Honduras reached an agreement with Russia for the purchase of the Sputnik V, but doubts persist about the transparency of the process."²⁰ There were also ongoing negotiations with Johnson & Johnson.²¹ A few days later, the regulation agency Arsa also approved Covishield, the vaccine by AstraZeneca for Honduras.²²

Last month, we saw a back and forth regarding possible vaccine doses through the COVAX mechanism. This month, the promise 48'000 doses for the end of March resurfaced.²³ Later, it was even increased to 139'000.²⁴ The 48'000 doses arrived on March 13.²⁵ A few days later, Mexico decommissioned fake Sputnik V vaccine doses meant for Honduras.²⁶ "A private plane carrying doses of Sputnik-V vaccines was stopped in Mexico this week. It was later discovered that they were fake. The intercepted plane was bound for Honduras and its crew members belonged mostly to Grupo Karim's, a company owned by Mohamad Yusuf Amdani, one of the richest men in Honduras. Local media in Mexico reported that the people were released and little is known about the intentions with which they were moving the vaccines."²⁷ In Honduras, a UNAH professor reported that a doctor had warned her that the cold-chain of the AstraZeneca vaccine was not being respected in Honduras.²⁸ On March 23, the JOH regime claimed to have vaccinated 90% of health workers, health workers themselves disputed this claim.²⁹ By the end of the month, health minister Alba Consuelo Flores revealed that she did not know when the next delivery of vaccine doses would arrive in Honduras.³⁰

15 <https://radioprogreso.hn.net/instante/medicos-y-enfermeras-denuncian-favorismo-en-aplicacion-de-primas-vacunas-contracovid-19/>

16 <https://tiempo.hn/contrato-vacuna-rusa-honduras/>

17 <https://proceso.hn/honduras-y-rusia-firman-contrato-para-adquirir-4-2-millones-de-dosis-de-la-vacuna-sputnik-v/>

18 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1447327-410/honduras-este-mes-vienen-primas-160000-dosis-vacuna-rusa>

19 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1447362-410/sputnik-v-compra-menos-10-dolares-asegura-gobierno-honduras>

20 <https://contracorriente.red/2021/03/10/retrasos-en-la-compra-de-vacunas-mantienen-a-honduras-expuesta-a-mas-contagios-y-posibles-actos-de-corrupcion/>

21 <https://tiempo.hn/honduras-compra-vacuna-de-johnson-johnson/>

22 <https://proceso.hn/arsa-autoriza-uso-de-la-vacuna-astrazeneca/>

23 <https://tiempo.hn/salud-48-mil-vacunas-llegan-a-honduras-en-marzo/>

24 <https://proceso.hn/unas-139-mil-200-dosis-de-la-vacuna-de-astrazeneca-estaran-disponibles-para-honduras-en-marzo-reconfirma-oms/>

25 https://twitter.com/OPSOMS_Honduras/status/1370805432923590656

26 <https://criterio.hn/vacunas-sputnik-v-que-iban-en-avion-privado-hacia-san-pedro-sula-son-falsas-dice-rusia/>

27 <https://contracorriente.red/2021/03/20/empleados-de-empresa-millonaria-ligados-a-la-detencion-de-avion-con-vacunas-falsas-en-mexico/>

28 <https://tiempo.hn/denuncian-incumplen-cadena-de-frio-vacuna-de-astrazeneca/>

29 <https://tiempo.hn/medicos-desmienten-gobierno-vacunacion/>

30 <https://proceso.hn/honduras-no-sabe-cuando-llegaran-las-otras-vacunas-donadas-y-las-compradas/>

The saga about the mobile hospitals also continued this month. Irregularly purchased, arriving months to late and in a state not really fit to attend patients, one nevertheless was opened last month in Tegucigalpa. This month, health authorities informed that no more COVID-19 patients would be treated there anymore.³¹ A few days later, the MP reiterated after an inspection that the mobile hospitals in San Pedro Sula and Choluteca were not really fit to attend corona patients.³²

On March 22, doctors in San Pedro Sula held a protest demanding the payment of outstanding paychecks.³³ A few days later, Criterio reported: "Through social networks, doctors contracted under the Green Code program anonymously denounced that they are being deducted a fee greater than the one thousand lempiras destined to finance the National Party. A general practitioner who works under contract for the Ministry of Health, made public his payment receipt; he said that he was charged a deduction of 1,173 lempiras destined to the government party, a situation that is described as "extortion".³⁴

Corruption

"For Ismael Zepeda, economist of the Social Forum for the Foreign Debt and Development of Honduras, Fosdeh, when one sees the direct execution of the pandemic, it is around six billion lempiras, which means that it is a much lower amount than the amount approved by the National Congress through loans and other disbursements."³⁵ ConfidencialHN also reported on how one year into the pandemic, officials linked to acts of corruption continue with impunity.³⁶

Human Rights

Indigenous organizations and social movements published the 41st joint press release during the pandemic. "Even without official results, the primary and internal elections of the political parties reaffirm the depth of the political crisis in which we live. Many simple people of good faith participated, but clearly not all the answers are there, as we express in this Forty-first public manifesto".³⁷ A week later, number 42 followed. "Honduras is once again the scene of a deepening political, social and economic crisis, where the word "change" is sold daily as a promise that never materializes through the ways proposed by the power of domination. In this permanent struggle for freedom, this meeting of social organizations raises its voice in this 42nd public manifesto".³⁸

31 <https://tiempo.hn/hospital-movil-ya-no-atendera-pacientes-covid-19/>

32 <https://criterio.hn/hospitales-moviles-de-san-pedro-sula-y-choluteca-no-son-aptos-para-atender-pacientes-con-covid-19/>

33 <https://confidencialhn.com/medicos-por-contrato-denuncian-falta-de-pago-salarial-en-san-pedro-sula/>

34 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/24/medicos-de-codigo-verde-denuncian-deduccin-de-sueldo-a-favor-del-partido-nacional/>

35 <https://radioprogreso.hn/aplicacion-movil/corupcion-en-pandemia-es-de-miles-de-millones-fosdeh/>

36 <https://confidencialhn.com/tras-un-ano-de-covid-19-funcionarios-vinculados-en-actos-de-corupcion-continuan-en-impunidad/>

37 <https://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cuadragésimo-primer-manifiesto-publico/>

38 <https://www.defensoresenlinea.com/cuadragésimo-segundo-manifiesto-publico/>

Economy

According to the Tegucigalpa Chamber of Commerce and Industry, unemployment doubled during the pandemic and there are two million Hondurans unemployed or in informal employment.³⁹ Female unemployment has increased more during the pandemic than male unemployment.⁴⁰ "Alejandro Kaffati, economist and researcher of the Social Forum on Foreign Debt and Development of Honduras (Fosdeh), estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic in Honduras has caused losses of seven and a half billion dollars in economic losses."⁴¹

Poverty

"In the anomaly that is life in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and where schools have been closed since March 2020 as a result, indigenous children in the Honduran mountains continue to have only one option: to go with their families to harvest coffee because it will help their fragile family economies. Currently, Honduran coffee exports are behaving downward, with sales falling in the 2019-2020 season to \$879.2 million compared to \$923.9 million in the previous season, according to EFE data in September 2020. Each coffee cortero in the mountains of Corquín earns about 2.40 lempiras per pound of coffee in grapes, this is double what indigenous corteros earn in other areas of the country, such as in the department of La Paz where they can earn as little as one lempira per pound of coffee in grapes. According to World Bank data, one out of every five Hondurans living in rural areas lives in extreme poverty, with less than 1.90 dollars a day. (...) In Corquín, children earn the same as adults, there is no difference in the payment per pound of coffee grapes harvested. (...) As of 2019, the National Institute of Statistics reveals that the average number of years of education in the country is eight, and the illiteracy rate is only 11%. With the expansion of COVID-19 and the closing of educational centers, the possibilities of receiving online classes for children in the Honduran mountains is reduced to zero, with no phone signal and no money to hire internet plans, working in the coffee harvest is the only possible activity."⁴²

CESPAD published a new report on poverty and the agricultural sector. "When the food crisis is promoted and reinforced by Executive Orders".⁴³

Education

1.2 million school children have enrolled so far this year in the public education system - the goal was 2.2 million.⁴⁴ The digital class room, meanwhile, offers new opportunities for corruption. "The purchase of the tablets that would allow more than 200,000 students to connect to their classes

39 <https://proceso.hn/honduras-duplico-cifra-de-desempleo-durante-un-ano-de-pandemia/>

40 <https://proceso.hn/pandemia-de-la-covid-19-ha-aumentado-el-desempleo-femenino-en-honduras/>

41 <https://proceso.hn/pandemia-ha-dejado-cerca-de-siete-mil-500-millones-de-dolares-en-perdidas-segun-el-fosdeh/>

42 <https://contracorriente.red/2021/03/06/el-trabajo-infantil-que-cosecha-el-cafe-de-exportacion/>

43 <http://cespad.org.hn/2021/03/09/coyuntura-desde-los-territorios-honduras-cuando-la-crisis-alimentaria-se-promueve-y-se-refuerza-desde-los-decretos-ejecutivos/>

44 <https://proceso.hn/solo-1-2-millones-de-estudiantes-se-han-matriculado-este-ano-en-sistema-publico/>

virtually continues to be questioned, as it was not only an acquisition of outdated equipment but also opens the door to "a new case of corruption".⁴⁵

Human Rights and Their Defenders

OACNUDH presented its yearly report on its work and the human rights situation in Honduras.^{46 47}

⁴⁸ "Restriction of civic space, excessive use of force by the police, disproportionate use of tear gas against demonstrators, journalists and human rights defenders under surveillance and threats, suspension of protection measures and delays in risk analysis in the Protection Mechanism, improper use of criminal law against human rights defenders, are part of an endless list of violations of the fundamental rights of citizens in Honduras, according to the 2020 annual report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras, OACNUDH."⁴⁹ Pasos de Animal Grande interviewed OACNUDH representative Isabel Albaladejo Escribano.⁵⁰

The UN Human Rights Council approved the Universal Periodic Review report on Honduras. The JOH regime adopted 203 out of the 223 recommendations.⁵¹ But Pasos de Animal Grande rightly explained: "However, the recommendations of the two previous cycles have passed with neither pain nor glory, including resolving violence against journalists and human rights defenders, with the punishment of those responsible in order to end impunity. Regarding other rights, there has been an enormous setback and the State has implemented a harmful policy of using criminal law to criminalize the work of defending human rights and maintains an impunity rate of more than 92 percent according to data from the National Commissioner for Human Rights, CONADEH."⁵²

The recent appointment of Blanca Izaguirre as head of Conadeh, was accompanied by widespread protest (see previous monitor). This month, Congressman Luis Redondo made an official request to the National Congress denouncing an irregular selection process that violated the democratic system.⁵³ Her father, Daniels Izaguirre, a journalist and Nationalist pre-candidate for Congress, was named in the recent Hermes corruption case (see below).⁵⁴

Assassinations

On March 2, Garífuna leader Martín Abad Pandý was murdered. He was the president of the board of trustees of the community of Corozal, in the municipality of La Ceiba, Atlántida.⁵⁵ "Ofraneh has denounced that the crime against Pandý is due to the fact that he gathered a group of young people

⁴⁵ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1452374-466/honduras-tablets-desfasadas-escandalo-corrupcion>

⁴⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmhfmGfCIFo>

⁴⁷ <https://oacnudh.hn/traduccion-no-oficial-en-espanol-del-informe/>

⁴⁸ https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session46/Documents/A_HRC_46_75_AdvanceUneditedVersion.docx

⁴⁹ <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/contexto/item/3110-informe-de-oacnudh-senala-grave-situacion-de-derechos-humanos-en-honduras>

⁵⁰ <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/contexto/item/3114-entrevista-con-isabel-albaladejo-escribano-representante-de-la-oficina-del-alto-comisionado-de-las-naciones-unidas-para-los-derechos-humanos-en-honduras>

⁵¹ <https://twitter.com/aliceshackel/status/1371913159737479171>

⁵² <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/monitoreo/item/3113-honduras-adopta-203-de-223-recomendaciones-del-consejo-de-derechos-humanos-en-materia-de-ddhh>

⁵³ <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2735-honduras-piden-al-congreso-separar-a-blanca-izaguirre-del-conadeh>

⁵⁴ <https://twitter.com/hondurasol/status/1367517834838872064>

⁵⁵ <http://cespad.org.hn/2021/03/06/alerta-con-un-asesinato-y-la-detencion-de-dos-defensoras-continua-el-ataque-a-la-comunidad-garifuna-en-honduras/>

to "protect and defend the rights of the community". Ofraneh also recalled that last February 13, in the same sector, hired assassins murdered the young Fernando Padilla, in this crime, according to testimonies, the assassins carried a list with the profiles of all the social activists of that community."⁵⁶

On the eve of the World Water Day, the Honduran environmental defender and community leader Juan Carlos Cerros Escalante was murdered. "Since the coup d'état, he began to participate in the defense of water at the community and regional level against the installation of the hydroelectric dam "El Tornillito", a project that threatens to disappear 10 communities in the departments of Cortés and Santa Bárbara."⁵⁷ Juan Carlos should have benefited from protective measures granted by the Protection Mechanism.⁵⁸ Pasos de Animal Grande spoke with the director of the Protection Mechanism Danilo Morales who said that they were currently reevaluating his case and the case of his community.⁵⁹ The IACHR condemned the murder.⁶⁰ So did, OACNUDH and the UN System in Honduras.^{61 62}

Attacks, Criminalization and Harassment

On March 2, 19 students had a hearing held against them in a case of criminalization going back to 2017. "Four years ago, the prosecution of the students took place in a context of strong repression against the University Student Movement (MEU) by the authorities of the UNAH, who resorted to the prohibition of demonstrations and the excessive use of State repressive forces, as well as members of the private security forces to persecute and violently repress students who defended the right to education and the peaceful exercise of protest; Likewise, criminal actions were brought with the aim of disarticulating and delegitimizing student organizations, according to the Human Rights Defenders Network. (...) This Tuesday they have gone to a new hearing since the Court of Appeals revoked the final dismissal given to them in 2017 and to inform them that a new process has been opened for the two crimes. Now they will go to an oral and public trial for the crimes and the judicial authorities told them that they can conciliate with the UNAH and thus avoid going to trial, García told Criterio.hn. The students have until June 7 to settle with the university authorities, who allege that the youths owe more than one million lempiras in damages they caused to the UNAH administrative building."⁶³

"Environmentalism Betty Vásquez, general coordinator of the Santa Bárbara Environmental Movement (MAS), denounced journalist Edward Azael Fernández before the Santa Bárbara Courts, for issuing comments that discredit the defense of natural resources and racist comments against the

56 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2741-honduras-garifunas-entre-carcel-y-tumba-matan-otros-dos>

57 <https://radioprogreso.hn.net/portada/asesinan-a-defensor-de-la-biosfera-del-rio-ulua>

58 <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/denuncias/item/3116-tenia-medidas-de-proteccion-asesinan-a-defensor-indigena-juan-carlos-cerros-en-santa-barbara>

59 <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/monitoreo/item/3117-director-del-sistema-nacional-de-proteccion-el-mecanismo-estaba-en-la-reevaluacion-de-riesgo-en-el-caso-del-defensor-asesinado-y-su-colectivo>

60 <https://twitter.com/CIDH/status/1374134630681616385>

61 <https://twitter.com/OACNUDH/status/1374786117287940098>

62 <https://twitter.com/aliceshackel/status/1374859610381811715>

63 <https://criterio.hn/continua-persecucion-contra-el-movimiento-estudiantil-universitario/>

Lenca people."⁶⁴ Defensores en Línea published an update of two other criminalized defenders. "For more than three months Víctor Vásquez, member of the General Coordination of the Independent Lenca Indigenous Movement of La Paz Honduras (MILPA-H), and Santos Vigil, member of the Nueva Esperanza Campesino Base, have been deprived of liberty in the La Paz Penal Center, accused of the crime of forced displacement. Victor, as a defender of land and territory, accompanied the peasants of the Nueva Esperanza Base, where Santos Vigil is a member, but they were unjustly accused by the alleged owners of three crimes, of which the judge dismissed two, but they are deprived of liberty for the crime of forced displacement, a new figure in the Criminal Code of Impunity."⁶⁵

On March 29, COFADEH sent out an alert that member of the police and TIGRES special forces repressed members of the environmental organization ARCAH, physically attacking them and capturing some of them, including its coordinator Christopher Castillo. ARCAH had staged a peaceful protest together with local communities against the contamination by the company Avicola El Cortijo.⁶⁶ Seven defenders were then charged by the MP and a judge decided on alternative measures to imprisonment.⁶⁷

Indigenous Peoples

COPINH commemorates its 28th anniversary this month. "Today we celebrate 28 years of resistance and rebellion of our organization, fighting for the liberation of the peoples, walking hand in hand with the Lenca for the liberation of ancestral territories."⁶⁸

The Spanish newspaper El País reported on the situation of the indigenous Tolupán in Honduras. "The oldest ethnic group in Honduras is confronting the state and logging companies by opposing indiscriminate logging. There are only about 20,000 indigenous people in a territory that has one of the best pine forests in the country. More than a hundred of them have been fatal victims of the violence that environmental defenders in Latin America face every day."⁶⁹

On March 3, OFRANEH sent out an alert: "Marianela Solórzano, OFRANEH member & Jennifer Solórzano, LIBRE Congressional precandidate, have been detained by the Honduran police in Trujillo, Colon."⁷⁰ Miriam Miranda denounced: "Our sisters Marianela Solorzano & Jennifer Solorzano remain detained in the DPI [police station] in Tocoa as they wait a hearing in Trujillo tomorrow. They are Garifuna [land] defenders, not criminals! We demand their immediate release! JOH wants to disappear us, he's genocidal"⁷¹ ⁷² The next day at the hearing, judge decided to keep

64 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/dh/57-pueblos-indigenas/1826-ambientalista-denuncia-campana-de-discriminacion-por-defender-la-naturaleza>

65 <https://www.defensoresenlinea.com/la-justicia-hondurena-se-sigue-ensanando-con-los-defensores-de-la-tierra-y-de-la-vida>

66 <https://www.defensoresenlinea.com/alerta-policia-captura-y-ataca-fisicamente-a-defensores-que-se-manifestaban-en-la-salida-al-sur-de-la-capital/>

67 <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/denuncias/item/3122-fueron-acusados-de-desplazamiento-forzado-ambientalistas-son-liberados-con-medidas-sustitutivas>

68 <https://twitter.com/COPINHONDURAS/status/1375881199026106376>

69 <https://elpais.com/planeta-futuro/2021-03-20/el-grito-de-los-bosques-en-tierra-de-los-tolupanes.html>

70 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1367291644286922753>

71 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1367352422767620096>

72 <https://www.defensoresenlinea.com/policia-captura-a-defensoras-del-territorio-en-colon/>

them in custody until the initial hearing three days later.⁷³ OACNUDH accompanied the case and "urged the authorities to respect due process and guarantee their physical and psychological integrity".⁷⁴

On March 6, a day before the initial hearing, OFRANEH held a press conference and published a press release.^{75 76} OFRANEH compared the swift criminalization of the defenders with the case of the Canadian businessman Randy Jorgensen who usurped community land. "In 2002 the community filed a complaint against Jorgensen for usurpation and in May 2012 the prosecutor's office issued an injunction and it was not until 2019 that the Trujillo Court granted him a definitive dismissal."⁷⁷ The territorial conflict in and around Trujillo started to get worse under the Lobo administration.⁷⁸

On the day of the trial, OFRANEH and COPINH denounced that the MP did not even present proof of their alleged wrongdoing.^{79 80} The hearing started with a negative sign when the judge denied the right to observe the hearing to national and international human rights organizations.⁸¹ The judge further decided on conditional release for the time until the trial, but in the case of Jennifer, this was not clear at that moment as she is accused of an additional set of trumped up charges in addition to the first three.⁸² On the next, day, "Judge Camilo Peralta ruled that second set of charges against Garifuna Jenifer M. Solorzano will go to trial. She's being accused of forced displacement & conditionally released thanks to the permanent demands & presence of Garifuna communities outside".⁸³

Their case is being accompanied by OACNUDH⁸⁴ and it was also picked up by the Inter-American Human Rights System. "Joel Hernández, representative of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, IACHR and Rapporteur for Honduras, explained that the resolution issued in 2015 by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights was not complied with, and that the problem remains the same for the Garifuna communities, so he notes with concern the arrest of two women defenders members of OFRANEH and the situation of insecurity of the population of that ethnic group."⁸⁵

The situation remained tense and at the end of the month, the National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders sent out an alert denouncing the ongoing harassment and persecution of Garífuna communities organized within OFRANEH.⁸⁶

73 <https://www.defensoresenlinea.com/dictan-prision-preventiva-a-defensoras-garifunas-en-trujillo/>

74 <https://twitter.com/OACNUDH/status/1367523283478978560>

75 <https://twitter.com/ofraneh/status/1368237079336005636>

76 <https://twitter.com/ofraneh/status/1368232690244272140>

77 <https://twitter.com/ofraneh/status/1368419043737280515>

78 <https://twitter.com/ofraneh/status/1368227011639017477>

79 <https://twitter.com/ofraneh/status/1368723763710353412>

80 <https://twitter.com/COPINHONDURAS/status/1368728223035650048>

81 <https://twitter.com/COPINHONDURAS/status/1368581977868296194>

82 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1368762472987979778>

83 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1368896663834693636>

84 <https://twitter.com/OACNUDH/status/1368928923204128770>

85 <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/monitoreo/item/3106-cidh-solicita-a-la-corteidh-declarar-incumplimiento-de-resoluciones-por-parte-del-estado-de-honduras>

86 <http://im-defensoras.org/2021/03/alerta-urgente-honduras-continua-hostigamiento-y-persecucion-contra-comunidades-organizadas-en-la-ofraneh/>

The Case of Berta Cáceres

March started with the Sentencing Tribunal presented the resolution of the evidentiary hearing against David Castillo. The tribunal accepted Daniel Atala as a witness, but, as COPINH denounced, not Jacobo Atala, Jose Eduardo Atala and Pedro Atala.⁸⁷ The trial date for David Castillo was also set; it will take place from April 6-30.^{88 89} This decision led to protests and the people stopped the transfer of the two defenders to the Olanchito prison, the prison where the criminalized Guapinol defenders are held.^{90 91}

On March 2, the world commemorated Berta Cáceres five year's after her assassination. "The memory of our comrade Berta Cáceres, the irreverent woman, fighter and conscious, has summoned us once again to remember her life and struggle, to denounce once again that impunity hovers over our people every time there is no punishment for those who commit horrendous crimes such as the one she was the victim of. The Honduran justice system turns a deaf ear to the existence of numerous information gathered and in-depth investigations by international experts that have identified the masterminds of the crime and that remain in the judicial files. It has been 1827 days, 1827 dawns in which the light of justice and truth have escaped from Honduran society because the judicial system prevents justice for the crime of Berta Cáceres."⁹² At the physical commemoration, representative of of various countries were present as was the representative of OACNUDH.^{93 94} OACNUDH also published a press release "to honor the memory of Berta Cáceres and reiterate the responsibility of the State in clarifying the truth about her murder".⁹⁵

US Senator Jeff Merkley wrote: "5 years ago, Honduran Indigenous and environmental rights trailblazer Berta Cáceres was murdered for her activism. Cáceres devoted her life to the struggle for human rights & environmental protection. Her legacy lives on in the communities she impacted & the leaders she inspired. I am calling for a suspension of U.S. security assistance until the architects of her assassination are prosecuted and Honduras dismantles the corrupt police state that is terrorizing its citizens."⁹⁶ Also in the US, the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act was reintroduced in Congress.⁹⁷

Honduran and international human rights organizations wrote a letter to the new US Secretary of State, Antony J. Blinken, in the Berta Cáceres case. "The undersigned civil society and academic organizations and defenders urgently implore the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Honduras to continue to press for accountability in the case of the murder of indigenous and environmental defender Berta Cáceres. We appreciate the ongoing efforts of the U.S. Embassy in

87 <https://copinh.org/2021/03/01-03-2021-resolucion-de-audiencia-contra-david-castillo/>

88 <https://twitter.com/COPINHONDURAS/status/1366546379645009924>

89 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/02/berta-caceres-honduras-accused-mastermind-trial>

90 <https://twitter.com/ofraneh/status/1367569953692483585>

91 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1367706874229886981>

92 <https://copinh.org/2021/03/pronunciamento-publico-cinco-anos-exigiendo-y-construyendo-justicia/>

93 <https://radioprogreso.hn/portada/a-5-anos-del-asesinato-de-berta-caceres-sigue-la-busqueda-de-justicia-y-verdad/>

94 <https://twitter.com/OACNUDH/status/1366882619674275840>

95 <https://oacnudh.hn/oacnudh-honra-la-memoria-de-berta-caceres-y-reitera-la-responsabilidad-del-estado-en-el-esclarecimiento-de-la-verdad-sobre-su-asesinato/>

96 <https://twitter.com/SenJeffMerkley/status/136683213323575301>

97 <https://hankjohnson.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/congressman-johnson-reintroduces-berta-c-ceres-human-rights-honduras-act>

Honduras to closely monitor the criminal investigations and proceedings related to this crime and to push for accountability. We ask that those efforts continue with regards to the forthcoming trial of David Castillo, and that the U.S. government increases its efforts to urge accountability for all of those who ordered and financed Berta's murder."⁹⁸

In the Gualcarque corruption case linked to Berta's case, the hearing was postponed this month.⁹⁹

LGBTQ

On the International Transgender Day of Visibility, OACNUDH reminded the State of Honduras to comply with the recommendation to implement a Gender Identity Law.¹⁰⁰

Freedom of Expression and Journalists

Throughout the month, C-Libre documented various attacks against journalists. "Journalist Charly Pineda, warned (...) about death threats against him, which he has been receiving since 2019 for reporting on issues related to the situation of violence in the department of Intibucá, in the western part of the country."¹⁰¹ "Journalist Nirvana Velásquez denounced (...) death threats to her WhatsApp account on her cell phone, after reporting on an event that occurred in San Pedro Sula, department of Cortés, northern Honduras."¹⁰² Electricity cables, the internet connection and equipment at the Radio Tenán, community radio in Lempira, were targeted by unknown attackers. "The damages against the community media, occur in a context of complaints about alleged acts of corruption of the mayor of the municipality, Guadalupe Muñoz, during the pandemic by COVID-19, told C-Libre Pablo Hernandez, director of the radio."¹⁰³

"A member of the military intelligence was discovered this Tuesday, March 9, outside the Sentencing Court in Tegucigalpa, taking photographs of the owner of Canal 36, Esdras Amado López, after a trial against a military officer accused of assaulting the channel's facilities in 2009."¹⁰⁴ "The Honduran justice system decided to keep the physical integrity and professional practice of journalist Cesar Omar Silva at risk, after his attacker Abelardo Mendoza was sentenced to 11 months and community service on Monday, March 22, in an abbreviated procedure. (...) It should be noted that the crime was changed, since the private prosecution filed a criminal action for attempted homicide. (...) On February 9, 2021, the Special Prosecutor's Office for Human Rights of the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) issued a document rejecting the request made by C-Libre not to apply the abbreviated procedure due to lack of acceptance by the victim, in this case, journalist Silva."¹⁰⁵

98 <https://earthrights.org/wp-content/uploads/CSO-Letter-to-State-Dept.-Berta-Ca%CC%81ceres-Case-.pdf>

99 <https://twitter.com/COPINHONDURAS/status/1367925949224923137>

100 <https://twitter.com/OACNUDHN/status/1377286087962468353>

101 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/portada-alertas/1321-por-amenazas-a-muerte-periodista-deja-su-profesion-y-su-vivienda>

102 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/portada-alertas/1320-periodista-denuncia-amenazas-a-muerte-tras-cubrir-suceso-en-la-capital>

103 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/portada-alertas/1322-cortan-cableado-para-impedir-transmisiones-de-radio-comunitaria>

104 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/portada-alertas/1332-propietario-de-canal-36-es-victima-de-intimidacion-por-parte-de-integrante-de-inteligencia-militar>

105 <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/portada-alertas/1333-periodista-en-riesgo-por-resolucion-judicial-que-favorece-a-su-agresor>

"While covering an incident, journalist Edwar Canales reported to C-Libre that one of those involved threatened to kill him in the municipality of Danlí, El Paraíso department. Canales told C-Libre that while he was filming an accident between a vehicle and a motorcycle, the driver of the latter approached him and, using foul language, warned him to stop filming. In addition, he went towards where he was filming the accident, to prevent him from carrying out his informative work and to damage his equipment. He also added that he made death threats."¹⁰⁶ A journalist was attacked by a man with a machete while covering a crime against a lawyer in Tegucigalpa.¹⁰⁷

Violence against Women

"The National Women Human Rights Defender Networks in Honduras, El Salvador and Mexico demand a March 8 without repression and patriarchal violence. "It is for all these reasons that this March 8, as every day of the year, we women demand to live free of violence and to be able to express ourselves, meet and demonstrate without fear. We demand that our States recognize and take responsibility for the serious situation of violence and inequality that women face, and avoid any act of defamation or other form of violence against us."¹⁰⁸ On the International Women's Day, itself, "different organizations promoting and defending women's rights have raised their voices in protest in various regions of the country, demanding that the Honduran government respond to the violence they face without the authorities curbing the abuses."¹⁰⁹

"Gender violence influences the forced displacement of Honduran women, an invisible phenomenon that prevents us from knowing its magnitude and impact, warns a study released Thursday by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Civil Society Group."¹¹⁰ On March 25, Criterio reported: "The sentencing by seven years and two months a few days ago of one of the rapists of a girl in La Ceiba "represents a first step in the response process of the justice system, but there is still much work to be done". This was stated in a joint communiqué by the Unit for the Integral Development of Women and the Family (Udimuf), the Visitación Padilla Women's Movement for Peace, Somos Muchas and the Center for the Promotion of Health and Family Assistance (Ceprosaf)."¹¹¹ The same day, there was also a protest by the Visitación Padilla Women's Movement for Peace outside the Government Civic Center in Tegucigalpa demanding the establishment of mechanisms to guarantee the lives of women. More than 60 women have been murdered so far this year.¹¹²

"During the last six years, 2265 farmers, day laborers and peasants were reported to the Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) for crimes related to sexual aggression. Men who work in the fields are the most reported, according to the database of the Public Prosecutor's Office, which only records the profession of the aggressor in 3821 cases out of 19,815. Although there is an increase in the

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/portada-alertas/1334-periodista-victima-de-amenazas-por-informar-sobre-suceso-en-zona-oriental-hondurena>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/index.php/portada-alertas/1331-periodista-es-atacado-en-lugar-donde-informaba-sobre-crimen-contra-abogado>

¹⁰⁸ <http://im-defensoras.org/2021/03/exigimos-un-8-de-marzo-sin-represion-ni-violencias-patriarcales/>

¹⁰⁹ <https://radioprogreso.net/aplicacion-movil/mujeres-demandan-respuestas-al-ministerio-publico-ante-denuncias-por-violencia-y-asesinatos/>

¹¹⁰ <https://proceso.hn/violencia-de-genero-obliga-a-mujeres-hondurenas-a-desplazarse-alerta-estudio/>

¹¹¹ <https://criterio.hn/alejandra-la-nina-victima-de-violacion-y-una-sentencia-agradable-para-las-mujeres-en-honduras/>

¹¹² <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/contexto/item/3119-las-chonas-estamos-aqui-para-que-el-presidente-se-de-cuenta-de-que-nos-están-matando>

number of complaints from women in rural areas, they face greater difficulties in obtaining comprehensive care in cases of sexual violence and access to justice."¹¹³

Protection Mechanism

Pasos de Animal Grande published a short overview of the mechanism which currently has 183 active cases.¹¹⁴

Extractive Industries

On March 19, the IACHR held a public hearing on extractivist projects in Honduras and their human rights impact.^{115 116}

"The quarterly report of the Central Bank of Honduras (BCH) on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which measures the total annual national production, records that the category of mining and quarrying, despite all the privileges and exemptions they have enjoyed for decades at a high cost of impoverishment for most Hondurans, in 2020 in nine months barely contributed 240 million lempiras to the country's economy (about 9 million dollars). At the end of December, the BCH points out that the total national production was around 600 billion lempiras. The current mining exploitation scheme authorized by the Government is a lousy business for Hondurans, but it is a source of social conflict and looting."¹¹⁷

Guapinol

At the beginning of the month, the Guapinol case reached once again the international level. "After finding that the detention of the eight Guapinol defenders imprisoned for more than 17 and 26 months is arbitrary, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention urges the Government of Honduras to "release the eight defenders immediately" and to grant them the effective right to compensation and reparation. The Group further called on the government to "conduct a thorough and independent investigation" into this arbitrariness and to take action against those responsible for it. In addition, the Group asked the State of Honduras to disseminate this opinion "by all available means and as widely as possible".¹¹⁸ OACNUDH visited one of them, Jeremías Martínez, at the Támara prison, where he is being held.¹¹⁹ Pasos de Animal Grande spoke with human rights defender and wife of Jeremías, Lidia Ramos Simeón.¹²⁰

113 <https://contracorriente.red/2021/03/27/mujeres-en-el-campo-sobreviven-a-la-violencia-sexual-sin-justicia/>

114 <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/monitoreo/item/3118-183-personas-están-con-medidas-de-protección-de-estas-135-son-defensoras-de-ddhh>

115 <https://www.cejil.org/es/honduras-cidh-conocera-situación-derechos-humanos-frente-instalación-proyectos-extractivos-pais>

116 <https://twitter.com/COPINHONDURAS/status/1373293060034035717>

117 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2743-exclusiva-mineria-no-aporta-ni-uno-por-ciento-a-economia-hondurena>

118 <https://www.guapinolresiste.org/post/un-immediately-release-guapinol-defenders-investigate-those-responsible-for-illegal-detention>

119 <https://twitter.com/OACNUDH/status/1367177681540968450>

120 <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/denuncias/item/3107-esposa-de-jeremias-martinez-lo-unico-que-el-ha-hecho-es-decir-que-la-minera-ha-perjudicado-el-rio>

On March 13, an urgent action called for the immediate release of the criminalized Guapinol defenders as one of them, with preexisting conditions, tested positive to COVID-19.¹²¹ OACNUDH also expressed concern.¹²² A few days later, Guapinol defender Jeremías Martínez was acquitted of charges of usurpation and damages related to his defense of the Guapinol and the San Pedro rivers. But this was where the good news ended. "Despite this result, Jeremías will not be released. He and the other 7 #Guapinol water protectors still face charges. Today's result is a call to action to keep demanding freedom for the Guapinol Water Protectors and all Honduran Political Prisoners!"¹²³ On the day of the trial, OACNUDH had called on the Honduran State to implement the Opinion of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and immediately release the Guapinol defenders.¹²⁴

Hydroelectricity

"[A]s part of its 179th Period of Sessions, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) held a working meeting to review the implementation of the precautionary measures of protection granted in 2018 to the communities consuming water from the Mezapa River in the Pajuiles sector, Honduras. (...) Given this situation, and the lack of implementation of concrete measures for the protection of the communities, during the space the State of Honduras made a commitment to resume the 2018 agreement to convene an inter-institutional roundtable to comprehensively address the implementation of the measures. Thus, it was agreed to resume the work of the roundtable with the participation of all relevant authorities, representatives of the communities, as well as representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner and the IACHR, including the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights (DESCA), Soledad García, and the commissioner for Honduras, Joel Hernández, as an observer and technical advisor."¹²⁵

"The Lenca Comunal Mejocote Indigenous Council, in Gracias, Lempira, has denounced that through the president of the Water Board, they are trying to build a hydroelectric dam that puts the Lenca corridor at risk; in addition, they have referred that once again they are failing to comply with ILO Convention 169."¹²⁶

ZEDEs

Some good news from Germany regarding the Próspera ZEDE. "TUM International, a company of the prestigious Technical University of Munich withdraws from the Próspera ZEDE, both on the island of Roatan and in La Ceiba. Responding to questions asked by the Ecumenical Office for Peace and Justice of Munich and from a German magazine, iz3w, the university declared that " on principal, TUM International GmbH withdraws from projects if there are indicators of human rights

121 <https://www.guapinolresiste.org/post/urgent-action-immediately-release-guapinol-defenders-in-high-risk>

122 <https://twitter.com/OACNUDH/status/1370934805534232579>

123 <https://twitter.com/hondurassol/status/1372327832840335363>

124 <https://oacnudh.hn/oacnudh-llama-al-estado-de-honduras-a-implementar-la-opinion-del-grupo-de-trabajo-de-naciones-unidas-sobre-la-detencion-arbitraria-y-liberar-inmediatamente-los-defensores-de-guapinol/>

125 <https://www.cejil.org/es/honduras-reactivara-mesa-interinstitucional-abordar-acceso-al-agua-y-salud-comunidad-pajuiles>

126 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2758-honduras-urgente-lencas-denuncian-imposicion-de-hidroelectrica-en-gracias>

violations, like in this case." They report that they had a consulting contract with Próspera to organize an investor congress in Munich and to do a site inspection in the Próspera ZEDE project's areas in Roatán and La Ceiba. However, they will not continue collaboration with the project. According to TUM International, any publicity about an educational center or an international university in Roatán with support from the Technical University of Munich is false."¹²⁷ A day later, this was picked up by DW which published an article on the Próspera ZEDE.¹²⁸

Corruption and Its Enemies

CESPAD published an analysis on the importance of access to information and transparency in the fight against corruption.¹²⁹ They also had a report this month on nepotism at the foreign service. "Special Missions made up of married couples; brothers and fathers appointed within the same embassies; fathers inheriting their posts to their children, and recognized members of the party of the current government (National Party), are among other characteristics of a large part of the personnel that make up the Foreign Service in Honduras."¹³⁰

On March 6, Pinu congresswoman sent out an alert: "The Honduran people are alerted about the intention of the National Congress to reform more than 25 articles of the General Budget of the Republic, aimed at promoting discretion in the use of funds and to make transfers without further control."¹³¹ "The Public Prosecutor's Office, through the Special Prosecutor's Office for Transparency and Fight against Public Corruption, FETCCOP, filed today Monday before the First Court of Appeals, a request for Pre-Trial against the former mayor of the city of La Ceiba and current councilman Carlos Alejandro Aguilar Ponce, who is accused of the crimes of Falsification of Public Documents, Violation of the Duties of Public Officials and Fraud to the detriment of the Public Administration."¹³²

"The Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ), authorized attorney Eddy Tábor to have a copy of the judicial file of the case of the Public Prosecutor's Office against the president of the National Congress, Mauricio Oliva. "I was notified today that the request for a copy of this case information from the Public Ministry was accepted, in which we request a copy of the file through which an appeal for protection of President Oliva and other persons who are being investigated was processed", said Tábor to a radio station."¹³³

And then, there is also the corruption case involving Nationalist presidential candidate Nasry Asfura (see Elections sub-section). Asfura is accused of "Money Laundering, Embezzlement of Public Funds, Fraud, Use of False Public Documents and Violation of the Duties of Public Officials to the

127 <https://www.bethgegilia.com/blog/a-munich-university-partner-withdraws-from-the-pr%C3%B3spera-zede>

128 <https://www.dw.com/es/honduras-soberan%C3%ADa-a-cambio-de-desarrollo-econ%C3%B3mico/a-56916122>

129 <http://cespad.org.hn/2021/03/02/analisis-la-informacion-y-la-transparencia-derechos-fundamentales-para-la-lucha-contra-la-corrupcion/>

130 <http://cespad.org.hn/2021/03/13/el-familion-en-el-servicio-exterior-de-honduras/>

131 <https://twitter.com/LuisSan16779987/status/1368311765247942667>

132 <https://radioprogreso.net/aplicacion-movil/solicitan-antejuicio-contra-excalde-de-la-ceiba-por-investigacion-de-actos-de-corrupcion/>

133 <https://proceso.hn/sala-de-lo-constitucional-otorga-permiso-a-eddy-tabora-para-tener-copia-del-caso-contra-mauricio-oliva/>

detriment of the Public Faith, the Economy and the Public Administration of the State of Honduras".¹³⁴

The US announced to form a anti-corruption task-force for the Northern Triangle.¹³⁵

The Onslaught against the Anti-Corruption Bodies

The new Penal Code continued to work its "magic" undermining previous corruption cases. The most recent one concerned Ilsa Vanessa Molina and Ilsa Damaris Aguirre, both were sentenced to prison in the IHSS corruption case.¹³⁶ This reinvigorated the discussion about the Penal Code.¹³⁷ Congress nominated a commission to revise the latter.¹³⁸ Congress nominated a commission to revise the latter.¹³⁹

Hermes

Last month, the newest corruption case by UFERCO was presented to the public, Hermes, which has JOH's deceased sister Hilda Hernández as a central figure. "The Hermes case, presented by Uferco, seems to be the last link to understand the structure with which Juan Orlando Hernandez came to power through welfare and media control; an embezzlement of more than 122 million lempiras that has as its main link the late minister and sister of the president, Hilda Hernandez."¹⁴⁰ It also made international headlines. "The depths of the Honduran president's alleged efforts to control the local press was revealed in an indictment leaked yesterday in the Central American nation. The new documents also alleged yet another corruption case to which the family and inner circle of President Juan Orlando Hernández is connected. The allegations outlined in the case involve some \$5 million that were funneled from the office of the presidency through front companies to journalists and political elites. "[The case shows] the fact that the structural and institutionalized corruption in the country uses journalists and the media and this mechanism that reinforces impunity," said Manuel Torres, a veteran Honduran journalist."¹⁴¹

At the beginning of March, the list of journalist receiving money as part of the corruption case was made public.¹⁴² The MP presented charges against 11 of the accused.¹⁴³

Pandora

CESPAD published an update on the Pandora case.¹⁴⁴ "Peasant women filed a writ of amparo against the resolution of the Court of Appeals that issued a definitive dismissal in favor of twenty-

¹³⁴ <https://criterio.hn/nueve-inmuebles-y-tres-empresas-aseguradas-en-caso-contrasfura/>

¹³⁵ <https://proceso.hn/nueva-fuerza-de-tarea-anticorupcion-de-eeuu-congelara-bienes-y-retirara-visas-en-ca/>

¹³⁶ <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2790-honduras-palillona-del-ihss-sale-de-prision-en-victoria>

¹³⁷ <https://criterio.hn/liberacion-de-la-palillona-agudiza-percepcion-de-impunidad-e-injusticia-en-honduras/>

¹³⁸ <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/22/resurgen-opiniones-a-favor-y-en-contradel-nuevo-codigo-penal-tras-salida-de-la-palillona-y-galdamez/>

¹³⁹ <https://proceso.hn/congreso-nacional-nombra-comision-para-revisar-nuevo-codigo-penal-en-honduras/>

¹⁴⁰ <https://contracorriente.red/2021/03/07/vehiculos-sandwiches-y-periodistas-el-desfalco-de-hilda-hernandez/>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.vice.com/en/article/m7adwb/honduran-presidency-allegedly-bribed-journalists-using-taxpayer-money>

¹⁴² <https://radioprogreso.hn/portada/publican-nombres-de-periodistas-favorecidos-con-pagos-de-casa-presidencial/>

¹⁴³ <https://confidencial.hn/ministerio-publico-presenta-requerimiento-fiscal-contralos-11-imputados-del-caso-hermes/>

¹⁴⁴ <http://cespad.org.hn/2021/03/03/pandora-el-despilfarro-de-12-millones-de-dolares-la-colusion-politica-y-las-victimas-que-nunca-se-beneficiaron-con-los-proyectos/>

two of the thirty-eight defendants in the Pandora case, which involves the diversion of millions of dollars of public funds destined for the agricultural sector to finance political parties in Honduras. The action was brought by the Council for the Integral Development of Peasant Women (CODIMCA), accompanied by the National Center of Rural Workers (CNTC), the Anti-Corruption Coalition, the Justice for the Peoples Law Firm and the Center for the Study of Democracy (Cespad), who filed the action before the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ)."¹⁴⁵ The Coalition Anti-Corruption did the same thing.¹⁴⁶

Rosa Elena Bonilla de Lobo

The re-trial of the former first lady Rosa Elena Bonilla de Lobo will take place from April 5 and 30.¹⁴⁷ Later, it was rescheduled for mid-June.¹⁴⁸

State Security Forces

Assassinations

On March 5, Keyla's family (see last month) held a press conference with COFADEH and other national and international human rights organizations. "Today marks 25 days since the National Police committed the criminal act against the life of Keyla Patricia Martinez Rodriguez, a university student of Nursing, who was detained under the Executive Decree PCM 012-2021 that suspends the Constitutional Guarantees and is a continuation of the PCM decree #021-2020 that has kept us without Fundamental Norms for a year. Keyla was deprived of her liberty in the cells of the Police Departmental Unit #10 (UDEP #10). We have reached this day and we have not seen any exemplary action on the part of the Public Prosecutor's Office that leads us to think "that we will obtain justice". The corresponding authorities do not give any answer on what they are doing to punish the intellectual, material and accomplices by action or omission that could have prevented this crime."¹⁴⁹ Didapol, the Directorate of Police Disciplinary Affairs, has opened an investigation against two members of the police force, BUT "is not for the death of the young woman, but for what happened from the moment of her arrest until she was found dead; both members of the police force are not being charged with the death of the young woman".¹⁵⁰ The next day, her family released the death certificate confirming that her death was caused by "asphyxia due to suffocation by blockage of respiratory orifices".¹⁵¹

On March 9, the MP informed that two members of the Military Police would go on trial accused of homicide.¹⁵² Three days later, two members of the police force were sent to pre-trial detention

145 <https://criterio.hn/campesinas-presentan-recurso-de-amparo-contra-resolucion-que-dejo-en-libres-a-implicados-en-caso-pandora/>

146 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/11/coalicion-anticorruption-pide-revocacion-de-sobreseimiento-definitivo-a-22-implicados-en-caso-pandora/>

147 <https://proceso.hn/del-5-al-30-de-abril-sera-repeticion-del-juicio-a-la-exprimera-dama-rosa-elena-bonilla/>

148 <https://proceso.hn/reprograman-para-junio-repeticion-de-juicio-oral-en-caso-caja-chica-de-la-dama/>

149 <https://www.defensoresenlinea.com/comunicado-publico-caso-keyla/>

150 <https://confidencial.hn.com/didapol-asegura-que-tiene-en-su-poder-dos-expedientes-sobre-el-caso-de-keyla-martinez/>

151 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/1447426-466/keyla-martinez-acta-defuncion-asfixia-honduras>

152 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/author-login/174-marzo2021/7266-por-homicidio-y-abuso-de-autoridad-van-a-juicio-miembros-de-la-pmop>

accused of a triple murder.¹⁵³ The MP also issued an arrest warrant against a member of the Armed Forces accused of femicide.¹⁵⁴

Penitentiary System

At least three inmates suffered gun wounds during a riot at the prison in El Porvenir, Francisco Morazán.¹⁵⁵ OACNUDH expressed concern.¹⁵⁶ Nadab Elí Mejía Corea, a 28-year old inmate at the Támara prison, was found dead on March 19. Prison authorities announced to investigate his death.¹⁵⁷

International Community

"Representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) approved a loan of US\$45 million to the Ministry of Finance for the implementation of the Digital Transformation of Honduras project."¹⁵⁸ The BCIE donated another \$500'000 to the JOH regime for their corona response.¹⁵⁹

US

The US State Department announced Ricardo Zuñiga as their Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle.¹⁶⁰ ¹⁶¹ El Faro published a profile of him.¹⁶² "President Joe Biden is tasking Vice President Kamala Harris with overseeing efforts with Central American countries to stem the flow of migrants to the US southern border, the first major issue Biden has assigned directly to his No. 2."¹⁶³

EU

Proceso Digital reported on new project by the European Union to tackle food security in the south of Honduras.¹⁶⁴

Drug Trafficking

JOH and links to drug trafficking continued to occupy the media this month (see next sub-section). Apart from JOH, the Armed Forces also face accusations of drug trafficking links. And just like

153 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/author-login/174-marzo2021/7289-a-prision-dos-policias-implicados-en-la-masacre-de-tres-personas-en-la-aldea-el-cedral-el-paraiso>

154 <https://www.mp.hn/index.php/author-login/174-marzo2021/7301-requerimiento-fiscal-contra-militar-acusado-de-femicidio-en-intibuca>

155 <https://proceso.hn/tres-privados-de-libertad-resultan-heridos-de-bala-tras-reverta-en-penal-el-porvenir-fm/>

156 <https://twitter.com/OACNUDH/status/1369434818447040519>

157 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/1451072-466/np-muerte-reo-carcel-tamara-honduras>

158 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/17/bid-aprueba-45-millones-de-dolares-a-finanzas-para-proyecto-tecnologico/>

159 <https://proceso.hn/el-bcie-hace-un-nuevo-aporte-a-honduras-para-centro-de-contencion-de-covid-19/>

160 <https://twitter.com/SecBlinken/status/1374022871551447047>

161 <https://proceso.hn/zuniga-a-hacer-cumplir-reglas-migratorias-y-anticorupcion-de-washington-en-trianguulo-norte/>

162 <https://elfaro.net/es/202103/centroamerica/25355/Biden-encarga-Centroam%C3%A9rica-al-hombre-que-negoci%C3%B3-la-reapertura-con-Cuba.html>

163 <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/24/politics/kamala-harris-immigration-central-america/index.html>

164 <https://proceso.hn/ue-apoya-esfuerzos-de-honduras-para-garantizar-la-seguridad-alimentaria-en-el-golfo-de-fonseca/>

JOH, they reject. them. "But these facts have been qualified as speculations by the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Tito Livio Moreno, who told journalists that there is a malicious campaign against his institution, promoted by the media and political groups."¹⁶⁵ In a later interview, Moreno, when asked about the drug trafficking links of JOH, answered: "I do not want to be irresponsible and give my opinion on issues that do not concern me."¹⁶⁶

On March 2, the JOH regime tried to go on the offensive using a US report¹⁶⁷ allegedly praising Honduras' anti-drug trafficking efforts. "Today, Casa Presidencial released part of the International Drug Control Strategy Report published by the U.S. State Department. This report corresponds to the 2020 period, while Donald Trump was still president of the United States. The government of Honduras is lying when it tries to claim that this report corresponds to the data and the opinion of the Biden administration on the role of Honduras in the fight against drug trafficking. In addition, Casa Presidencial hides additional data contained in said report. In Presidential Determination No. 2020-11 dated September 16, 2020, the then President of the United States Donald Trump sent a Memorandum to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, with the title "Major Drug Traffickers or Major Drug Producers, Countries for Fiscal 2021" in which he places Honduras among the 22 countries with the largest production and transit of drugs worldwide."¹⁶⁸

The Supreme Court admitted two new extradition requests for two Hondurans, one from the US, one from Panama.¹⁶⁹ On March 25, "[f]ormer deputy [police] commissioner Jorge Alberto Barralaga Hernández and the wife of drug trafficker Wilter Blanco, Montse Fraga Duarte, were sentenced today to 10 years in prison for money laundering."¹⁷⁰ On March 29, the US Department of Justice announced that "JUAN MANUEL AVILA MEZA, a former member of the Honduran National Police, was sentenced today to 12 years in prison for conspiring to import cocaine into the United States. AVILA MEZA previously pled guilty before U.S. District Judge Lorna G. Schofield, who imposed today's sentence. (...) In February 2014, AVILA MEZA helped set up and attended a meeting between one of the leaders of the Cachiros and Juan Antonio Hernández Alvarado, a/k/a "Tony Hernández," another convicted major drug trafficker who is the brother of current Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández, to discuss money laundering transactions between a Cachiros front company and the Honduran government. In June 2014, AVILA MEZA met with six other members of the Honduran National Police, Fabio Lobo Sosa, the now-convicted son of Porfirio Lobo Sosa, the Honduran president who preceded Juan Orlando Hernández, and two DEA confidential sources purporting to be members of the Sinaloa Cartel. During the meeting, AVILA MEZA led a discussion of how best to rely on the Honduran National Police to secure safe passage for a large cocaine shipment."¹⁷¹

165 <https://criterio.hn/fa-aa-de-honduras-recurre-al-descredito-de-la-prensa-para-defenderse-de-acusaciones-de-narcotrafico/>

166 <https://proceso.hn/no-me-compete-opinar-responde-jefe-de-las-ffaa-a-consulta-sobre-supuestos-vinculos-del-presidente-hermandez-con-el-narco/>

167 <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/International-Narcotics-Control-Strategy-Report-Volume-I-FINAL-1.pdf>

168 <https://prohondurasnetwork.com/2021/03/02/honduras-entre-los-22-paises-con-mayor-produccion-y-transito-de-drogas-en-el-mundo/>

169 <https://tiempo.hn/solicitudes-extradicion-csj-dos-eeuu-panama/>

170 <https://proceso.hn/condenan-a-10-anos-de-prision-a-exoficial-barralaga-por-lavado/>

171 <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/former-honduran-national-police-officer-sentenced-12-years-prison-conspiring-import>

At the end of the month, "Pinu warned about the pretension of a faction of the Legislative that would have links with organized crime, since it seeks in the next sessions to reform some articles of the Law of Deprivation of Dominion, with the purpose of shielding high government officials who are involved in illicit activities."¹⁷²

The Trial against Geovanny Daniel Fuentes Ramírez

"On the eve of the trial of alleged drug trafficker Geovanny Fuentes, prosecutors are asking to admit new evidence that appears to be subtracted from the iCloud of Fuentes' son, identified as CC-14. Included are photos and conversations, including a photo of CC-14 with JOH."¹⁷³ ¹⁷⁴ This was even picked up by El Heraldo¹⁷⁵ and internationally.¹⁷⁶ The Pro Honduras Network further reported that the newest evidence indicated that CC-3 (co-conspirator 3) is commissioner Ramón Martínez Hernández.¹⁷⁷ Jeff Ernst published an overview just before the start of the trial. "In 2013, seated across a roundtable from then-presidential candidate Juan Orlando Hernández, alleged drug trafficker Geovanny Fuentes opened up a black briefcase and pulled out \$15,000 dollars in cash. "To help you with the campaign," said Fuentes. The apparent bribe was allegedly intended to ensure Fuentes and his drug shipments were protected from, and by, law enforcement. In Honduras, it worked. But in the end, it made him a target of the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) as part of its ongoing investigation of Hernández and led to his arrest upon arrival to Florida in March 2020. A year later, Fuentes is set to go on trial beginning March 8 in a case that could ultimately help determine the fate of Hernández – an unindicted co-conspirator who prosecutors have accused of accepting millions in bribes from drug traffickers – and the course of U.S.-Honduras relations under the Biden Administration."¹⁷⁸

On March 7, the trial against Geovanny Daniel Fuentes Ramírez started in New York. "[T]o mention Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez in the country is to talk about the man who has high-ranking government officials "in check. He is the man whom many military and police officers protected, provided weapons, police and military clothing, and whom they now fear. Behind the scenes they expect their names to resound in the courtrooms of New York because it is information that began to be gathered many years ago."¹⁷⁹ Even before the trial had started, one of Ramírez' sons threatened the family of a witness in his case.¹⁸⁰ On the first day, the jury was selected and "a list of names of places, people, and businesses was given to the selected jury members that include several names of Honduran politicians and convicted drug traffickers. This is to help the jury keep track of all the

172 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/26/pinu-denuncia-que-legislativo-quiere-aprobar-reformas-a-ley-de-privacion-de-dominio/>

173 <https://twitter.com/jeffernst/status/1366987948768583683>

174 <https://prohondurasnetwork.com/2021/03/03/fiscalia-pide-admitir-nuevas-pruebas-que-incluyen-fotografias-de-juan-orlando-herandez-con-co-conspiradores/>

175 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1447023-466/joh-narcotrafico-estados-unidos-juicio>

176 <https://apnews.com/article/noticias-2037f72be1ddc8e68210bf02b9a27ede>

177 https://twitter.com/Prohn_Honduras/status/1367161371297796096

178 <https://www.univision.com/univision-news/latin-america/new-york-drug-trial-geovanny-fuentes-provides-deeper-insights-into-honduran-corruption-implicates-president>

179 <http://cespad.org.hn/2021/03/07/los-testimonios-e-historias-en-el-juicio-de-geovanny-fuentes-que-ponen-en-jaque-al-gobierno-de-honduras/>

180 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1448064-466/honduras-narcotrafico-geovanny-fuentes-juicio-joh-testigo>

names that may be used throughout the trial.”¹⁸¹ JOH reacted to the start of the trial with a long Twitter thread once again threatening to stop international anti-drug trafficking cooperation.¹⁸²

Karen Spring, covering the trial, highlighted the following for Day 2 of the trial. "GFR gave President Juan Orlando Hernandez \$25,000 in cash, and access to his cocaine lab. In exchange, the President agreed to shield him from prosecution “with help from the Attorney General [Oscar Chinchilla].” (words of US prosecutors) (...) A Honduran accountant named Jose Sanchez, who worked with a business used by GFR to launder drug money, will testify about GFR’s meeting with Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez and witnessing GFR bribe a Honduran judge, amongst other details. (...) Honduran agro-industrial businessman, Fuad Juan Jarufe Larach, is GFR’s business mentor that made contributions to President Juan Orlando Hernandez’s political campaign. He introduced GFR to the President, the Vice President, and members of the Honduran military.”¹⁸³ Jeff Ernst who also covered the trial made public that Fuentes brother, Cristhian Fuentes, is running for Congress for the political movement inside the National Party close to JOH.¹⁸⁴

Day 3 of the trial against Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez included the testimony of Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga from the Los Cachiros cartel. Ramirez worked with them and according to the testimony, "GFR had several contacts in the Cortés Department inside the Honduran National Police. When an individual working with the Cachiros cartel leader, Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga (now a government witness) was arrested during a drug shipment, GFR called the mayor of the northern city of Choloma Leopoldo Civelli, nicknamed ‘Polo’ [now running as a pre-candidate for Congress for the Liberal Party under Yani Rosenthal’s stream. Civelli has also been accused of fraud, falsifying documents, amongst other charges]. Mayor Civelli called the police and had the worker released.”¹⁸⁵ Jeff Ernst explained that behind CC-14 (co-conspirator 14) is Ramirez’ son Geovanny Fuentes Gutiérrez.¹⁸⁶ At this point, JOH reacted on his personal twitter account,¹⁸⁷ on the one from the presidency,¹⁸⁸ and he also let lose his bot army¹⁸⁹.

On Day 4 of the trial , Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga continued his testimony. The most head lines made his statement regarding the bribes paid by Los Cachiros. "Los Cachiros bribed President Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) with \$250,000 in approx. 2012. The money was given to JOH’s sister, Hilda Hernandez. Los Cachiros paid Manuel Zelaya in approx. 2016, \$500,000 asking him to name their cousin as the Minister of Security. Also, Los Cachiros paid \$500,000 to current Vice President Ricardo Alvarez, at the time he was campaigning to be President, and also paid \$50,000 to Tony Hernandez (JOH’s brother).”¹⁹⁰ Former president Zelaya denied the allegations and said he would

181 <https://www.aquiabajo.com/blog/2021/3/9/day-one-trial-against-honduran-geovanny-david-fuentes-ramirez>

182 <https://twitter.com/JuanOrlandoH/status/1368957296018157571>

183 <https://www.aquiabajo.com/blog/2021/3/9/day-two-trial-against-honduran-geovanny-fuentes-ramirez-business-partner-of-honduran-president-juan-orlando-hernandez>

184 <https://twitter.com/jeffgernst/status/1369522125820858368>

185 <https://www.aquiabajo.com/blog/2021/3/10/day-three-trial-against-geovanny-fuentes-ramirez>

186 <https://twitter.com/jeffgernst/status/1369625636210434048>

187 <https://twitter.com/JuanOrlandoH/status/1369671574119387138>

188 https://twitter.com/Presidencia_HN/status/1369841929945505792

189 <https://twitter.com/luisassardo/status/1369817588054757384>

190 <https://www.aquiabajo.com/blog/2021/3/11/day-four-trial-against-honduran-drug-trafficker-geovanny-fuentes-ramirez>

go to the US if requested by US authorities. Ricardo Álvarez also denied having received bribes.¹⁹¹ Nasralla once again called for a transition government¹⁹² and the Patriot Movement called for "the departure of the heads of the three branches of government, the replacement of the military high command, the departure of the Attorney General and the Procurator General of the Republic".¹⁹³ Day 5 of the trial did not take place due to a possible COVID-19 case of a family member of a juror.¹⁹⁴ Meanwhile, audio files of the testimony of Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga had surfaced in Honduras. Judge Kevin Castel explained that this is illegal.¹⁹⁵

On Day 6, the testimony by Devis Leonel Rivera Maradiaga, which began the previous week, came to an end and the Honduran historian Darío Euraque took over his place at the stand. The biggest headlines in Honduras made the following revelation. "Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez (GFR) told Rivera Maradiaga in a US prison that he was going to cooperate with the DEA in order to secure his release because he [GFR] had photos and videos of President Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) receiving shipments of cocaine from Colombia at the San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa airports. According to GFR, JOH did this right in front of the DEA without the DEA knowing and JOH made fun of the DEA."¹⁹⁶ The same day, InSight Crime asked if this trial would finally break US-Honduras ties. "'It seems that the US Government has decided that its relationship with JOH is untenable,'" a former senior State Department official told InSight Crime on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak on the matter. Recent statements by National Security Council official Juan Gonzalez and his Obama-era counterpart Dan Restrepo "make clear that the United States has decided it won't deal with Central American leaders who are accused of gross acts of corruption," the official said. Those sentiments were echoed by longtime State Department official and current Southern Border Ambassador Roberta Jacobson. When asked about the drug allegations against President Hernández in a White House press briefing on March 10, she said that no funds from a proposed \$4 billion assistance package for Central America would be handed over to government leaders. (...) The Biden administration, however, may be loath to completely torpedo its relationship with President Hernández, which the embattled president seems to be relying on."¹⁹⁷

On Day 7, Historian Darío Euraque finished his testimony and the first protected witness began to testify. Here are some of the highlights put together by Karen Spring "The protected witness heard President Juan Orlando Hernandez make several shocking statements in different meetings held in the offices of the rice company, Graneros Nacionales in Choloma, including: That JOH had plans to stay in power for 25 years; had put Oscar Chinchilla as Attorney General to "protect them and to avoid charges"; and that together, Chinchilla and Mauricio Oliva (the current President of Congress) were working to amend laws in their favor. (...) On two occasions, GFR met with JOH in Graneros

191 <https://criterio.hn/mel-zelaya-y-ricardo-alvarez-dicen-que-no-recibieron-sobornos-del-exlider-del-cartel-de-los-cachiros/>

192 <https://criterio.hn/nasralla-pide-un-gobierno-de-transicion-tras-nuevos-senalamientos-en-corte-de-nueva-york/>

193 <https://criterio.hn/movimiento-patria-pide-salida-de-los-tres-poderes-del-estado-y-un-gobierno-de-transicion/>

194 https://twitter.com/Prohn_Honduras/status/1370403795168063489

195 <https://prohondurasnetwork.com/2021/03/12/juez-kevin-castel-se-pronuncia-ante-audio-del-juicio-filtrado-en-honduras/>

196 <https://www.aquiabajo.com/blog/2021/3/15/day-six-trial-against-honduran-drug-trafficker-geovanny-fuentes-ramirez>

197 <https://insightcrime.org/news/drug-trial-us-honduras-ties/>

Nacionales and according to the witness, gave JOH two bribes: One for \$10,000 and the second for \$15,000. The witness made two copies of the videos tapes of the security cameras of one of these two meetings. He gave one to Prosecutor Marlene Banegas [murdered in October 2014] and another to Cristian Ayala [no details given about this person but could be the son of a Sub-Commissioner of the Police, Cristian Ayala Vigil, who was murdered in June 2015]."¹⁹⁸

On Day 8, the first protected witness finished his testimony and the second one also testified. Karen Spring highlighted the following: "Attorney General Oscar Chinchilla was briefly mentioned again in emails between Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez (GFR) and his son while GFR was in a US jail. GFR's sons said that GFR's partners (military official 'Comanche' or Police Commissioner Martinez) told GFR's sons to talk to Chinchilla directly to see if Chinchilla can help them get the documents that GFR was urgently requesting from jail in the US." "After the government made public filings in the Tony Hernandez case, prosecutors used geographical location information extracted from GFR's phone to show that he went to the Presidential palace in at least a few occasions."¹⁹⁹ On Day 9, the last witness testified and the government rested its case.²⁰⁰ And on Day 10, the jurors started with their deliberation.²⁰¹ Back in Honduras, JOH reacted with a 14 (!) tweet-long Twitter thread on his claimed successes in fighting drug trafficking.²⁰² The same day, apparently thanks to good fortune, the police announced the seizure of 1.6 tons of cocaine.²⁰³

On March 22, Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez was found guilty on all three counts.²⁰⁴ In the press release by the US Justice Department announcing the verdict, JOH had a prominent role. "Manhattan U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said: "Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez was, up until his arrest by the DEA just over a year ago, a ruthless, powerful, and murderous cocaine trafficker in Honduras. He facilitated the shipment of large loads of cocaine by bribing Juan Orlando Hernández Alvarado, then president of the Honduran National Congress and now the Honduran president. Hernández Alvarado instructed Fuentes Ramirez to report directly to convicted co-conspirator and former Honduran congressman Tony Hernandez, the president's brother. Now Geovanny Fuentes Ramirez, one of the criminal conduits between Honduran officials and drug traffickers, faces a possible life behind bars."" In the two-page press release, JOH is mentioned 9 more times.²⁰⁵ Speaking to the former head of the Honduran Central Bank, the now political analyst Edmundo Orellana warns that this is still not the end of JOH. "What can be inferred from the primary elections "is that we are going to have Juan Orlando for a while, at least two more terms", said Orellana. The National Party has more votes than the opposition parties, which have been distributed in such a way that "an alliance is impossible" due to the refusal of Libertad y Refundación and Partido Salvador de Honduras to unite with Yani Rosenthal. "So if there is no possibility of an alliance they are going to go alone and thus the National Party is going to win and

198 <https://www.aquiabajo.com/blog/2021/3/16/day-seven-trial-against-honduran-drug-trafficker-geovanny-fuentes-ramirez>

199 <https://www.aquiabajo.com/blog/2021/3/17/day-eight-trial-against-honduran-drug-trafficker-geovanny-fuentes-ramirez>

200 <https://www.aquiabajo.com/blog/2021/3/18/day-nine-trial-against-honduran-drug-trafficker-geovanny-fuentes-ramirez>

201 <https://www.univision.com/noticias/narcotrafico/juicio-de-geovanny-fuentes-el-empresario-acusado-de-narcotrafico-con-presidente-hondureno-pase-a-manos-del-jurado-el-viernes>

202 https://twitter.com/Presidencia_HN/status/1372973796035022848

203 <https://proceso.hn/encuentran-cargamento-de-supuesta-droga-en-colon/>

204 <https://www.univision.com/univision-news/latin-america/geovanny-fuentes-an-alleged-partner-of-honduran-president-found-guilty-of-drug-trafficking-by-new-york-jury>

205 <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/honduran-national-convicted-drug-trafficking-and-weapons-charges>

"papi a la orden" (Tito Asfura) is a man of Juan Hernandez".²⁰⁶ InSight Crime added: "Usually loath to name sitting presidents in criminal cases, prosecutors in the United States have made an exception for Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, painting a clear picture of him taking bribes from drug traffickers and participating firsthand in his brother's cocaine smuggling ring. (...) Unlike in previous court filings, in which President Hernández is identified only as co-conspirator number four (CC-4), prosecutors mentioned his name directly 58 times in the March 16 filing."²⁰⁷

In the coming days, the international media coverage continued. The Guardian wrote: "For the US, this is a painfully embarrassing fortnight to count Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández as a key ally in Central America."²⁰⁸ The New York Times, meanwhile, questioned the gravity of the recent trial on JOH. "President Juan Orlando Hernández of Honduras figured prominently in a U.S. drug trial, but few think it will matter in a country mired in corruption."²⁰⁹ To avoid even more pressure at home, to be expected from the sentencing of his brother, the JOH regime authorized the Easter holidays, one week called Semana Santa, in the midst of a pandemic.²¹⁰ Additionally, JOH held a press conference (without the possibility to ask questions) repeating that he was being framed.²¹¹

The Sentencing of Tony Hernández

On March 5, the lawyer Melvin Bonilla was murdered at an intersection in Tegucigalpa.²¹² He was part of Tony Hernández' legal team.²¹³ In less than a week, two people linked to Tony Hernández were murdered. Before, it was a police official mentioned in Tony's trial, Normando Lozano López (see last month).²¹⁴ A week before the expected sentencing of Tony, the US prosecution asked for a life sentence.²¹⁵ The sentencing was later postponed, for the ninth time, but this time only by a week, to March 30.²¹⁶ Criterio reported how the JOH regime had tried to influence the case against JOH's brother Tony Hernández, e.g. by threatening to close US military bases in Honduras.²¹⁷

On March 26, it was made public that the defense of Tony demanded the minimum penalty of 40 years in prison.²¹⁸ As part of their request, they presented documents showing that Tony took bible study classes and an anger management course.²¹⁹ Tony and JOH's mother also wrote an open letter to judge Kevin Castell. Interestingly, she asks for clemency for her "sons".²²⁰ Tony's lawyer also

206 <https://criterio.hn/veredicto-contrageovanny-fuentes-es-una-condena-indirecta-contrajuan-herandez-pero-no-su-fin/>

207 <https://insightcrime.org/news/honduras-president-drug-conspiracy/>

208 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/24/the-us-has-been-silent-on-honduras-drug-problem-but-that-might-be-about-to-change>

209 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/23/world/americas/honduras-juan-orlando-herandez-drug-trial.html>

210 <https://criterio.hn/celebracion-de-semana-santa-es-para-desviar-la-atencion-sobre-la-sentencia-de-tony-herandez/>

211 <https://tiempo.hn/joh-grabaciones-dea-niegan-sea-narcotraficante>

212 <https://confidencialhn.com/asesinan-al-exabogado-de-tony-herandez-en-colonia-la-alameda-de-la-capital/>

213 <https://prohondurasnetwork.com/2021/03/04/trasciende-el-asesinato-en-la-colonia-alameda-de-melvin-bonilla-abogado-defensor-de-tony-herandez-y-rosa-elena-de-lobo/>

214 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2737-honduras-urgente-en-seis-dias-matan-a-dos-personas-vinculadas-a-tony>

215 <https://www.univision.com/univision-news/latin-america/new-york-prosecutors-look-for-life-in-prison-for-tony-herandez-brother-of-honduran-president>

216 <https://proceso.hn/postergan-por-una-semana-mas-lectura-de-sentencia-para-tony-herandez/>

217 <https://criterio.hn/con-cierre-de-bases-militares-estadounidenses-en-honduras-firma-de-abogados-intento-influir-en-caso-contratony-herandez/>

218 <https://proceso.hn/defensa-de-tony-herandez-pide-al-juez-que-imponga-una-pena/>

219 <https://prohondurasnetwork.com/2021/03/26/cursos-de-la-biblia-y-diplomas-recibidos-por-tony-durante-su-estadia-en-la-carcel-son-incluidos-dentro-los-argumentos-de-su-defensa/>

220 <https://prohondurasnetwork.com/2021/03/26/madre-de-tony-herandez-pide-clemencia-al-juez-kevin-castell/>

wrote an open letter. "This case is one more in a long line of disgraceful foreign policy intervention by the U.S. government, this time in pursuit of regime change at the highest levels in Honduras.²²¹" I guess he did not see the irony in this sentence. JOH, meanwhile, shared a transcript of conversations recorded by a DEA infiltrator that allegedly reveal how a group of Honduran drug traffickers talked about an attempt against JOH which somehow should exonerate him.²²² The Pro Honduras Network explained why this was wrong.²²³

A day before the sentencing, US authorities ordered the seizure of Tony's assets and those of some of his front men worth \$183.5 million.²²⁴ And then, on March 30, Tony was sentenced to life plus 30 years in prison, the same as El Chapo.²²⁵ "Based upon Juan Antonio's free choice to engage in a life of drug trafficking over a 12-year period ... a sentence of life imprisonment is richly deserved," said Judge Kevin Castel. The judge also sentenced Hernandez to pay \$138.5 million dollars in forfeiture for trafficking an estimated 185,000 kilos of cocaine. (...) When it as his turn, prosecutor Matthew Laroche, told the court that he was shocked by Hernandez's arrogance and lack of remorse. "It is stunning. It speaks exactly to who this person is," he said. "He has shown no remorse to this day. He doesn't care, clearly, how his crimes have affected his country," he added, citing the extreme poverty and lawlessness in Honduras."²²⁶ US Senator Ed Markey tweeted: "The sentencing of the Honduran president's brother for drug-trafficking highlights the corruption driving human rights violations & instability for millions of Hondurans. I'm a proud co-sponsor of the Honduras Human Rights & Anti-Corruption Act, which commits the U.S. to justice."²²⁷

The next day, the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) also commented on the sentencing. "The conviction & sentencing of Tony Hernandez is a reminder there is no position powerful enough to shield you from facing justice when you violate U.S. drug laws by sending tons of cocaine to our country," said #DEA Chief Wendy Woolcock.²²⁸ And the former head of the MACCIH, Juan Jiménez Mayor, stated that the sentencing once again showed that in Honduras "drug trafficking is very close to politics".²²⁹ In Honduras, meanwhile, the "coordinator of judges of the Supreme Court of Justice (CSJ), Mario Díaz, has said that the Public Prosecutor's Office must act ex officio against the persons mentioned in the New York trials, especially against Juan Hernández".²³⁰ Padre Melo believes that "Juan Orlando's reign will be coming to an end, but it is up to the citizens to carry out actions of protest or pressure to achieve its end. An end that could have a violent outcome due to the dangerousness of JOH, so it is time to be alert and in constant mobilization".²³¹

221 <https://proceso.hn/defensa-de-tony-hermandez-dice-que-eeuu-busca-cambiar-el-gobierno-hondureno/>

222 <https://confidencialhn.com/se-que-le-han-querido-llegar-por-otros-lados-y-el-hijo-de-p-se-ha-puesto-super-arisco-yankel-rosenthal-segun-grabacion-de-la-dea/>

223 <https://prohondurasnetwork.com/2021/03/26/el-agente-infiltrado-de-la-dea-y-las-mentiras-de-juan-orlando-hermandez-al-verse-acorralado-por-el-departamento-de-justicia-de-eeuu/>

224 <https://prohondurasnetwork.com/2021/03/29/fiscalia-de-eeuu-ordena-la-confiscacion-inmediata-de-los-bienes-de-tony-hermandez-y-sus-testaferros-valorados-en-138-5-millones-de-dolares/>

225 <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/former-honduran-congressman-tony-hermandez-sentenced-life-prison-and-ordered-forfeit>

226 <https://www.univision.com/univision-news/latin-america/tony-hermandez-brother-of-honduran-president-sentenced-to-life-for-drug-trafficking>

227 <https://twitter.com/SenMarkey/status/1377048155838156802>

228 <https://twitter.com/DEAHQ/status/1377266029466939392>

229 <https://criterio.hn/los-vientos-del-norte-son-muy-fuertes-para-honduras-juan-jimenez-mayor/>

230 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2820-honduras-corte-suprema-fiscalia-debe-actuar-de-oficio-tras-informe-dea>

231 <https://radioprogreso.hn/aplicacion-movil/sentencia-contr-tony-abre-escenario-a-un-posible-juicio-contr-joh/>

Varia

JOH

February was a difficult month for JOH with a new Senate Bill in the US highlighting corruption, human rights violations and drug trafficking linked to his regime. The news about the bill reinvigorated calls for JOH's resignation which continued this month.²³² 40 members of Congress signed a bill calling for his resignation, 22 more would be needed for a simple majority.²³³ Under the slogan 100+Women/1000 reasons, feminist and women organizations joined the demand for the resignation of JOH.²³⁴

Also in the US, the Washington Post published an important OpEd by Dana Frank demanding that "Biden must end U.S. policy shoring up the corrupt and authoritarian regime in Honduras".²³⁵ Additionally, the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act was reintroduced in Congress.²³⁶ On March 6, Criterio cited US Senator Jeff Merkley saying: "I hope that President Hernandez begins to think seriously about the request coming from many legislators for him to step aside."²³⁷ On March 8 and 9, US State Department spokesman Ned Price was asked twice about Honduras. First, he seemed reluctant to call JOH a partner of the US. On the question if JOH is a partner, he answered. "Look, we understand that we need to work constructively with countries in the Northern Triangle. I would hate to put – I would be hesitant to put a label on it. I think what we understand and what we are confident in is that unless we make progress on these underlying challenges, we're not going to make progress on the challenge of irregular migration."²³⁸ A day later, Price became more explicit. "Any leader, I think it is fair to say, not prepared to combat the corruption won't be in a position to enjoy a close partnership with the United States."²³⁹ This was even picked up by the corporate media in Honduras.²⁴⁰ The next day, JOH's presidential secretary Ebal Díaz unconvincingly claimed that the Biden administration had called them to apologize for the statements made.²⁴¹ A week later, at another briefing at the State Department, Ned Price was asked about this and more or less denied it.²⁴²

True or not, an article by the Los Angeles Times included further bad news for the JOH regime. "Weeks after earmarking \$4 billion in U.S. aid for Central America, the Biden administration is fine-tuning its plans and sharply limiting how much money will go directly to the governments of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, a senior administration official told the Los Angeles Times. Roberta Jacobson, Biden's senior official for southwest border affairs and an expert on immigration,

232 <https://criterio.hn/se-multiplican-las-voces-que-exigen-la-renuncia-de-juan-hermandez/>

233 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2729-honduras-actualizacion-ya-son-40-diputados-que-piden-renuncia-de-joh>

234 <https://criterio.hn/mujeres-de-honduras-se-pronuncian-por-salida-del-gobernante-mas-nocivo-de-la-historia/>

235 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/03/biden-honduras-juan-orlando-herandez-corruption-dea/>

236 <https://hankjohnson.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/congressman-johnson-reintroduces-bertha-caceres-human-rights-honduras-act>

237 <https://criterio.hn/senador-democrata-recomienda-a-herandez-pensar-seriamente-en-dar-un-paso-al-costado/>

238 <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-march-8-2021/#post-224701-HONDURAS>

239 <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-march-9-2021/#post-225070-HONDURAS>

240 <https://proceso.hn/eeuu-advierde-que-no-colaborara-con-presidente-hondureno-por-la-corrupcion/>

241 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/10/ebal-diaz-revela-que-ee-uu-ya-se-disculpo-con-honduras-por-declaraciones-de-portavoz-diplomatico/>

242 <https://www.state.gov/briefings/department-press-briefing-march-11-2021/#post-225613-HONDURAS>

said in an interview that the \$4 billion will be subject to strict — but untested — conditions on recipients, based on measures of anticorruption efforts and good governance. (...) “We have a long history of sending aid to Central American governments that failed to produce lasting, positive results,” Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) said in a statement to The Times. “If we are going to send more U.S. tax dollars to those governments, they need trustworthy leaders who want to help their people, rather than to stay in power and enrich themselves.”²⁴³

Leahy later doubled down in a press release. “Democracy in Central America is facing existential threats. (...) In Honduras, corruption permeates the highest ranks of government, civil society activists are under attack, and the justice system is complicit in perpetuating lawlessness and impunity. (...) Without good governance, no amount of foreign aid will fundamentally change this dynamic. The Biden Administration and the U.S. Congress should reassess our relations with these governments that are the antithesis of credible partners, and in doing so reaffirm our strong commitment to defending the rights of the Central American people and the principles of government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”²⁴⁴

The political analyst Tomás Andino Mencía reflected on a post-JOH Honduras and the role of the primary elections (which took place on March 14, see below). “However, it is a mistake to believe that the problem is reduced to Juan Orlando and that the solution only consists in his leaving the government. That is a necessary but not sufficient condition. JOH is the visible head of a larger, multi-headed beast that we call narco-dictatorship. This is a group of people and institutions that cohere to oppress us and that JOH has so far coordinated. (...) But there is a particularly dangerous species of this ilk; they are the political leaders who, in one way or another, have benefited from the sweetness of power and its dirty business. They are especially dangerous because they have the possibility of perpetuating this state of affairs from the power of a government. There are not only in the National Party, there are also wolves disguised in sheep's clothing, linked to the Power and enemies of the People in parties of the so-called “opposition”.”²⁴⁵ ContraCorriente took a closer look at “the paths that remain for President Juan Orlando Hernandez” in light of the trial (see above).²⁴⁶

Picking up an article by the AFP, El Heraldo reported that US Senator Tim Kaine said the following during a hearing in Congress regarding the US support for JOH during the electoral crisis in 2017: “The United States paid a high cost for not going against an authoritarian [meaning JOH] and now we are dealing with a border crisis driven by intense violence and corruption in that country.”²⁴⁷

Migration

“The deportation of Honduran immigrants, mainly from the United States and Mexico, decreased by 49.8% between January and February 2021, compared to the same period in 2020, an official source

243 <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-03-10/biden-to-restrict-u-s-aid-to-central-american-governments-set-new-conditions-for-money>

244 <https://www.leahy.senate.gov/press/statement-of-senator-patrick-leahy-central-american-democracy-faces-existential-threats>

245 <https://criterio.hn/el-dilema-del-14-de-marzo-a-favor-o-en-contra-de-los-candidatos-de-la-narcodictadura/>

246 <https://contracorriente.red/2021/03/12/los-caminos-que-le-quedan-al-presidente-juan-orlando-hernandez/>

247 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/pais/1452201-466/joh-narcotrafico-honduras-dea-eeuu-almagro>

informed Wednesday in Tegucigalpa."²⁴⁸ "According to a study by the National Forum for Migration in Honduras (Fonamih) and Oxfam Honduras, currently 8.5% of the country's population, more than 824,000 Hondurans, have been forced to emigrate, forced by violence, misery, inequality and corruption, among other causes. However, the report "Culture of Banishment", prepared by Oxfam and Fosdeh, reveals that as of 2019 there are 1.2 million Hondurans living in the United States alone."²⁴⁹

For the remainder of the month, most headlines regarding migration came from outside Honduras. On March 14, Proceso Digital reported that "[a]fter attempting to swim across the border into the United States, a 28-year-old Honduran immigrant woman lost her life and another Honduran man was rescued by security forces in the Mexican state of Tijuana."²⁵⁰ A week later, Nina Lakhani reported for the Guardian from the Mexican-US border. "The Texas governor has sent troops to fortify the border while advocates say the immigration numbers are being politicized."²⁵¹ The LA Times reported on how the Biden Administration maintained Trump's Title 42 policy to close the border and cut off asylum. "The Biden administration says the Trump-era policy known as Title 42, which relies on a 1944 public health statute to indefinitely close the border to "nonessential" travel, remains necessary to limit the spread of the coronavirus. At the same time, Biden officials say, migrants at the southern border still can seek protection in the United States, a right afforded to them under U.S. law. Yet since March 20, 2020, when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued its order invoking Title 42, U.S. border officials have claimed unchecked, unilateral authority to summarily expel from the country hundreds of thousands of immigrant adults, families and unaccompanied minors who didn't have prior permission to enter, without due process or access to asylum — let alone testing for the coronavirus."²⁵² Further south, Mexico announced to close its border to Guatemala and Belize to nonessential travel. "The Foreign Relations Department did not explain why the measure was announced now, more than a year after the start of the pandemic. But the result could help the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden handle a wave of Central American migrants reaching the U.S. border and it came on the same day the U.S. confirmed it will send 2.5 million doses of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine to Mexico."²⁵³

On March 23, The Guardian reported: "Joe Biden took office promising to put a friendlier face on US immigration policy. He put an end to a scheme requiring asylum seekers to remain in Mexico, promised to restore the US asylum system and pledged to spend \$4bn on addressing the root causes of migration in Central America. But as ever-increasing numbers of unaccompanied minors arrive at the US southern border and create a domestic political crisis for the US president, he is turning to a tactic used by his predecessors – including Donald Trump: outsourcing immigration enforcement to Mexico. Trump pressured Mexico into deploying its newly formed national guard to its border with

248 <https://proceso.hn/deportacion-de-inmigrantes-hondurenos-disminuye-49-8-entre-enero-y-febrero/>

249 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2753-mas-de-800-mil-hondurenos-viven-en-exilio>

250 <https://proceso.hn/muere-migrante-hondurena-al-intentar-cruzar-la-frontera-de-eeuu-nadando/>

251 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/18/us-mexico-immigration-border-crisis>

252 <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-03-19/a-year-of-title-42-both-trump-and-biden-have-kept-the-border-closed-and-cut-off-asylum-access>

253 <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-travel-mexico-coronavirus-pandemic-guatemala-41c66dbe3c1b37814c3e361940b3e2d5>

Guatemala in June 2019, having threatened escalating tariffs on Mexican imports. Analysts see something similar happening again in Mexico – but this time with more promises of cooperation on issues such as sharing Covid-19 vaccines, rather than threats of economic catastrophe."²⁵⁴

In an Op-ed in The Hill, law professor and immigration lawyer Sarah Sherman-Stokes lays out that the root cause of Central American migration is the US and its role in the region. "Migration from Central America today is primarily the result of U.S. policies that have exacerbated violence, poverty, food insecurity and climate change. Our immigration laws, one-sided trade deals, and decades of military intervention have left hundreds of thousands of Central Americans with no choice — they must flee their homes to save their lives and the lives of their families."²⁵⁵ The same day, an open letter by civil society organizations was sent to the Biden administration urging them to not repeat mistakes of the past in Central America. "As the State Department is developing a “root cause strategy” addressing the reasons why so many children, women, and men are fleeing the northern countries of Central America, U.S.-based and international faith, humanitarian, immigrant-led, human rights, environmental, and grassroots organizations called on President Biden and Vice President Harris to support and amplify civil society calls in each country for governments to address the structural and societal causes driving forced migration. These include pervasive corruption, corrosive levels of human rights abuses and impunity, gang and gender-based violence, poverty and inequality, exclusive economic models, and climate change. The letter urges the administration to consult with a wide range of civil society organizations in each country as it develops and implements this root cause strategy to ensure that the United States transforms diplomacy and aid so as not to repeat the mistakes of the past, including the ways in which U.S. policy has contributed to human rights violations and forced migration from the region."²⁵⁶

Caravan

At the end of the month, a new caravan formed in San Pedro Sula.²⁵⁷ Guatemala declared a state of prevention to close off the border²⁵⁸ and Mexico had already previously announced a border closure with Guatemala until April 21.²⁵⁹ After taking off, the migrants dispersed hoping to join up before the Guatemalan border.²⁶⁰ A day later, Reuters reported: "Honduran police on Tuesday turned back a U.S.-bound caravan of hundreds of migrants for lacking proper identification papers and proof of negative coronavirus tests, helping the U.S. government contain pressure on its southern border."²⁶¹

²⁵⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/23/joe-biden-mexico-migrants>

²⁵⁵ <https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/538301-the-root-cause-of-migration-to-the-united-states-mr-president-is-us>

²⁵⁶ <https://www.lawg.org/press-release-civil-society-organizations-urge-president-biden-and-vice-president-harris-to-not-repeat-mistakes-of-the-past-in-central-america/>

²⁵⁷ <https://proceso.hn/una-caravana-sui-generis-se-organiza-en-san-pedro-sula/>

²⁵⁸ <https://criterio.hn/guatemala-emite-estado-de-prevencion-ante-nueva-caravana-migrante-de-honduras/>

²⁵⁹ <https://radioprogreso.hn/noticias-nacionales/ni-con-visa-se-puede-ingresar-a-mexico-via-terrestre/>

²⁶⁰ <https://radioprogreso.hn/aplicacion-movil/en-pequenos-grupos-avanza-caravana-de-migrantes-con-rumbo-a-la-frontera/>

²⁶¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-honduras/honduras-police-turn-back-u-s-bound-migrant-caravan-idUSKBN2BM27J?>

Elections

As the month started, Honduras was just two weeks away from the primary elections and problems abound. "The primary and internal elections of March 14, under the responsibility of a new governing body, will be governed under two mechanisms that make noise on the issue of transparency: there will be no quick ballot box count to give a preliminary trend, but it will be done under the mechanism of exit voting, and the control unit of the Clean Politics Act, enters to follow the trail of campaign money without all the necessary tools to prevent the entry of dirty money."²⁶² And very symptomatic of this uncertainty, on March 2, several CNE officials tested positive for corona.²⁶³ Another day later, CNE council member Rixi Moncada warned that 1.6 million Hondurans would not be able to vote in the primaries as they were moved from their voting centers and do not appear in the electoral rolls as they should have appeared.²⁶⁴

CESPAD looked back at the history of the electoral bodies in Honduras up to its newest iteration, the National Electoral Council (CNE). CESPAD presents five initial conclusions: "Today's CNE is more transparent than the old TSE; Recognition that the CNE plenary represents the parties; The Liberal Party consolidates its independence from the National Party; Deputy councilors continue the tradition of minority parties; Designing the rules of the electoral game on the fly".²⁶⁵ So far, most of the news on the electoral process came from the CNE, but this month the Electoral Justice Tribunal (TJE) also commented on the situation. "The president of the Electoral Justice Tribunal (TJE), Gaudy Bustillo, expressed this Wednesday that "they are concerned that in such a short time we do not have clear rules" for the primary elections in the country."²⁶⁶

On March 5, it was reported that a criminal complaint was presented against the pre-candidate to the presidency of Honduras for the Liberal Party, Yani Benjamín Rosenthal Hidalgo, for the crimes of money laundering and illicit association.²⁶⁷ Rosenthal is a convicted drug trafficker who was imprisoned in the US before returning to Honduras.²⁶⁸

Proces Digital published an overview of the violence accompanying the electoral process with various candidates having been murdered (see also last month).²⁶⁹ Criterio, meanwhile, focused on the lack of transparency in party financing.²⁷⁰ "Despite evidence of looting of public funds for campaign expenses and allegations of financing from drug trafficking, no party or politician has been charged in the courts."²⁷¹ "The former Attorney General of the Constitution, René Adán Tomé, asked this Wednesday the authorities of the National Electoral Council (CNE) to disqualify for

262 <https://proceso.hn/primarias-sin-reformas-para-fiscalizar-dinero-y-sin-conteo-rapido/>

263 <https://confidencialhn.com/a-cuarentena-servidores-del-cne-por-resultar-positivos-a-covid-19/>

264 <https://criterio.hn/1-6-millones-ciudadanos-enrolados-tendrian-problemas-para-ejercer-sufragio-en-elecciones-primarias/>

265 <http://cespad.org.hn/2021/03/04/analisis-el-consejo-electoral-pone-a-prueba-su-nuevo-modelo-multipartidista/>

266 <https://confidencialhn.com/tje-senala-preocupado-que-ha-pocos-dias-de-los-comicios-primarios-no-existan-reglas-claras/>

267 <https://proceso.hn/interponen-denuncia-ante-el-mp-contra-yani-y-yankel-rosenthal-y-jefe-de-los-cachiros-por-lavado/>

268 <https://criterio.hn/presentan-denuncia-criminal-contra-yani-rosenthal-precandidato-a-la-presidencia-de-honduras/>

269 <https://proceso.hn/hechos-violentos-han-acompanado-el-proceso-electoral/>

270 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/10/abogado-pide-al-cne-inhabilite-a-cuatro-aspirantes-presidenciales-por-actos-de-corrupcion/>

271 <https://criterio.hn/fiscalizacion-politica-en-honduras-una-mision-que-no-logra-despegar/>

apparent acts of corruption the presidential aspirants of the Liberal Party Yani Rosenthal Hidalgo and Ángel Darío Banegas and Mauricio Oliva and Nasry Asfura of the National Party."²⁷²

As many Hondurans were about to be left out of the electoral process (see above), the CNE decided on March 9 to allow the printing of the electoral booklets with special lists of the people who were left out of the electoral census. "The representative of the Liberal Party in the governing body of the elections assured that the decision was made based on the right of suffrage of the people and not prioritizing administrative divisions. Like Hall, the representative of Libertad y Refundación (Libre), Rixi Moncada, pointed out that the action is legal because the interests of three sick councilors who defend the position of the National Party should not take precedence over the inalienable right to vote."²⁷³ The National Party denounced this as illegal and even accused Moncada for abuse of authority at the MP.²⁷⁴

On March 12 and until March 16, the constitutional restrictions in place for almost a year were suspended due to the primary elections.²⁷⁵ MADJ published a "call to vote without becoming accomplices of those who have assaulted the Honduran State".²⁷⁶ The National Anti-Corruption Council (CNA) sees the starting electoral cycle as "the peaceful way to change the destiny of Honduras, which has been hit by drug trafficking and corruption". In the past, it did not turn out this way.²⁷⁷ Radio Progreso looked at the statements and promises made by some candidates. "Honduras is a few hours away from the primary elections in which the final candidates for various elected positions will be chosen. At the closing of the campaigns, politicians of the National, Liberal and Libre parties, took advantage of the occasion to spread demagoguery, lies and superficial promises."²⁷⁸ Apart from this, there is also the problem of still unclear "rules of the game".²⁷⁹ And last but not least, the Electoral Justice Tribunal (TJE) showed in a first case that it is without teeth.²⁸⁰

And then, on Sunday March 14, the primary elections took place. A day before, the UN published a press release calling for transparent and fair elections.²⁸¹ COFADEH was not so hopeful. "The mood leading up to Sunday is not the best, because the waters are rough. And because we are going to stand in line without vaccination against the pandemic. And because we will open a huge ballot full of faces of people under public questioning for corruption, for money laundering, for drug trafficking and other organized crimes. And because the ballot boxes are under the custody of the armed forces, which have facilitated the transportation of cocaine and other drugs."²⁸²

272 <https://criterio.hn/seguira-el-narcotrafico-y-la-corrupcion-financiando-las-campanas-politicas-en-honduras/>

273 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/09/hall-y-moncada-aprueban-cuadernillos-electorales-partido-nacional-senala-que-es-ilegal/>

274 <https://proceso.hn/pn-denuncia-ante-el-mp-por-abuso-de-autoridad-a-concejera-rix-moncada/>

275 <https://radioprogreso.hn/aplicacion-movil/desde-hoy-hasta-el-martes-no-hay-toque-de-queda-tampoco-restriccion-de-la-circulacion/>

276 <https://madj.org/index.php/2021/03/12/resistir-al-fraude-electoral/>

277 <https://twitter.com/cnahonduras/status/1370516361278021632>

278 <https://hurgandoenlabasura.radioprogreso.hn/2021/03/12/mentiras-y-promesas-superficiales-la-constante-de-politicos-en-sus-cierres-de-campana/>

279 <https://criterio.hn/reglas-del-juego-tardias-y-confusas-para-las-elecciones-del-domingo/>

280 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2759-honduras-justicia-electoral-no-tocara-a-criminales-del-voto>

281 <https://honduras.un.org/es/116195-comunicado-del-sistema-de-las-naciones-unidas-sobre-elecciones-primarias-en-honduras>

282 <https://www.defensoresenlinea.com/aqui-no-pasa-nada/>

When the polls closed, the CNE announced that the final results would be reported five days later with the first projections being published on the day after the elections.²⁸³ Exit polls, meanwhile, projected a clear victory for Xiomara Castro (Libre), the mayor of Tegucigalpa facing corruption charges Nasry Asfura (National Party) and the convicted drug trafficker Yani Rosenthal (Liberal Party).²⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the lack of same day results let to several candidates declaring themselves the winner and to denouncing possible fraud.^{285 286} "The National Electoral Council (CNE), with all the technology and enough time for a transparent process and without the vices of the past, has not been able to manage internal elections that respond to the urgency of democracy for the people and creates uncertainty because there will be no official data until the electoral suitcases arrive. In this context, the "exit polls" make their way to manipulate results and popular perception, this time the political crisis is installed from the internal elections, regrets the former electoral official, Enrique Ortiz Sequeira."²⁸⁷ Additionally, ConexiHon reported on some incidents in which journalists were hindered from doing their work.²⁸⁸

The situation grew more tense the next day, as the CNE failed to present the first official projections.^{289 290} On Tuesday, there were still no official projections.²⁹¹ The same day, Pasos de Animal Grande denounced. "An exaggerated military deployment that continues to this day, and repression against the population to promote the reelection of a mayor who supports the Progelsa hydroelectric company, denounced human rights defenders in the sector, who fear a fatal outcome due to this arbitrariness."²⁹² And then, finally, on Wednesday night at 9pm, the first projections were published. They reflected the exit polls with Yani Rosenthal (Liberal), Nasy Asfura (National) and Xiomara Castro (Libre) in the lead.²⁹³ But this did not stop the voices denouncing fraud.^{294 295} Sociologist Víctor Meza said: "We are in the presence of a serious, complex and difficult moment, because those who lead the electoral bodies do not represent the citizenry or society, but rather the petty interests of their parties. (...) They are mired in personal quarrels, disagreements, disqualifications and showbiz conflicts, which make them seem more protagonists of a media ambition than of a fulfillment of their functions in the name of democracy."²⁹⁶ Over the following days, the CNE published further projections reflecting the same trend.^{297 298 299}

283 <https://proceso.hn/no-estamos-en-silencio-estamos-trabajando-dice-consejera-hall-que-promete-resultados-para-la-posteridad/>

284 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2021/1449769-508/resultados-proyecciones-elecciones-honduras-2021>

285 <https://criterio.hn/nasry-asfura-y-mauricio-oliva-se-declaran-ganadores-en-el-partido-nacional/>

286 <https://criterio.hn/luis-zelaya-denuncia-fraude-en-el-partido-liberal/>

287 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2771-otra-vez-institucion-electoral-falla-a-hondurenos>

288 <http://www.conexihon.hn/index.php/libertad-de-expresion/1832-al-cierre-de-urnas-conteo-de-agresiones-a-la-libertad-de-expresion-y-de-prensa>

289 <https://www.reporterosdeinvestigacion.com/2021/03/15/24-horas-de-silencio-y-oscuridad-del-cne/>

290 <https://criterio.hn/lueven-criticas-al-cne-por-falta-de-conteo-rapido-en-elecciones-primarias/>

291 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2777-honduras-50-horas-despues-de-elecciones-y-aun-no-hay-resultados-oficiales>

292 <https://pasosdeanimalgrande.com/es-co/denuncias/item/3112-honduras-hostilidad-y-militarizacion-contra-personas-defensoras-de-ddhh-en-reitoca>

293 <https://proceso.hn/yani-en-pl-asfura-en-pn-y-xiomara-en-libre-lideran-en-primer-boletin-del-cne/>

294 <https://radioprogreso.hn/portada/observadores-denuncian-que-cne-no-esta-depurando-actas-con-vicios-de-nulidad/>

295 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2021/1450595-508/elecciones-primarias-honduras-fraude-inconsistencias-cne-aspirantes>

296 <https://proceso.hn/en-los-organos-electorales-se-defienden-intereses-mezquinos-partidarios-reprocha-analista-politico/>

297 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2021/1450886-508/segundo-boletin-cne-votos-nulos-blancos-elecciones-primarias-2021>

298 <https://proceso.hn/yani-nasry-y-xiomara-siguen-liderando-resultados-de-primarias/>

299 <https://www.elheraldo.hn/eleccioneshonduras2021/1451198-508/elecciones-honduras-cuarto-boletin-cne-votos-nulos-blanco>

On March 18, at the National Party Mauricio Oliva accepted his defeat to Asfura.³⁰⁰ At the Liberal Party, the situation remained tense. Luis Zelaya denounced that "that the highest electoral body has in its ranks several followers of his opponent Yani Rosenthal, who hold vital positions to question the scrutiny".³⁰¹ A day later, he even claimed that Rosenthal and his movement spent 500 million Lempiras to buy votes.³⁰² There is the question of how much of it will go to the courts. But there is one problem, the Electoral Justice Tribunal (TJE) does not yet count with a working electoral justice regulation.³⁰³

By March 22, the final results had still not been published as the CNE continued to postpone their publication.³⁰⁴ By the same time, Luis Zelaya and Darío Banegas from the Liberal Party requested the revision of 328 ballot, i.e. 57'643 votes.³⁰⁵ Luis Zelaya even called for the repetition of the elections.³⁰⁶ The next day, the likely Nationalist presidential candidate Nasry Asfura had several of his properties and companies seized as part of a corruption investigation.³⁰⁷ ³⁰⁸ The Electoral Justice Tribunal (TJE) announced that they would not act ex officio to truncate his aspiration, since this is the exclusive responsibility of the MP.³⁰⁹ It seems that Nationalist voters shrug off such things also shown by the man who got most votes in Yoro, Gabriel Rubí, who last year had to resign from Copeco under strong criticism for the purchase of supplies to attend the pandemic.³¹⁰

On March 24, the CNE announced to have processed all ballots at the presidential level. But 17.8% showed inconsistencies and errors. They had to be analyzed and the final result would not be published in the meantime.³¹¹ ³¹² By that time, part of the political opposition have formed an alliance for the coming general elections in November. It consists of Salvador Nasralla (has his own party), Luis Zelaya (who lost the Liberal primary to Yani Rosenthal), Nelson Ávila, Darío Banegas and Wilfredo Méndez (all three lost in the Libre primary to Xiomara Castro).³¹³

Radio Progreso spoke with political analyst Raúl Pineda Alvarado about "the possibilities of political alliances, the future of Juan Orlando Hernández, the betrayals in the National Party and why there is a fierce dispute for the control of the next National Congress".³¹⁴ Strengthened by the primary election convicted drug trafficker and likely Liberal presidential candidate Yani Rosenthal and his allies seem to one to clean house at the Liberal Party, i.e. get rid of their opponents. "Víctor Cubas, a Liberal leader who supports presidential candidate Yani Rosenthal, announced that they

300 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2781-honduras-con-10-de-votos-contados-mauricio-oliva-aplaude-su-derrota>

301 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2779-honduras-luis-zelaya-denuncia-infeccion-yanista-en-consejo-electoral>

302 <https://confidencialhn.com/nosotros-no-gastamos-l-500-millones-en-elecciones-comprando-votos-luis-zelaya/>

303 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/23/sin-ley-de-justicia-electoral-tje-asegura-estar-listo-para-recibir-apelaciones-a-los-resultados-de-las-primarias/>

304 <https://proceso.hn/hoy-finalizaria-conteo-de-votos-en-el-nivel-presidencial-segun-el-cne/>

305 <https://criterio.hn/liberales-presentan-impugnacion-por-328-actas-adulteradas-que-favorecen-a-rosenthal/>

306 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/22/cne-reconoce-posible-fraude-luis-los-tacha-de-sinverguezas-y-pide-nuevos-comicios/>

307 <https://proceso.hn/ordenan-aseguramientos-de-bienes-al-edil-nasry-asfura/>

308 <https://confidencialhn.com/mp-ejecuta-medida-de-aseguramiento-sobre-13-bienes-vinculados-a-nasry-asfura/>

309 <http://www.web.ellibertador.hn/index.php/noticias/nacionales/2799-honduras-tribunal-electoral-no-actuara-de-oficio-contr-a-alcalde-asfura>

310 <https://confidencialhn.com/gabriel-rubi-acusado-del-saqueo-a-copeco-es-el-mas-votado-en-yoro/>

311 <https://radioprogreso.hn/aplicacion-movil/cne-concluye-procesamiento-de-actas-en-el-nivel-presidencial/>

312 <https://proceso.hn/el-17-8-de-actas-presentan-inconsistencias-y-no-se-suben-al-conteo-hasta-que-se-resuelvan-cne/>

313 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/24/oficializan-la-primera-coalicion-politica-nombrada-como-alianza-de-la-honestidad/>

314 <https://radioprogreso.hn/portada/el-candidato-de-juan-orlando-herandez-siempre-fue-joh/>

will demand at the Liberal Party convention the expulsion of Luis Zelaya, Eduardo Martell, Enrique Orteza Sequeira and Octavio Pineda, considering them "traitors".³¹⁵ At the same time, Manuel Zelaya called for a united opposition in reaction to a group of opposition movements who had announced an alliance on Wednesday. At the same time, he insisted that the presidential candidate of such a united opposition should be the one who got the most votes during the primaries, i.e. his wife Xiomara Castro.³¹⁶

The CNE presented a report on irregularities during the primary election.³¹⁷ Luis Zelaya, former Liberal presidential candidate in 2017, presented a formal complaint at the MP denouncing that various ballots of the Liberal primary had been adulterated.³¹⁸ The aspiring Nationalist mayoral candidate Juan Diego Zelaya presented 149 ballots with inconsistencies to the CNE.³¹⁹ And so did Libre candidates Julissa Villanueva and Olivia Zúniga Cáceres.³²⁰ The same day, on March 25, the CNE started to analyze the ballots they themselves had sorted out due to inconsistencies.³²¹

On March 28, the CNE published the first results of their re-count of flagged ballots. The results confirmed the general trend with Yani Rosenthal, Nasry Asfura and Xiomara Castro as the winners.³²² In its newest update, the National Party has over 1 million votes, the Liberal Party 732'000 and Libre 472'000. At the same time, Libre presidential candidate Xiomara got more votes than the likely Liberal candidate Yani Rosenthal.³²³

"For the lawyer Ramón Enrique Barrios, analyst and former Judge of Sentences, in the next general elections it will be much more important to have control of the National Congress than of the Presidency of the Republic. "Congress will elect the next Attorney General of the Republic, the Supreme Court of Justice, the next Procurator General of the Republic, the Superior Court of Accounts, and will elect the next members of the National Electoral Council. The most important institutionality of this country will be elected in the National Congress", said Barrios."³²⁴ Criterio published an analysis of the primaries by Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle who focused on the situation at Libre.³²⁵

315 <https://elpulso.hn/2021/03/25/afines-al-vanismo-exigiran-expulsion-de-luis-zelaya-y-otros-por-considerarlos-traidores/>

316 <https://tiempo.hn/mela-alianza-nasralla-y-luis/>

317 <https://twitter.com/cnahonduras/status/1375522569403650053>

318 <https://confidencialhn.com/luis-zelaya-interpone-denuncia-ante-el-mp-por-actas-adulteradas/>

319 <https://proceso.hn/juan-diego-zelaya-impugna-149-actas-por-presentar-inconsistencias-ante-el-cne/>

320 <https://proceso.hn/precandidatas-a-diputadas-de-libre-presentan-impugnaciones-en-el-cne/>

321 <https://tiempo.hn/cne-conteo-actas-con-inconsistencias/>

322 <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1453018-410/reconteo-actas-votos-favorece-nasry-yani-rosenthal>

323 <https://proceso.hn/pn-supera-el-millon-de-votos-el-pl-los-732-mil-y-libre-los-472-mil-en-ultimo-conteo-del-cne/>

324 <https://radioprogreso.hn.net/portada/politicos-se-disputan-control-del-proximo-congreso-nacional/>

325 <https://criterio.hn/de-fraudes-alanzas-espejismos-y-prospectos/>

Eta and Iota

The JOH regime presented its reconstruction plans yesterday in reaction to last year's hurricanes Eta and Iota. The first phase will cost 19 billion Lempiras.³²⁶ The UN in Honduras published a new report on the situation in Honduras after the hurricanes Eta and Iota last November.³²⁷

And Light at the End of a Month

Again this month, there are two good news items, both related to court decisions. First, "[t]he Administrative Court of Appeals, on behalf of the State of Honduras, recognized through a court ruling the violation of the right to food and health of the Tolupan tribe of San Francisco Locomapa in the department of Yoro, northern Honduras."³²⁸ Second, "[o]n March 12, eight years after our compañera Lilian Borjas, peasant woman, community leader, defender of land and territory faced a long judicial process plagued with irregularities and inconsistencies, the Sentencing Court of El Progreso, Yoro, ruled final dismissal for the crime of usurpation. Lilian, who is a member of the CNTC del Progreso, a member organization of the National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras, together with eleven members of the peasant group "Triunfo de la Bolsa", undertook a strong struggle for their territories that were irregularly granted by the State of Honduras to a privileged family in the area."³²⁹

326 <https://proceso.hn/gobierno-invertira-1-19-mil-millones-en-primera-fase-de-reconstruccion-nacional-anuncia-ministro-madero/>

327 <https://honduras.un.org/es/116020-informe-de-situacion-no9-honduras-tormentas-tropicales-eta-e-iota>

328 <https://criterio.hn/juzgado-obliga-a-municipalidad-de-yoro-garantizar-alimentacion-de-tolupanes-durante-la-emergencia-sanitaria/>

329 <http://im-defensoras.org/2021/03/red-nacional-de-defensoras-de-ddhh-en-honduras-logramos-el-sobreseimiento-definitivo-para-la-defensora-de-la-tierra-y-territorio-lilian-borjas/>

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-

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