

HONDURAS ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT – PROAH

SUMMARY OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND EVENTS IN HONDURAS AUGUST & SEPTEMBER 2014

August and September brought two anniversaries which highlight worrying aspects of the public security system. On August 25 last year three members of the Tolupan indigenous people from **Locomapa** were murdered by hitmen in the pay of illegal mining and logging interests. Despite being subject to arrest warrants, their killers still remain at large and are continuing to intimidate the population (P.17). September 15 marked the anniversary of the first presentation of the **Public Order Military Police (PMOP)** to the public and since then one of their primary functions appears to have been to intimidate critics of the government – including the raid on the home of a doctor who has been vocal in condemning conditions at the hospital where he works (P.25). The incident occurs against the background of a **host of disturbing revelations about the conduct of the security forces** - further allegations of high-ranking police officers being involved in death squads (P.24), as well as cases where soldiers have been charged with death squad-style killings (P.26). A study has found that 6 out of every 10 people detained are tortured by the police (P.23). There have also been reports of a case where the police have been complicit in the kidnapping and torture of two fishermen (P.21), and another where soldiers were directly responsible for the torture of two miners (P.26). The Miskito people have formally complained to the President about the increasing number of human rights abuses committed by the police and army since La Moskitia became militarized in the war on drugs (P. 16). Meanwhile, the military are taking increasing control of the **prison system**, contrary to recommendations by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) (P.22).

The extent of the consultation process on the **Draft Law to Protect Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Media Workers, and Justice Operators** was welcomed by human rights groups (P.2). The need for its quick and effective implementation was underlined by the **number of murders** of members of these groups in August and September – veteran land rights campaigner Margarita Murillo (P.3), two journalists (P.5) and two lawyers (P.8) - as well as the numerous examples of threats and intimidation.

Teachers have been identified as another vulnerable group, with one murdered every month (P.8). The **murders of women** were also the focus of attention, both at the hearing of the IACHR in August (below and P. 9), and with the visit of Alda Facio, member of the UN Working Group on discrimination against women (P.10). The violation of **Garifuna land rights** was also a prominent issue, with the hearing on Punta Piedra at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights coinciding with a series of land evictions (P.12).

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights – 152nd session

The IACHR held its [152nd special session](#) in Mexico City on August 11-15, 2014. Honduras was one of the seven countries for which there were public hearings. The subjects raised by Honduran human rights organizations included the worsening of violence in the **Bajo Aguán** region and the continuing impunity for the murders of campesinos there, the dramatic rise in the **killings of women** (see P.9), as well as the banning of **emergency contraceptive pills** since the coup (see P.10). They also raised the increase in **violence against LGBTI persons**, and the **growing militarization** of the State's various security functions. On **migrant children**, the organizations highlighted as push factors the all-pervasive violence in Honduras, as well as the fact that 45.3 % of people live in extreme poverty. They stressed the need for the state to adopt comprehensive measures for the medium and long term to address the issue. This approach was supported by the IACHR, who also urged the State to avoid the

use of cooperation resources to increase militarization or to implement other repressive policies.¹ **The IACHR plans to visit Honduras** in December to conduct a review of the general human rights situation in the country.

A [regional roundtable discussion](#) on the **protection of women human rights defenders** in Mexico and Mesoamerica was held on the side-lines of the IACHR session, on 15 August, focusing on the need for stronger national implementation of a [UN General Assembly resolution on the protection of women human rights defenders](#), adopted last year.

Universal Periodic Review

The UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Honduras' human rights record is assuming increasing prominence, both for the government and NGOs, as it is scheduled for April-May 2015, with the deadline for the government's submission set for January. On September 22, the Ministry for Human Rights, Justice, Governance and Decentralization [announced](#) the establishment of a **Special Human Rights Response Group**, formed of over 25 state and civil society institutions, whose remit appears to be to draft the government's submissions to various UN human rights bodies, such as the UPR and the Committee against Torture, to avoid imminent deadlines being missed. On the face of it, it seems a rather bizarre initiative, given that the whole point of having a state submission to these UN bodies is so that it can account for progress (or its lack) in meeting its international treaty obligations – NGOs can present their own shadow reports separately.

A number of organisations have already presented submissions to the UPR – for example, **PEN International** on freedom of expression (see P.4), **CESPAD** (Study Center for Democracy), on [the violation of electoral rights](#), **ODHINH** (Human Rights Observatory of the Indigenous Peoples of Honduras) (see P.11), as well as the **ISHR** (International Service for Human Rights) and **Protection International** on human rights defenders.

Draft Law to Protect Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Media Workers, and Justice Operators

Both **ISHR** and **Protection International**, in their UPR submissions, welcomed the Bill, as did a range of other bodies, including the **IACHR**, at its 152nd session. They also reminded the State that for this mechanism to be effective, the authorities needed to ensure that proper consultation was carried out with civil society and experts on the issue, and that the law was in line with international human rights standards. (**Protection International** and the **Center for Justice and International Law** (CEJIL), carried out a [joint mission](#) to Honduras from July 28 to August 2 to discuss the draft with politicians and the affected groups). **Amnesty International** in its [urgent action](#) on the murder of Margarita Murillo (see P.3), urged the Honduran government to approve and implement the law as soon as possible, and to provide adequate resources (including financial and human) for the establishment of an effective protection mechanism. By the end of September, the law was awaiting its third reading in Congress, before being adopted, following a consultation process² – described as 'comprehensive' by Protection International - with the affected groups in different parts of the country. The organization hailed the resulting revised draft as incorporating 'international standards and known best practices related to HRDs [human rights defenders] protection'. Now, the test will be whether adequate resources will be devoted to the protection mechanism, or whether the Honduran system will share the fate of the Mexican one which, [according to IAPA](#) (Inter-American Press Association), is unable to

1 The IACHR has [launched](#) a [report](#) 'Human Rights of Migrants and Other Persons in the Context of Human Mobility in Mexico', and on August 19 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued an [advisory opinion on the rights of migrant children](#).

2 See, for example, press release by Congress [Sociedad civil hace valiosos aportes de Ley de Protección de Periodistas](#)

function effectively as it is still under-resourced two years after its introduction.

ACI-PARTICIPA, with the support of the UNDP, published its [Situation Report for Human Rights Defenders in Honduras for 2014](#) (*Informe Situacional 2014 sobre Defensores y Defensoras de Derechos Humanos en Honduras*). According to the report, up to 17 September, at least five human rights defenders had been assassinated and around 50 had received death threats for defending the rights of their communities and the country's natural resources. The most recent murder victim mentioned was Margarita Murillo.

MURDER OF CAMPESINO LEADER MARGARITA MURILLO

As mentioned above, Amnesty International issued an [urgent action](#) about the murder of the prominent campesino leader Margarita Murillo, and the IACHR published a [press statement](#) expressing concern at the killing. She was shot dead on 27 August in the community of El Planón, in Villanueva municipality, to the south of San Pedro Sula, while she was working on the land. She had reported being under surveillance and receiving threats in the days leading up to her death. Margarita Murillo was the president of Las Ventanas Farming Cooperative (*Empresa Asociativa Campesina de Producción Las Ventanas*), which is part of the CNTC (National Farmworkers' Federation). She was also an active member of the Social Forum of the Sula Valley (*Foro Social del Valle de Sula*). On 19 August, she attended a very tense meeting at INA (National Agrarian Institute) concerning land disputes in Las Ventanas. [According to her daughter](#), the police found on Margarita Murillo's body a letter inviting her to another meeting with INA, but at the end asking her to leave things be if she wanted to avoid bloodshed. In April 2014, Raymundo García, the treasurer of Las Ventanas cooperative, died violently in circumstances that have yet to be clarified. On hearing of her death, the Honduran Congress held a minute's silence at the request of Alda Facio, Latin American representative on the UN Working Group on discrimination against women, who was due to give a speech there (see P.10 for more on her visit).

Margarita Murillo's partner [reported](#) that only two days after her funeral the police had turned up at her simple house in El Planón, close to her crops, to search it, destroying everything they found there in the process. They said that they were looking for an arms cache. The police then tried to do the same at Margarita Murillo's home in El Marañón in the same municipality, but her daughter refused them entry. It is considered another instance of the Government's demonization of the opposition movement.

Margarita Murillo's murder is a bitter blow for Honduran social movements, given her 40-year-long history of defending campesino and women's rights. She was a founding member of the CNTC and LIBRE, and was a congressional candidate for the party during the 2013 elections. In the 1980s she had suffered torture and persecution because her activism to the point where she was forced into exile until 1991. She had been granted precautionary measures by the IACHR since the coup, but they were never implemented.

[A range of organizations](#) have been demanding justice for her murder, as well as paying tribute to her – these include the [CPTRT](#), [COFADEH](#), [ERIC](#) which had named her Patriot of the Year in 2010 for her work with Honduran social movements.³

Villanueva, where Margarita Murillo's murder was committed, is the same municipality where **Pedro Antonio Chávez**, an FNRP leader, has been the target of constant police persecution, and was the victim of a failed murder attempt in July (see P.10 of our [July summary](#))

3 See also the moving obituary by Stephen Sefton [Margarita Murillo, 1960-2014, Heroína abnegada de la Revolución Centroamericana](#)

POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

Murders

Luis Fernando Rodríguez, an 18-year-old member of LIBRE Youth in Danlí, in the south of Honduras, was [found dead](#) on September 2. His family had last seen him alive when he left his home at 5pm on Saturday August 30. His body was found half-buried, in an advanced state of decay, at the entrance to the community of San Marcos Abajo.

On August 31, **Vidal Moisés Martínez**, former National Party candidate for mayor for San Jerónimo, Copán, was [shot dead](#) in El Alto, Florida municipality along with Reinaldo Ramírez, an engineer who was with him at the time. Martínez had been the target of a previous attempt on his life in which he was unhurt.

In neither case is there currently any indication of the motive for the murders.

Attempted murder

C-Libre [reported](#) that, on September 19, a man in police uniform fired at the car of **Silvia Ayala**, a lawyer, former LIBRE candidate and ex-Congressional representative for the UD (Democratic Union) Party. The incident happened at 2 pm on the beltway of San Pedro Sula, when she was driving her car with her young daughter. The attacker, who shot at the car twice, was traveling in a mini-bus without license plates. Silvia Ayala has been the victim of death threats in the past, such as [in 2012](#), which she linked directly to her candidature for LIBRE.

The Human Rights Network of the West (*Red Derechos Humanos de Occidente*) [reported](#) that one of their members, **José Augusto Moreno**, had been knocked down by a car, they believe deliberately. The incident occurred on September 17 at 6.30 pm in Santa Rosa de Copán, when a car without number plates accelerated along a main road and hit the victim, despite there being speed bumps. The Network believes it is connected to José Augusto Moreno's participation in the FNRP's alternative independence day march, in which he played Uncle Sam manipulating a puppet representing Juan Orlando Hernández. There is no information given about his condition.

JOURNALISTS

In preparation for the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Honduras, scheduled for April-May 2015, **PEN International, PEN Canada and University of Toronto** provided a [submission](#) on infringements of the right to freedom of expression, particularly impunity for attacks on journalists, since the last UPR, in November 2010. The submission is based on their 2014 joint report, [Honduras: Journalism in the Shadow of Impunity](#), and a follow-up field mission by PEN International from 27 July to 2 August 2014. It provides a survey and analysis of the types of attacks on journalists, ranging from surveillance and criminalization to murder, as well as the continuing institutional failures resulting in rampant impunity and the profession's acute vulnerability. **It characterizes the period under review - 2010-2014, as one of deterioration**, with 'an alarming climate of violence, impunity and fear'. It cites statistics produced by C-Libre, which recorded 191 acts of aggression against the right to freedom of expression and information in 2013, half targeting journalists and media outlets.⁴ This is a 40 per cent increase from 2012 (136 attacks), and a 66 per cent rise from 2011 (115 attacks).⁵ It states that while many of the areas of concern highlighted at the last UPR persist or have worsened, a large number of the advances praised at that time have been seriously undermined.

C-Libre has reported that in 2014, the situation continued to deteriorate, with journalists facing a period of increasing intimidation and restrictions on information. From January 1 to August 19, the organization had issued 43 alerts related to violations of freedom of expression, of which 58% were

⁴ C-Libre, [Despacho Urgente: Ni perseguidos, ni vigilados ¡Hagan Justicia! Informe 2013](#) p. 159-160

⁵ C-Libre, [¡Basta! Informe ¿Libertad de Expresión? 2012](#), p. 128.

committed by the state, whether by the security forces or state officials. The other main group (21%) committing violations of this right were owners and managers of media outlets, with a further 21% committed by 'persons unknown', but in many cases C-Libre believed were linked to organized crime. The organization also listed incidents in August itself, including statements by senior military officers delegitimizing the work of journalists, and instances where government officials had refused to provide information.

The US-based Committee to Protect Journalists produced an in-depth article [Who is killing Central America's journalists?](#) focusing on Honduras and Guatemala. It examines how the failure to investigate attacks on journalists, or to identify the masterminds behind them, has produced an information black hole, as journalists are too frightened to investigate certain stories, including organized crime.

Murders

Two murders of journalists in August, in the departments of Yoro and El Paraíso, bring **the number of media workers killed so far this year to seven.**

[Reporters without Borders](#) and the [IACHR](#) condemned the murder of the well-known **TV presenter and radio producer Nery Francisco Soto**, who was gunned down outside his home in Olanchito, in the northern department of Yoro, on the night of August 14. The gunmen shot him as he was putting his motorcycle inside his garage. The Olanchito authorities have ruled out robbery as a motive because his killers took nothing. On August 25, the police [arrested two men](#) in Olanchito in connection with the murder. The killing had provoked a [march](#) demanding that his killers be brought to justice. Colleagues say Soto, a *Canal 23* TV anchor and co-producer of Radio Full FM's *Cuarto Poder* (Fourth Estate) program, had been investigating corruption involving the mayor of the nearby city of Yoro, who is currently wanted for suspected money laundering. Three or four journalists from the channel have [already been threatened](#) by text message, e-mail or calls on air when they have dealt with subjects such as drug-trafficking and political corruption.

This is the **second killing in less than a month of a prominent TV journalist** from Yoro department. On July 21, **Herlyn Espinal**, chief correspondent on Televisión's news program *Hoy Mismo* (Today) was found shot dead in a field in Santa Cruz de Yojoa, a municipality south of San Pedro Sula (see P.8 of [July summary](#)). Héctor Hernández, the **Coordinator of Forensic Medicine in San Pedro Sula**, [was suspended without pay](#) for a fortnight and then demoted for making statements about the murder, including the fact that no evidence had been gathered from the scene 24-36 hours after his murder.

On August 21, another broadcaster, **Dagoberto Díaz**, was murdered, this time in Danlí, in the eastern department of El Paraíso. He was the owner of *Café Visión*, Channel 23, as well as being a primary school teacher. He was murdered in the center of the city at 8 pm after he had just got into his car, which was [surrounded by three masked men](#) who shot him in the head. He is the fourth journalist to be murdered in El Paraíso since the coup.

PEN International [issued a statement expressing concern at the murder of these three journalists in the space of little over month.](#)

According to a [report](#) by the **CONADEH** (National Human Rights Commissioner), **there have been 47 murders of journalists in Honduras since 2003**, of which 91% have gone unpunished. The breakdown by presidency is Ricardo Maduro (2002-2006) – 1; Manuel Zelaya (2006 - June 2009) – 5; Robert Micheletti (July 2009 – January 2010) – 1; Porfirio Lobo (February 2010 – December 2013) –

33. The total of seven murders during the presidency of Juan Orlando Hernández, his presidency (January 27 – September 2014), is an average of almost one journalist killed every month, which if it continues at the same rate for his whole presidency far exceed even the figure for Porfirio Lobo's term, which is itself unprecedentedly high.

Of the 7 murders this year, 3 were in the department of Yoro, 2 in Olancho, 1 in Copán and 1 in El Paraíso.

Impunity

PEN International issued an [action](#) pressing for an end to impunity for **the murder of Juan Carlos Argeñal Medina**, owner of Christian station Vida Televisión and a local correspondent for TV Globo. He was shot and killed by unidentified gunmen in his home in Danlí, on December 7, 2013. In the months before his murder, he had received death threats in connection with his reporting on corruption in a local hospital and in local government. Conexihon has published a series of in-depth articles on the case.⁶

Death threats

In late August, **María Chichilla**⁷ was [threatened](#) by three men while she was conducting an investigation for her work near Namasigüe, a border town in the department of Choluteca, in the south of Honduras. Three men in a car passed the journalist, who works for the independent news program *Abriendo Brecha*, and shouted 'We're going to kill you if you carry on doing that'. According to María Chichilla, one of the men had an accent from another Central American country. She has reported the incident to the authorities.

The television reporter **Rogelio Trejo** from the northern municipality of Choloma, department of Cortés, has received [death threats](#) issued by the son of the mayor, Leopoldo Crivelli. Trejo, a correspondent for the news program *Hable como Habla*, had investigated and criticized certain photos published on social networks of a visit that Crivelli made to the US. Crivelli is one of the mayors subject to a [major investigation](#), called 'Sindaco', by the authorities into municipal corruption and misuse of public funds. Among the entities involved in the operation is the US-trained UTIC (Transnational Criminal Investigation Unit).

Criminalization and censorship

[Reporters without Borders issued a statement](#) calling for the **immediate withdrawal of the criminal defamation action brought against David Romero Ellner**, the head of Radio Globo, by Sonia Inéz Gálvez, a lawyer married to the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Rigoberto Cuellar. The lawsuit could result in a sentence of up to 15 years in jail for Romero and the closure of Radio and TV Globo. In her suit, Gálvez accused Romero and three of his Globo colleagues – Ivis Alvarado, Rony Martínez and **César Silva** – of insulting and defaming her on the air by accusing her of abusing her influence over the Public Prosecution Service. More recently, Romero has accused Gálvez of trying to get the Prosecution Service to [manufacture a case against him](#). A few days before she filed her complaint, Romero reported having been threatened by suspicious individuals and accused Gálvez of being behind an attempt to intimidate him. As a result, Reporters without Borders [wrote](#) to the CONADEH asking for protection for the journalist. On August 25, the lawsuit was [accepted](#) by the Supreme Court in relation to Romero, but rejected for the other three. A [conciliation hearing](#) on September 22 failed to yield a result and so the case will now go to a full trial. Given the status of

6 Starting with [Políticos estaban incómodos por sus denuncias de corrupción cuando sicarios asesinaron a periodista Argeñal](#) on 4 September, 2014

7 Her surname is spelt 'Chinchilla' in some reports.

Radio and TV Globo as voices of the opposition, there were [protests](#) outside the main Prosecution Service building in support of the four journalists by members of the FNRP (National Popular Resistance Front).

Julio Ernesto Alvarado, a Radio Globo journalist, has had a **16-month ban on practicing his profession re-imposed by the court of appeal** on September 22, after being found guilty, in December 2013, of defamation. The ban had been lifted in April, but this decision was appealed against by Belinda Flores, a dean at UNAH (National Autonomous University of Honduras). She had brought the case of defamation against him essentially because he had given two lecturers air-time to accuse her of corruption, allegations already published in *El Heraldo* newspaper. While they were exonerated in a law-suit brought by the dean, he was found guilty. His case was taken up by PEN International, concerned that the judgment was politically motivated, and he has received death threats to himself and his family through his Facebook page since the ruling in December.⁸ PEN International has described this latest development as 'deeply disturbing', and Julio Ernesto Alvarado will appeal against the decision. IAPA also [condemned the ruling](#), and stated that it regretted the Honduran government's failure honor its commitment to decriminalize libel, calumny and defamation.

Reporters without Borders issued a [statement](#) expressing concern that the **program *Noticiero Independiente (Independent News)***, broadcast by Radio Estereo Castilla in Trujillo, was taken off the air on 20 August as a result of pressure from the city's mayor. The presenter **Miguel Dubon**, who is also a local Radio Globo correspondent, had [reported to C-Libre](#), that the electricity was cut off regularly at the time of program, known for its criticism of the local government. The mayor finally succeeded in getting Miguel Dubon fired after the journalist had reported on his program that the mayor had gone on an unauthorized trip to Spain, taking with him a cheque from the municipality for over 7,000 dollars in expenses. The radio station's manager told Dubon that his program, which had been broadcast for 12 years, was being canceled as a result of pressure from the local authorities and from a representative of CONATEL (National Telecommunications Commission), both of which threatened to close the station down. CONATEL had apparently told the radio manager that if he wanted to continue broadcasting, the station would have to move to Castilla, as it did not have a license for the city of Trujillo. However, C-Libre [confirmed](#) that, according to CONATEL's website, the license was for the whole of the municipality of Trujillo, and so the threat was baseless.

CONATEL is also [threatening to close down](#) the **Garífuna radio station Radio Sugua**, based in Sambo Creek. It was set up in 2009, in the wake of the coup, as an alternative to the information control imposed by the mainstream media and as a means of strengthening Garífuna culture and language. According to the [summons](#) issued by CONATEL, it came to its attention in December 2013 (that is, four years after Radio Sugua first came on air) that it was using a frequency without authorization. CONATEL asked the Radio to provide information in its defense by September 17 and threatened to report it to the Public Prosecution Service. It could result in the Radio's closure. The summons refers to OFRANEH as the Radio's proprietor, which is not the case, strengthening suspicions that CONATEL is using the threat of closure as a means of intimidating the organization, at a time when tensions have increased because of a series of evictions affecting Garífuna communities (see P. 12).

The journalist **Gilberto Gálvez** was [threatened](#) by the lawyer and town councilor Melida Isis Velásquez

⁸ PEN International [Honduras: Increased harassment of journalists Julio Ernesto Alvarado and Dina Meza must cease](#)

that she would take out a lawsuit against him if he did not apologize to Gilma Ondina Castillo, mayor of La Paz in the west of the country. Gálvez, who is a correspondent for Channel TEN and HRN in the capital as well as a local news program, *Construyendo Sociedad* (Building Society), was threatened after he publicized the fact that the municipal council of La Paz had decided not to work Saturdays, as from September 3.

LAWYERS

Two lawyers were killed in San Pedro Sula in the space of two days.

The first victim, [Dilmer Eusebio Reyes Torres](#) was traveling in a car with his brother on the San Pedro Sula beltway on September 16 when four men on motorbikes drew alongside and started shooting at them. The brothers tried to escape but drove off the road and hit a tree. One of the killers went over to the car to finish the brothers off. Dilmer Reyes was a prominent criminal lawyer who had his own law practice in the Medina neighborhood. In 2010, his father and a nephew were murdered and one of his brothers was murdered last year. The police were pursuing two theories – that the killing was related to Dilmer Reyes' profession or to the area where he lived. The brother who died with him normally lived in the US, but owned a number of school canteens in San Pedro.

The second victim, [Rafael Paredes Paz](#) had just arrived at his house in his car at 11 am on September 18 when two men got out of another car, opened his car door by force and then shot him. One theory is that they wished to steal his car and he put up resistance. He was a former employee of Puerto Cortés municipality. He was not involved in litigation, but rather acting as a notary, and according to his family had not mentioned any threats or problems which could have resulted in his murder.

According to a [report](#) by the CONADEH, **at least 81 lawyers have been murdered since 2010**, 5 of them in 2014. This compares to 29 in 2013. From 2010 to date, the departments with the highest death tolls have been Francisco Morazan (which includes Tegucigalpa) with 31 murders, and Cortes (which includes San Pedro Sula) with 26.

Mario Díaz, Vice-President of the AJD (Association of Judges for Democracy) has [expressed concern](#) at the **total lack of protection for judges** at the moment which is affecting the operation of the justice system. Six judges working in Tegucigalpa have brought a lawsuit because some of the trials they preside over are related to organized crime, such as murders and blackmail, and as a result they are receiving death threats. The problem is nationwide, and the threats primarily arise in cases involving economic interests, for example, organized crime, as well as labor issues. The AJD has made proposals to the Supreme Court, and latterly the Judiciary Council, on the issue but there has been no response. The AJD complains that the government, when drawing up the draft Law to Protect Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Media Workers, and Justice Operators, has made no attempt to consult judges working in criminal law on the type of security measures they may need. It feels that, in the absence of such measures for judges, sensitive criminal cases ought to be heard by special judges with proper protection.

TEACHERS

The Violence Observatory of the UNAH (National Autonomous University of Honduras) has [announced](#) that **a teacher is murdered every month in Honduras**. From 2009 to 2014, 83 teachers have been killed, with the worst year 2011, with a death toll of 20. This year, 8 teachers had been murdered up to the end of August, most of them working in primary schools, a number on a par with other vulnerable professions, such as journalists and lawyers. The Observatory expressed concern at the psychological effect on the teachers' pupils. It attributed many of the deaths to the teachers' trying to dissuade children or youths from criminal activities.

The latest victim was [Héctor Augusto López Tábora](#), Deputy Principal of the José Castro López

Secondary School in Cofradía, department of Cortes. On August 2 his body was found dumped, with his hands and feet bound and a plastic bag over his head. Immediately after his killing, the motive being explored by the police was robbery, given that his car was missing.

What appears to be missing from the Violence Observatory's analysis of the murders of teachers, as reported, is any possibility that there may be a **political motive**, given that many teachers and their unions have been known for their opposition to the coup. According to the alternative Commission of Truth, up to March 2011, 13 teachers had died in the post-coup period in circumstances suggesting that they were executed for political reasons.⁹

CIPRODEH STAFF THREATENED

There were **two incidents in the space of eight days** in which members of CIPRODEH (Center for the Investigation and Promotion of Human Rights) received death threats.

Wilfredo Méndez, the organization's director, issued a [statement](#) saying that the death threats, intimidation and attacks on him had increased this year. The latest [incident](#) was on August 22, when he was on a work visit to the Bajo Aguán with colleagues from CIPRODEH. They were in a car at a petrol station when two other cars parked immediately in front and behind them to prevent them escaping. The men in the two cars pointed guns at the CIPRODEH staff and issued death threats. The Coalition against Impunity (*Coalición contra la Impunidad*) [published a statement in support of CIPRODEH and condemning the attack.](#)

The second incident, on August 30, concerned **Erick Martínez**, another member of CIPRODEH's staff. According to his [statement](#), at about 1pm he was in his car with his mother and sisters in Tegucigalpa, when a man on motorbike pulled up beside him and said, “I know you and I know who you are. I'm not going to fill you with lead because your women are here. Wherever I next see you I'm going to murder you.” While the man was saying this he was touching underneath his shirt as if threatening to take out the gun that he had concealed there. He then went off on his motorbike, which did not have license plates.

WOMEN

IACHR – Violent deaths of women

A coalition of women's organizations¹⁰ participated in the hearing on Honduras during the **IACHR's 152nd period of sessions**. They reported that the rate of violent deaths of women rose from 2.7 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2005 to 14.6 in 2013, with 636 women killed in 2013 alone. Reports of missing women rose from 91 in 2008 to 347 in 2013. There is reportedly a 95% impunity rate in cases involving sexual violence and killings of women. Despite femicides having been a specific crime in the Penal Code since April 2013, so far only 5 people had been charged with the offense and only one person sentenced.¹¹

The issue has a particular resonance this year, as it is the 20th anniversary of the [Convention of Belém Pará \(Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women\)](#).

9 P.92 of Commission of Truth's report [The Voice of Greatest Authority is that of the Victims'](#)

10 Women's Forum for Life (*Foro de Mujeres por la Vida*), CDM (Women's Rights Center), CEM-H (Center for Women's Studies), CLADEM-Honduras (Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights), the National Network of Women's Human Rights Defenders (*Red Nacional de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos*) and JASS (Just Associates)

11 See <https://www.justassociates.org/en/node/1965> for the statistics and videos of the various parts of the IACHR hearing relating to women

Acts of violence against women in 2014

CDM [published](#) a map of acts of violence against women for the first half of 2014. According to the organization, there had been 187 violent deaths of women recorded in the press up to the end of June, as compared to 225 in the same period for 2013, which would indicate a 17% reduction this year. However, CDM believes that was not necessarily the case as the figures were only based on press reports, as **official figures were not totally reliable**, with under-recording, or long delays in registering cases. Furthermore, the Ministry of Security and the Forensic Medicine Department refused access to their figures. This is a problem which has dogged the previously authoritative figures produced by UNAH's Violence Observatory.

The [discrepancies in figures produced](#) by the Violence Observatory and the Government, in terms of the overall murder rates, became evident by the end of 2013, with UNAH reporting a year-end homicide rate of 83 per 100,000, while police reported that murders had dropped to a rate of 75.1 per 100,000, with the difference reportedly due to the National Police not recording 700 apparent homicides in which no autopsy was performed.¹²

Model Protocol for investigations and prosecutions for femicides in Latin America

The UN Human Rights Office and UN Women [announced](#) that they had developed a [Model Protocol](#) to guide investigations and prosecutions launched in the wake of gender-based murders of women in Latin America as a means of seeking to end impunity for them.

Visit by member of the UN Working Group on discrimination against women

The Costa Rican lawyer **Alda Facio**, member of the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, representing Latin American and Caribbean States, visited Honduras at the end of August. She expressed concern about the level of femicides and general violence in the country as well as widespread discrimination against women, both rich and poor, when she [spoke](#) to the Congress on August 27. She said that there was a perception within the UN that the Honduran Government was not doing very much to address these problems and did not take its obligations seriously. For her, one indication of that was the **state's failure to submit its report on its compliance with CEDAW** (UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women), due in April 2012, as well as **its failure to adopt the Optional Protocol to CEDAW**. This would allow individual women to make formal complaints to the CEDAW Committee, which would investigate them and could give rise to recommendations to the state and possibly country visits.

Domestic Violence Act

On a happier note, on August 20, **Congress passed a law [rescinding controversial amendments to the Domestic Violence Act](#)**. The law was presented by Doris Gutiérrez, the sole congressional representative of PINU-SD (Social Democratic Innovation and Unity Party). It concerned Article 23 of the Domestic Violence Act which, under the amendment passed last year, imposed confidentiality upon legal proceedings, with only the parties directly concerned and judicial authorities allowed access to details of the case. The abolition of the provision represents a victory for women's organizations which, as members of the [National Campaign against Femicides](#), led objections to it on the basis that it could deny victims of domestic violence the right to justice because it prevented them from receiving support from women's rights organizations during the proceedings. It also meant that the media could not report on the case, which the organizations considered unconstitutional in imposing secrecy on a social issue of public interest. By June 5, over [200 legal challenges](#) to the new Article 23 on constitutional grounds had been filed with the Supreme Court. Under the new provision, victims of

12 See Insight Crime article [Is Honduras Faking its Falling Homicide Rates?](#)

domestic violence will also not be forced to confront the perpetrator if they are not emotionally fit to do so.

Emergency contraceptive pills

When the issue of the post-coup ban on emergency contraceptive pills (ECPs) was raised at the IACHR hearing in August, the IACHR Chair, who is also Rapporteur on the Rights of Women, underscored that it has been widely documented and proved that emergency contraceptives were not abortion methods. Medecins sans Frontieres has [expressed concern](#) at the ban, which leaves many victims of sexual violence little option but to resort to unsafe illegal abortions if they become pregnant. In most cases of rape reported to the Public Prosecution Service the victims are girls aged 10 to 14.

LGBTI

Break-in

During the night of September 29, the **offices of the LGBTI rights organization APUVIMEH** (Association for a Better Life) in Tegucigalpa were [broken into](#). The only items stolen were laptops containing confidential information, including the database of the organization's workers and beneficiaries. APUVIMEH reported the burglary to the authorities, but when a forensic team arrived at the scene, they said that they had no powder to take finger-prints and did not take the CCTV footage of the burglary. APUVIMEH were granted precautionary measures on January 22¹³ but they have been unable to contact the person in the Ministry of Security responsible for following up on the security measures ordered for the organization. The incident follows a similar burglary of the offices of the LGBTI Rainbow Association (*Asociación LGTBI Arcoíris*) in September 2013, during which, again, only a computer was taken.

Kidnap Attempt

Nelson Arambú, co-founder of the Violet Collective (*Colectivo Violeta*) and Kulkulcán Association (*Asociación Kulkulcán*) [reported](#) that he was the victim of a failed kidnap attempt on September 15 near his home in Tegucigalpa. He was walking along a deserted street in the afternoon when he noticed a large unmarked vehicle with tinted windows following him. He then felt someone grab his shirt from behind, and a second man came out of the vehicle and struck him in the back. Fortunately he managed to escape. The incident took place as Nelson Arambú was returning home from a march protesting at the government's failure to address the violence and poverty in the country. He does not know why the men tried to kidnap him. He reported having received insults and threats from fake Facebook profiles in the weeks leading up to the incident.

LGBTI Coalition issues report on attacks

A new report launched on August 21 by the National AIDS Forum (*Foro Nacional de Sida*), LGBTI Rainbow Association, Amazonas Collective (*Colectiva Amazonas*) and Progresio/Latina identified **the police as responsible for most cases of aggressions and rights violations against the LGBTI community**. Members of organized crime groups and street gangs are also responsible for many abuses, forcing members of the community to sell drugs and perform sexual acts. According to the report, 178 members of the LGBTI community have been murdered in Honduras since 2009.¹⁴

This LGBTI coalition is proposing [changes in public policy](#) to protect the right to sexual diversity, including hate crimes against LGTBI people being designated as specific crimes within the Penal Code.

13 PM 457/13 - Members of "Asociación para una Vida Mejor de Honduras" (APUVIMEH) [Resolution](#) in Spanish only

14 InsightCrime [Police, Gangs Behind Abuse of Honduras' LGBTI Community](#) The report itself does not appear to be available on-line.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: ODHINH

ODHINH (Human Rights Observatory of the Indigenous Peoples of Honduras) has sent their **submission for the Universal Periodic Review** (as at October 2, it did not appear to be on-line). The submission largely reflects the [declaration](#) ODHINH made after its Workshop on Prior, Free and Informed Consultation and Consent on September 8. It refers to the great welter of regulations – such as for the ZEDEs and the Mining Act – adopted since the coup without due consultation. The submission points particularly to hydroelectric schemes, affecting the indigenous peoples of La Moskitia and the Lenca people in the west of the country, as well as the possibility of oil and gas extraction by BG Group in an environmentally-sensitive area of the Caribbean. It also mentions the Fishing Act, which was only discussed, before its adoption, with large fishing companies and a few cooperatives, but will have major implications for indigenous communities as it now permits large commercial boats to enter the 3-mile limit originally reserved for small-scale fishermen. In addition, Garífuna community land has come under increasing pressure from tourist projects. Although this process started in the 1990s, it has worsened since the coup, and it is significant that in a period in which the Punta Piedra case has been brought before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Court's judgment on *Triunfo de la Cruz* is imminent, the authorities have gone ahead with evictions affecting three Garífuna communities (see next page). The submission also refers to the illegal mining and logging on Tolupan territory, the impact of drug-trafficking and militarization on previously peaceful indigenous communities, including the Ahuas tragedy of May 2012, and the loss of food security.

GARÍFUNA PEOPLE

Punta Piedra – Hearing before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights heard the case of the Garífuna community of [Punta Piedra](#) during its [51st Extraordinary Period of Sessions](#) in Paraguay, which ended on September 4. The state had acknowledged the community's claim to its ancestral lands by granting it full title to it, but failed to deal with the encroachment of non-Garífuna settlers, spearheaded by high-ranking military officers. This means that the community's right to property has been violated, as it has access to only half its land, which has given rise to conflict, resulting in the death of one of its members.¹⁵ At the hearing the state [argued](#) that the issue revolved around a land dispute between two communities, Punta Piedra and Río Miel, raising the question, if this were so, why the land titles were granted to Punta Piedra in the first place. In fact, according to a representative of the IACHR, the Honduran state had failed to honor its commitment to relocate the campesinos of Río Miel. A further argument advanced by the Honduran state was that the Garífuna people were themselves invaders, as the land had been originally been settled by Miskitos. However, [according to OFRANEH](#) (Garífuna People's Federation of Honduras), the Miskitos had never occupied that particular area. The Honduran Government used a similar argument during the Inter-American Court hearing on *Triunfo de la Cruz*, in May, stating that *Triunfo* had originally been Tolupan territory, whereas according to OFRANEH, they had retreated to the mountains in the 16th century, long before the Garífunas' arrival. OFRANEH consider the Government's tactics a means of sowing discord among the different indigenous groups. The verdict on the *Triunfo de la Cruz* case is expected before the end of the year.

15 IACHR press release of October 11, 2013 No. 76/13 [IACHR Takes Case involving Honduras to the Inter-American Court](#). More details of the case are available (in Spanish only) in the [Resolution of the Court's President](#) on the *Case of Punta Piedra Garífuna Community and its members vs. Honduras*

Attempt by Honduran government to deny Garífunas indigenous status

OFRANEH has [reported](#) that another tactic deployed by the Honduran state in its defense before the Court has been to seek to deny the Garífunas their status as an indigenous people. By 'relegating' the Garífunas to the status of an ethnic minority - Afro-descendants - the Honduran government believes it would be able to claim that ILO Convention 169 was no longer applicable. The Convention stipulates that the land rights of indigenous peoples must be respected and they must be subject to prior consultation before decisions are taken which affect them.

It is very difficult (impossible) to see how such a defense could be effective before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, particularly in view of its [landmark decision](#) of 2007, *Saramaka v Suriname*, in which it concluded that the Saramaka people (descendants of self-liberated African slaves) “*make up a tribal community ... not indigenous to the region, but that share similar characteristics with indigenous peoples ... whose social, cultural and economic characteristics are different from other sections of the national community, particularly because of their special relationship with their ancestral territories, and because they regulate themselves, at least partially, by their own norms, customs, and/or traditions*”. They were therefore, like indigenous peoples, “*subject to special measures that ensure the full exercise of their rights,*” and as with other such groups, to be treated as equivalent to indigenous peoples in international law.

In the case of the Garífuna people, they are the descendants of Africans shipwrecked on Saint Vincent in the mid-17th century and of the indigenous people on the island. After a rebellion, they were forcibly removed to the Bay Islands off the coast of Honduras by the British in the late 18th century, and from there settled on the Honduran mainland, as well as in Guatemala, Belize and Nicaragua. The Garífuna language is a fusion of indigenous Caribbean and West African languages and, along with the Garífuna's dance and music, is registered by [UNESCO](#) on its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

For a history of OFRANEH as a social movement, see the [paper by Olivier Cuisset](#).

The Court cases highlight one of the main challenges facing Garífuna communities - the **relentless erosion of their land rights**. This month there were a number of examples:-

Barra Vieja - Eviction of community

On September 30, the [eviction](#) of the Garífuna community of Barra Vieja, in the municipality of Tela, Atlántida department was carried out. Policemen and military entered the community and removed people's belongings from their homes. After the eviction, the members of the community put their possessions back in their homes and reoccupied them. There had been a similar eviction attempt on August 6. As at October 16, there have been no further eviction attempts, although the threat has remained, and a police patrol has been present during the day in the community. PROAH accompanied OFRANEH to Barra Vieja in September. [Members of the community](#) have said that they would rather die than leave their homes, as they have nowhere else to go. OFRANEH applied to the IACHR for precautionary measures for Barra Vieja and the community lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court on September 26.

The coastal community of over 450 people, including 200 children, is at the entrance to the [Indura Beach Resort](#), a luxury tourist complex (formerly called 'Los Micos Beach and Golf Resort'), a public-private initiative, where 80 hectares of the [Micos Lagoon](#), a wetland protected under the Ramsar Convention, has been filled in to create a golf course. The community's land is officially owned by the ENP (National Port Authority), and OFRANEH believes that the reason for the eviction is to allow for the expansion of the Indura Resort. Barra Vieja lies between the Garífuna communities of Miami and Tornabe, whose inhabitants by various means have already been persuaded to sell much of their land –

once communal – for the building of the resort, which opened earlier this year.¹⁶ ('Indura' is the name for Honduras in the Garífuna language, making the resort a perfect example of the Honduran state's theme park attitude to the Garífunas – adopting aspects of their culture when convenient, while allowing the steady erosion of Garífuna territory, threatening their very survival as a people.)

The Barra Vieja community itself was officially recognized by the municipality in the 1950s, but there have been Garífuna settlements along that stretch of coast – the Tela Bay - from long before. According to OFRANEH, the ENP has 'mysteriously' acquired ownership of a large proportion of Garífuna territory in the Tela Bay, where land speculation began in the 1980s, and with it the threats and murders of Garífunas opposed to communal land being handed over, primarily for tourist schemes.¹⁷

The appropriation of Garífuna land for Indura Beach Resort, and the associated damage to the lagoon were one of the issues dealt with in the case of Triunfo de la Cruz currently before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

Nueva Armenia - Arrests and eviction from recuperated land

OFRANEH reported in an e-mail that, in Armenia, about 12 police officers evicted Garífunas from recuperated ancestral land, which had been taken over by the Standard Fruit Company and then used as clandestine air-strips for drug trafficking. There had been [an earlier attempt](#), on August 8, to effect evictions from the land, in Jutiapa municipality, Atlántida department. On that occasion, police arrested 40 people, taking them Jutiapa where, according to OFRANEH, they were held arbitrarily for eight hours. People linked to African palm growers who have been occupying the land took advantage of their absence to torch 11 of the Garífunas' homes and all their belongings.

According to [OFRANEH](#), the settlement of Armenia was founded at the end of the 19th century on the Papaloteca River delta. In the 1920s, the Garífuna population was displaced from its land by the Standard Fruit Company, and relocated on the western bank of the Papaloteca River, forming Nueva ('New') Armenia. This followed the burning of land registers in La Ceiba in 1920, which enabled the Company, with the complicity of state officials, to take over land in Atlántida belonging to Garífunas and farmers from Olancho. The state concession granted to Standard Fruit Company (now Dole Food Company) for the land expired in 2000, and it was 'returned' to the municipality of Jutiapa without taking into account the fact that it was the ancestral land of the Armenia Garífuna community. **The municipality gradually began granting the land to small groups of campesinos, who cut trees to plant African palm.** This process has accelerated in recent months, and in response, the community began an intensive process to recover its territory. Now over 80 members of the community have been charged with 'usurpation of land'.

The community has been supported by a range of international organizations, such as Friends of the Earth Latin America, Biodiversity Alliance (*Alianza Biodiversidad*) and the World Rainforest Movement which, with OFRANEH and other organizations, held a [forum on 'Biodiesel, African Palm and their Effects on Food Sovereignty'](#) on September 9 in La Ceiba, and took the opportunity to visit Nueva Armenia.

16 See also Radio Progreso & ERIC article [Desalojo en Barra Vieja conforma estrategia de expulsión del pueblo garífuna](#) and Conexihon article on an incident in which a soldier tried to stop a journalist filming the eviction [Militar intimida a periodista hondureño “Vos con quién estás, sos parte del problema”](#)

17 See OFRANEH article [Empresa Nacional Portuaria \(E.N.P\) promueve desalojo de la comunidad Garífuna de Barra Vieja, Tela and the photo essay by James Rodriguez Garífuna Resistance against Mega-Tourism in Tela Bay](#) from 2008, which gives good background on the Tela Bay tourist development.

Puerto Castilla – eviction

OFRANEH [reported](#) that on August 28, Garífuna people were evicted from 5 *manzanas* of land (about 3.5 hectares) in the community of Puerto Castilla, in Colón. It gave no details of how many people were affected by the eviction. The Garífuna community of Cristales and Río Negro had been formally granted the land of La Puntilla (now known as Puerto Castilla) in 1889 by General Luis Bogran, the then president. According to the community, they were forced at gunpoint to cede land to the ENP (National Port Authority) in 1976 by the notorious General Alvarez Martinez, future head of the armed forces and founder of the Battalion 3-16 death squad. The 5 *manzanas* in question had been sold by the ENP to the Intermares company in 1996, which was going to build a fishmeal factory there, but the land ended up in the hands of a private individual, Dennis Weizemblut Oliva, who requested the eviction.

There has been a lot of land speculation recently in the area, as Puerto Castilla is being touted as one of the sites of the ZEDEs (Employment and Economic Development Zones). The community has been threatened with relocation to Plan Grande, an area in the west of Trujillo Bay, where there are currently no roads or even basic infrastructure. As well as the ZEDE, the area is under threat from [other large-scale projects](#), such as mining.

Puerto Castilla was the site of a [violent crackdown](#) in May, when police and soldiers broke up a demonstration using pepper spray and tear-gas, hospitalizing 6 children and forcing others to be evacuated to a boat moored on the coast. The protesters were demanding the return of land to relieve overcrowding, as well as for ENP to fulfill its commitments, which included giving members of the community a share of the jobs at the port.

Ángel Amílcar Colón Quevedo

According to an [article](#) by Amnesty International, the coming weeks will be critical for Ángel Amílcar Colón Quevedo, former president of OFRANEH, as prosecutors in Mexico will decide by mid-October whether to proceed with his case. Ángel Amílcar Colón Quevedo was detained by police in March 2009 in Mexico, en route to the USA, where he had hoped to earn money to pay for cancer treatment for his eldest son. While in custody, he was tortured to falsely implicate himself in criminal activity and, as a result, has been in prison ever since. Amnesty International has [adopted him](#) as a Prisoner of Conscience and he is one of the [cases](#) in its major Stop Torture campaign. There have been a number of moves to secure his release.

The Mexican organization Centro PRODH (Miguel Agustín *Pro Juárez* Human Rights Center) which has been conducting his defense, [wrote](#) to the Mexican Director of Public Prosecutions formally requesting his immediate release. In the last full week of September, the Public Prosecutor was questioned on the case by members of the Mexican Congress. The CONADEH had written to the Honduran Congress in July asking it to give support to Ángel Amílcar Colón Quevedo, and met with the director of Centro PRODH on September 30. According to the director, Ángel Amílcar Colón Quevedo is only one of thousands of migrants languishing in Mexican jails for crimes they have not committed.¹⁸

Migration of Garífunas

[According to Humberto Castillo](#), president of ASOFROVA (Association of Afro-Descendants of Sula Valley), roughly half of the Garífuna population between the ages of 12 and 30 have left the country since mid-2013, fleeing poverty and violence. He believes that this poses a serious threat to Garífuna communities and culture.

18 Proceso Digital [Preso de conciencia acumula violaciones en su contra durante su cautiverio en México](#)

MISKITO PEOPLE

On September 18, the Miskito organization MASTA (Moskitia Asla Takanka) wrote a [formal letter](#) to President Juan Orlando Hernandez to complain about **a range of abuses and human rights violations committed by the security forces**. They point out that, while there has been no attempt to apologize or provide reparations for the [Ahuas tragedy](#), there has been increasing militarization of the Moskitia in the war on drugs, without due consultation, contrary to Article 30 of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). The apparently indiscriminate use of explosives and gunfire near to communities causes widespread panic and is affecting the inhabitants' health, and has led to the deaths from fright of two people in August and September.

According to the letter, **soldiers are constantly raiding the homes of Miskitos** (but not non-indigenous peoples) **and stealing belongings** including livestock, foodstuffs, clothes and cellphones. The soldiers also search people and confiscate their possessions which they then sell to buy alcohol, get drunk and intimidate the population. When the community leaders complain, the only response that they receive is that these are the orders of the President and 'the gringos'. On August 28, in Brus Laguna, **soldiers raided two farms without any authority and brutally beat up the inhabitants** to the point where some had to be hospitalized. The victims were told that if they reported these crimes the women would be sexually abused and the men murdered. MASTA's demands in the letter include a high level meeting with the Government and armed forces, with human rights observers, to seek solutions to the problem, and the immediate cessation of the abuses against the indigenous population in the Moskitia.

A member of MASTA [reported](#) on an incident, on September 27, when **an army lieutenant shot and wounded four people** in the community of Wampusirpi. Soldiers and the local police had turned up drunk at a party, in their uniforms and with their regulation weapons, and began to beat up those present because the owner of the venue would not give them beer. The soldiers and police then arrested all 40 men from the party and put them in prison, demanding money from them so that they could carry on drinking. The people of the community protested at the mass arrest, and the soldiers responded by firing at them. The lieutenant fired at the prison, wounding four people. The soldiers and police then fled the scene. The community [burnt down](#) the police station in protest. They said that the police and soldiers regularly fire their weapons when they are drunk, but when the community reports the incidents to the police, they are ignored.

LENCA PEOPLE: HYDROELECTRIC PROJECTS

COPINH lodges 50 complaints with the Prosecution Service

On September 11, COPINH (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras), accompanied by PROAH, [lodged 50 formal complaints](#) with Public Prosecution Service concerning projects and concessions which the organization considers violate the right to life and other individual and collective rights of the Lenca people, including the right to consultation under ILO Convention 169. COPINH met with the Prosecutor for Ethnic Groups (Fiscal de Etnias), who undertook to look into the complaints. The organization wishes the Prosecution Service to investigate the process of granting concessions.

San Francisco Lempira

On August 3, COPINH and the Catholic church authorities of San Francisco Lempira [confronted the mayor](#), Elmer Noel Molina, in a public assembly attended by over 300 people in the church. He was accused publicly of negotiating for a hydroelectric project on the San Juan River affecting four municipalities - San Francisco de Lempira, Yamaranguila, Erandique and San Marcos de la Sierra. He

had also officially given permission for the police and army to build prisons and posts in the town square and the market. Both of these he had done without consulting the population. Initially the mayor denied that he had given any authorization for the Tanguay hydroelectric project, but COPINH had the document from SERNA (Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment) which showed that he and SERNA had granted permits for land concessions and feasibility studies by ELSA (Clean Energy Company). The mayor said outside the assembly that if he had not been in the church he would have shot the COPINH leader Aureliano Molina Villanueva, who had organized the assembly, and the day after, at night, men fired guns around Aureliano's family home. The mayor had issued death threats to other community leaders and members of COPINH, and had threatened to burn COPINH's radio station, La Voz Lenca, because it had reported on the mayor's misdeeds.

Santa Elena - MILPA

MILPA (La Paz Lenca Indigenous Movement) issued an [alert](#) stating that on September 3, heavily armed men, accompanied by municipal council officials from Santa Elena, La Paz department, shot at a group of indigenous campesinos who have been occupying and working land, which they say is national territory, in the hamlet of El Nazario, in El Potrero village. The victims ran for their lives and were pursued by 12 police officers and 8 civilians, including the head of El Potrero community council. Their pursuers set fire to the campesinos' huts, destroying the foodstuffs and belongings inside. The aim was to evict the campesinos, but there was no warrant served nor legal official present. The land is wanted for a hydroelectric project on the River Chinacla by Los Encinos company, which is owned by Gladys Aurora López, currently Vice-President of Congress and chair of the National Party's Central Committee. On January 26, various members of MILPA had received threats as a result of a roadblock they had set up to prevent the passage of machinery for the dam. MILPA stated at the time that they were simply exerting control over their own indigenous territory, and that they had not been consulted about the hydroelectric project (see P.5 of our [summary for January - February](#) for more details).

CESPAD report

On August 26, **CESPAD** (Study Center for Democracy) launched a new [report](#) - '**Hydroelectric Dams and Exclusion: Social Conflict in the Northern Valleys of Santa Barbara**' – which focuses on Chiquila community, where the Chamelecón 280 hydroelectric project, owned by GERSA (Electricity Generation Company) aims to expand on the Blanco and Tapalapa Rivers. It contrasts the vast profits, virtually guaranteed for GERSA for years, with the social and economic cost for affected communities.

LENCA PEOPLE: COMMUNITY LEADER ARRESTED BY ARMY

CINPH (Honduras Indigenous Coordinating Group for People's Power) [reported](#) that on August 17, a Lenca leader was arrested by the army in the 21 de Octubre community, in San Pedro Lomas, Intibucá. The leader, Florencio Aguilar Robles, was detained at 11.30 am by soldiers from the 1st Engineers Battalion and police special forces. According to the CINPH's statement, the members of the community, of the Lenca indigenous group, suffer repression, evictions, imprisonment and the burning of their crops, and Florencio Aguilar Robles is the fourth of their leaders to be arrested. The security forces were acting at the behest of a wealthy landowner who the community says has illegally taken over their communal land.

MINING: LOCOMAPA

On August 25, members of the Locomapa community, from the Tolupan indigenous group, organized a [march](#) commemorating the **first anniversary of the murder of Ricardo Soto Funes, Armando Funes Medina and María Enriqueta Matute**, shot dead because of their opposition to illegal mining and

logging in the community. The march was accompanied by PROAH.

The anniversary was also marked by a [protest](#) the following day at the **lack of progress in bringing the perpetrators to justice**, outside the Public Prosecution Service's building in San Pedro Sula. Despite arrest warrants issued for 'Los Matute', hitmen for mining and logging companies, they remain free and active in the community. The police have used a string of excuses to justify their failure to detain them, such as not being able to find them, lack of transport, and fear of people around being injured if there were a confrontation between the police and the killers.¹⁹

As a result of threats against them, **18 members of the community**, members of MADJ (Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice) **were granted precautionary measures**²⁰ issued by the IACHR. However, despite the assurances given by the Honduran government that it would increase the community's security, the threats continue. **The latest flashpoint has been the election of a new community council.** The members of MADJ accuse the current council of being in the pockets of mining and logging companies. The elections could not take place on August 17 as planned, with the council using the pretext that the quorum of 500 had not been reached, despite the fact that, on previous occasions, the elections had gone ahead with fewer than 500 voters. (The council also refused to register for voting 18 members of the community active in the fight against the exploitation of Tolupan territory, arguing that their status as members of the community had been suspended. This suspension, which the council never justified legally, was only valid for a year, and had lapsed 13 days before the elections.) The day before the new election date, set for September 6, 'Los Matute' came into the community firing into the air and directly threatening several of its members. They shouted that they would not let any members of the 'Resistance' – opponents of mining - vote in the elections, nor allow observers at the elections, whether Honduran or international. (PROAH had been invited to attend). As a result, the community members who received threats decided to suspend their participation in the elections, which had still not taken place by October 16.²¹

MINING: LA NUEVA ESPERANZA

On August 30, a *cabildo abierto* (open meeting) was held in La Yusa, in the municipality of Tela, Atlántida department, at which 250 people from 16 communities in the Florida district, including La Nueva Esperanza, declared the area free of mining in the presence of the mayor of Tela. The actual designation they gave themselves was 'Water-producing communities free of mining operations and exploration and any kind of economic activity potentially detrimental to the livelihoods and social harmony of its inhabitants'.

Present at the *cabildo abierto* were two PROAH volunteers, as well as representatives from MADJ, MAA (Atlántida Environmental Movement), San Juan Pueblo parish, ERIC, Radio Progreso and other radio stations, Claretian missionaries from Arizona, the parish which serves the Florida district, and the singer Karla Lara.

The declaration is being hailed by the communities and their supporters as a significant step forward, as they have spent years opposing attempts by mining companies to operate in the area (see, for example, the declarations by [MADJ](#) and the [Claretian missionaries](#)). This has been at significant cost, particularly to the people of La Nueva Esperanza and their supporters, who have faced threats and persecution by the state and employees of the mining company Minerales Victoria, particularly last year. This included the [temporary abduction](#) of two members of PROAH and the displacement of a

19 See also the Latin Correspondent article by ex-PROAH volunteer Erika Piquero

[The Hondurans that don't migrate: Indigenous communities face death threats to defend their land](#)

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

21 See [declaration](#) by MADJ and communities of Locomapa.

family. Wilfredo Funes, foreman for Minerales Victoria, and the ring-leader of the abduction and displacement, and perpetrator of numerous other acts of intimidation within the community, was arrested in February and [remains in preventive detention](#). However, no other person has been arrested, such as the intellectual authors of the intimidation nor any of the security guards hired by the company to terrorize the village.

MINING: SIRIA VALLEY

Case against Siria Valley Environmental Committee

On September 24, there was a [hearing](#) at which there was **an attempt to overturn the not guilty verdict, issued in February 2013**, in the case of 17 members of the Siria Valley Environmental Committee (*Comité Ambientalista del Valle de Siria*). They had been accused of obstructing a forestry management plan, due to their efforts to protect from logging a watershed which supplies water for human consumption to six communities in El Porvenir municipality, directly affecting 10,000 people. The Committee has argued that there were a number of irregularities concerning the adoption of the management plan, including the failure to carry out an appropriate environmental impact assessment with adequate local participation. **The Committee, which has been active in campaigning against the San Martin gold-mine** in the Valley, and seeking justice for its environmental and health impacts, was also concerned that the degradation through logging of the area subject to the plan could make it easier for it then to be given over to mining. The not guilty verdict handed down last year was provisional, pending a definitive ruling. The attempt to overturn it is being instigated (somewhat ironically) by the Prosecutor for the Environment and the person who wishes to undertake the logging. PROAH has accompanied the Committee and COFADEH, which is conducting its defense, in the case. In July 2011, over 50 organizations signed an international [letter](#) protesting at the **criminalization of the Committee** which was sent to the authorities and US and Canadian diplomatic representatives in Honduras.

Environmental and economic impacts of mining

[Giorgio Trucchi](#) and [Felix Molina](#) have both published disturbing articles on the **environmental and economic impacts** of mining in the Siria Valley. Giorgio Trucchi's article features chilling statistics, while Felix Molina's also refers to the **high security prison** being built in the valley, guarded by heavily armed soldiers, another indication of the militarization of the prison system (see P.22).

LAND DISPUTES: BAJO AGUAN

The IACHR issued a [press release](#) expressing concern at **the series of human rights violations in the Bajo Aguán since May**, including violent evictions as well as threats and the arrest of various campesino leaders who were beneficiaries of precautionary measures it granted on May 8, 2014. The IACHR urged the State to investigate these acts of violence and to prosecute and punish those responsible, and to immediately adopt all necessary measures to guarantee the right to life, integrity, and security of the human rights defenders in the country.

The statement by the IACHR, as well as [one by OPDHA \(Aguán Permanent Human Rights Observatory\)](#) mentions that on August 19, Santos Torres, a leader of the MCRGC (Gregorio Chávez Refoundation Campesino Movement) and a beneficiary of the precautionary measures granted by the IACHR, was **threatened at his home by members of the military and Dinant security guards**. They pointed firearms at him and his wife, and issued threats such as 'We'll kill you with just one shot'. The same group then went to the home of Glenda Chávez, a member of OPDHA and also a leader of the MCRGC, and issued similar threats.

According to OPDHA's statement, the vehicle that went to the home of the two MCRGC leaders on August 19 was the same one from which shots had been fired after there had been [another attempt](#) by campesinos to reoccupy Paso Aguán farm, on August 15. Those soldiers and security guards had been guarding the farm for over a month. The campesinos were [violently re-evicted](#) the same day. **OPDHA calls on the authorities to investigate these joint actions between the security guards and the military.**

[Dinant had announced in May that henceforth its security guards would go unarmed](#), as 'Part of Dinant's Program to Operate in a Safe, Transparent and Respectful Manner,' mentioning specifically the Paso Aguán farm. The firearms would be under lock-and-key, supervised by the local Commander of the Joint Military Task Force, which would suggest that he had authorized the latest 'joint operations' between the military and Dinant security guards.

Irma Lemus of [OPDHA](#) gave an [interview](#) to Conexihon in which she spoke of **the increase in persecution of the Observatory** in recent months, particularly associated with its support for the campesinos of the Paso Aguán farm. On August 26, the **Aguán Valley Regional Agrarian Platform** (*Plataforma Agraria Regional del Valle del Aguán*) [denounced](#) a series of acts of persecution and criminalization in August.

An international delegation to Honduras, including US and Canadian human rights observers, issued a [statement](#) concerning **accusations made by Colonel Germán Alfaro**, the then head of FUSINA (National Inter-Institutional Security Force)²² that they were "encouraging campesinos to launch attacks" and causing "instability" in the region. The accusations were made on August 16, following the delegation's visit to the Bajo Aguán, and the Colonel stated that it was being investigated for being in "a practically restricted area of the country." These accusations are similar to those made against Annie Bird of Rights Action in December 2013 and July 2014 when Roger Pineda of Dinant and Colonel Alfaro accused Bird of "causing chaos" attempting to "destabilize" the Aguán region and, on a local television channel in Tocoa, Colon, accused her of conducting "illicit activities."

La Consentida - Eviction and destruction of crops

On August 27, OPDHA issued a [statement](#) denouncing the eviction of 36 campesino families of the Nueva Esperanza cooperative and the destruction of their cultivated crops in the citrus plantation of La Consentida, adjacent to the village of Rigores in the municipality of Trujillo. The plantation is owned by the fruit processor Colon Fruit Company (COFRUTCO). At about 8 am a contingent of six military and police vehicles, under the command of Colonel Rene Jovel Martínez, commander of Operation Xatruch III, proceeded with the eviction. The campesinos, who had been occupying part of the plantation for four months, left peacefully. At 10 am, representatives of OPDHA accompanied by the lawyer Juan Frañón, from the local office of the CONADEH, tried to open a dialogue with Colonel Martínez, but he refused to talk to OPDHA, saying that they lacked the legal status of a human rights organization. Shortly afterwards, **Colonel Martínez ordered the destruction of the 52 acres of cultivated corn**, even though the staff of the National Agrarian Institute (INA) and OPDHA requested an extension of two months so that the farmers could harvest the corn.

Dinant – World Bank

On August 11, the World Bank's [Compliance Advisor Ombudsman](#) (CAO) issued a new [report](#) concluding that the IFC (International Finance Corporation – a private sector arm of the World Bank) **did not pay enough attention to environmental and social risks when it lent to Honduras' largest bank, Ficohsa**. The investigation was triggered by CAO when it became aware that Banco Ficohsa had made significant loans to Dinant, itself the subject of a [damning CAO report](#) in 2013.

22 Now transferred – see P.24

International and Honduran civil society groups [responded](#) by calling on World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim to clean up these scandals, stating that the **World Bank should immediately require Dinant to halt all violence directed at local farmers and find a peaceful and sustainable resolution to the conflict over land.** They also called for an impartial investigation of crimes committed against campesinos in the Aguán region, and an end to all IFC loans to Dinant if ongoing investigations found the company responsible for any of these.²³

Dinant issued a [press release](#) repeating its line that the company 'was making significant progress... implementing the criteria laid out in the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights, which govern how we vet, recruit and train our security staff, and how they engage with members of the community'. (One wonders whether this includes the August 19 visits by Dinant security guards to the MCRGC leaders Santos Torres and Glenda Chávez). Dinant also [announced](#) that its staff had received training from the Red Cross on 'self-defense and the proportionate use of force' in July.

One of the actions that the World Bank has taken in response to the CAO report on Dinant has been to contract Merrick Hoben of the [Consensus Building Institute](#) to [carry out an evaluation](#) to see if there was scope to carry out **a mediation process** between the various parties in the land disputes with Dinant in the Bajo Aguán. Around September 23, Merrick Hoben held a meeting with almost 50 representatives of the Aguán Valley Regional Agrarian Platform in La Ceiba, and was due to also meet representatives from Dinant, NGOs and state institutions.

KIDNAPPING AND ILL-TREATMENT OF TWO FISHERMEN

COFADEH [reported](#) that **two young fishermen had been abducted and beaten by the shrimp farm owner Elvin Canales and his employees.** Family members of the young men now fear retaliation for publicly reporting the incident. The fishermen Israel Castro, aged 17, and Arlen Flores, 18, were out on their boat in the Gulf of Fonseca on August 31, off the coast of San Lorenzo, Valle department, in the south of the country, when they were intercepted at 10 pm by five men working at the shrimp farm, including its owner, Elvin Canales, and his brother Alejandro. The shrimp farmers fired at the outboard engine and burned the fishermen's boat. Israel and Arlen were then taken to a place called El Lagartón, where **their ill-treatment included being beaten up and having gasoline poured on them and urine thrown in their faces.** They were accused of stealing shrimps, which they deny.

The two fishermen were found by police at a shrimp farm owned by Canales over a day later, early on the morning of September 2. The officers were from the neighboring municipality of Nacaome, as **the police from San Lorenzo had refused to act but rather were complicit in the abduction.** Canales and his men had taken the youths to the police station in San Lorenzo, where they had given a statement, but the shrimp farmers had then been allowed to take them away again, and the police had denied any knowledge of their whereabouts to their families.

There have been **numerous cases of fishermen in the Gulf of Fonseca being killed or wounded by employees of shrimp farms,** who accuse them of robbing the shrimps. Between 1990 and 2001, there were 12 recorded murders of fishermen linked to shrimp farming.²⁴ The death toll has reduced since then, which has been attributed partly to the farms' security guards using air-rifles rather than AK47s, so that fishermen who venture too near the farms now tend to get maimed rather than killed. The latest known fatality was in 2012 when security guards from GMSB (San Bernardo Sea Farms) captured Yelson Gabino García Mendoza, aged 17 years, who was out fishing in the Tionostal estuary at 2 am on August 31. They took him away and later produced his corpse, which showed signs of torture, with blows to his body. His face was riddled with shotgun pellets, apparently fired at point-blank range,

²³ See also the Bretton Woods Project's articles on both the [Ficohsa case](#) and the [IFC's response to criticisms](#)

²⁴ Environmental Justice Foundation report [Smash and Grab](#), P.19

which caused his death.²⁵

JUDICIARY

The 'purge' of judges

Abel Orellana, a private criminal lawyer, has [filed an amparo application](#) with the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, asking for the **Judiciary Council to suspend its operations**. The Council is responsible for the current purge of judges, and Abel Orellana, like many other criminal lawyers, is concerned that judges, fearing the council's power, have lost their independence. One of the major signs of this is that judges are now reluctant to order alternatives to preventive detention pending trial, in case they face disciplinary proceedings for doing so. On September 1, two more judges, one based in Tegucigalpa and the other in Danlí, [were suspended](#) by the Judiciary Council pending investigations.

The Constitutional Unit of the Public Prosecution Service has issued an [opinion](#) that the use of lie detectors on justice operators is constitutional.

EU Aid For Justice System

On August 19, supported by the European Union (EU) and the Spanish cooperation agency AECID, Honduras has launched the program ["Promoting a Rapid and Accessible Justice System in Honduras"](#) (EUROJUSTICIA). The prime aim of the program, with funding of 31 million euros (39 million dollars) is to 'contribute to national efforts to combat impunity for corruption and violent crime and to guarantee the Honduran population's access to an efficient, effective, transparent and accountable justice system, promoting social equality.' The program has two components - a project against impunity and for the promotion of transparency (PIT), which will include better equipment and training of the Public Prosecution Service, and a project for supporting the judiciary (JUSTHO), including providing more efficient administrative procedures.

PRISONS

On August 18, MNP-CONAPREV (Mechanism and National Committee for the Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment) [formally presented](#) the **regulations implementing the National Prison System Act** to the government. The EU provided financial and technical support for the drafting of the regulations, which govern the operation of the INP (National Prison Institute), including prison visits, work performed by prisoners, access to information, education, health, rehabilitation, as well as social reintegration for those due to be released. Rigoberto Chang Castillo, the Minister for Human Rights, Justice, Governance and Decentralization said that the prison needed to be changed substantially, and that 100 million lempiras (around 5 million dollars) from the security tax (*tasa de seguridad*) would be used to improve prison conditions, including **improvements in the supply of drinking water, drainage, security and the prison buildings**.

Changes in the prison system are urgently needed, particularly in the wake of the **tragic fire in Comayagua** in February 2012, which resulted in deaths of 361 people. A [damning report](#) by the IACHR concluded that the major factors in the fire were gross overcrowding and abandonment by the authorities.

However, on the face of it, **the current initiatives do nothing to address the problem of overcrowding**, with currently 14,500 inmates in a prison system designed for 8,000, while the corruption and criminal activities within the system are being addressed by **increased militarization**.

On July 30, the **Director of Prisons**, Santos Simeón Flores, a police officer, was sacked because of the

25 ENCA Newsletter January 2013, P.6 [Translation](#) of an article by Jorge Varela Márquez

escape of 13 inmates from Támara high security prison outside Tegucigalpa, and replaced by an air-force colonel, Francisco Gálvez Granados, who is now responsible for 'imposing order'. His appointment was [met with consternation](#) by specialists in field, such as MNP-CONAPREV, who argue that **the prison service, including the director, should be staffed by specially-trained civilians**, as recommended by the IACHR in its [report](#) on the Honduran prison system following the Comayagua fire (Para. 87). At the time of the report, in 2012, the IACHR was concerned only at the use of police to staff prisons, but since then, the military have been increasingly deployed within the prison system. (According to the report, prisons were staffed by civilians until the militarization of the 1980s).

A recent development has been the **use of the First Infantry Battalion premises as a prison**. On September 8, MNP-CONAPREV conducted an inspection. Among its [findings](#), it expressed concern at untrained army staff being given responsibility for the custody of prisoners, stating that it was in contravention of the National Prison System Act, which gave the INP that responsibility. MNP-CONAPREV was also concerned about the treatment of the prisoners, and the fact that they had only access to the outdoors and exercise for 20 minutes a day. Contact with their relatives and lawyers, particularly by phone, was also overly restricted, conjugal visits were forbidden, and their transport to and from court in the open back of patrol cars was not only a danger to their security, but also violated their right to be treated as innocent until proven guilty.

A further step on the road to militarization of the prison system is the [plan to use army reservists as prison guards](#). 1,200 will ultimately be deployed, with the first batch of 300 beginning their two-months' training on September 16. The aim is to increase security within prisons and wrest control of them from the inmates.

Juvenile offenders

DINAF, the new Directorate for Children, Adolescents and the Family, is currently [examining](#) means of introducing a **new criminal justice system specifically for juvenile offenders**, with both custodial and non-custodial measures. It is involving a number of different entities, including UNICEF and USAID, and a commission from the judiciary will visit Nicaragua to learn from its experiences (interesting, given the Honduran Government's reluctance to look to the Nicaraguan model for police reforms). It will also look at preventive measures.

In addition, DINAF aims for measures to improve the conditions for the 328 inmates of the three Honduran juvenile detention facilities - El Carmen in San Pedro Sula and Sagrado Corazón de María and Renaciendo in Tegucigalpa – such as vocational training to help them reintegrate into society once released. For [MNP-CONAPREV](#), urgent action is needed, as **the juvenile detention system is at breaking point**, and it believes that the question is not one of budget, but of political will to address its problems.

The **IACHR**, in its [statement](#) to mark International Youth Day on August 13, expressed concern at the poor state of juvenile detention centers in the Americas, as well as the adoption of repressive policies towards juveniles as a knee-jerk reaction to security concerns.

POLICING

Torture – Report by CPTRT

According to a [report](#) by the CPTRT (Center for the Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture and their Relatives), **6 out of every 10 people detained are the victims of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by the police**. These were the findings following interviews with 260 people, 153 of whom, or 58.84%, were the victims of ill-treatment. The rate was even higher for people younger than 18-years-old – of the 28 people interviewed, 19 (or 65.5%) were

the victims of ill-treatment. As well as direct ill-treatment by the police, a range of other human rights violations of detainees were recorded, such as overcrowding, acts of aggression between detainees, and the failure to allow the detainees to contact their relatives and lawyers. The research was conducted from December 2013 to July 2014 at 16 police stations in Tegucigalpa and 9 in San Pedro Sula, as well as the National Women's Prison and the Marco Aurelio Soto National Prison (Támara high security prison). The CPTRT was particularly concerned as most of the detainees were highly vulnerable, coming from the poorest neighborhoods in the two cities. The study also highlighted the poor working conditions for low-ranking police officers, who can have working days of 24-30 hours, low pay, and no rest areas. They also lack training in human rights, the use of firearms, and in correct police procedure.

Trial for police brutality

On September 25, it was [ruled](#) that the trial of the senior police officer, Elder Madrid Guerra, should continue. He is charged with human rights violations including illegal detention, ill-treatment and torture of 24 people during a peaceful protest against the coup outside the Congress building on August 12, 2009, when he was commander of the COBRA special forces. The victims, some of whom had not even taken part in the demonstration, were beaten and then detained for two days, some of this at the COBRA barracks, where they were subject to ill-treatment. The criminal court had definitively dismissed the charges against him in 2010, but this verdict was overturned by the Court of Appeal in 2012, after being challenged by COFADEH and the Public Prosecution Service. Elder Madrid's lawyers have sought to invoke the 2010 Amnesty Law in his defense, but the court has accepted COFADEH and the Prosecution Service's arguments that this could not be applied in cases of crimes against humanity and human rights violations.²⁶ (The Supreme Court had already found in the victims' favor on this point in April, but for some reason the trial judge believed there had been confusion regarding the ruling). The brutal crackdown on August 12, 2009 was one of the most notorious following the coup.²⁷ Despite this, Elder Madrid was never suspended and has continued to progress through the force, recently [being appointed](#) head of COEPOL (Center of Police Operations and Strategy).

Police purge

On September 22, it was [announced](#) that 43 officers, a number of whom were quite high-ranking, had been summoned to hearings in relation to the police purge, and that in total 200 were [currently under investigation](#). According to Ramón Sabillón, head of the National Police, 1,400 police had been either sacked or suspended since the process started in 2012, of which 12% hold a rank higher than basic.

Police Death Squads

An agent who worked with the police's Analysis Unit for several years, gave [details](#) in a sworn statement to Radio Globo Director, David Romero, of a number of executions where he was present, implicating top level commanders of the national security forces. They were published on September 18. He gave details of six cases of persecution, kidnapping and murder. One of the murder victims was a 65-year-old person from Copán, in western Honduras, and one of the officers involved in the case was former Director of the National Police chief Juan Carlos "Tigre" Bonilla (already [investigated](#) for death squad killings in the early 2000s). Another case involved the kidnapping of a woman in the company of a young boy in Barrio Cabañas, San Pedro Sula. She was intercepted by three vehicles under the command of the former head of the Preventive Police, Héctor Iván Mejía. The woman was taken to a security house, interrogated for 48 hours, hanged and disappeared. Other cases include the

²⁶ Defensoresenlinea [CSJ ordena proseguir en el juicio contra policías que incurrieron en violaciones a DDHH en 2009](#)

²⁷ See P.136 of Commission of Truth report [The Voice with Most Authority is that of the Victims](#) for more details.

kidnapping and rape of a young girl to pressure her mother to tell police the whereabouts of a man who was tortured and killed days later, and the torture and murder of three members of a gang. Certain police commissioners' names recur in these cases - Arias Aguilar, López Flores, Turcios Andrade and Zavala Vásquez - as well as the GEAS (Special Anti-Kidnapping Group) and the DNIC (National Criminal Investigation Directorate).

Military Police

September 15 marked **the anniversary of the first presentation of the Public Order Military Police (PMOP)** to the public, and they gave another chilling show of strength at this year's independence day celebrations.²⁸ They were first deployed on the streets in mid-October last year - just in time to intimidate opposition activists in the run-up to the elections, contributing significantly to the climate of fear (see P.5 of our [summary October-December 2013](#)).

One of the main forms of intimidation used on dissenters has been to stage raids on their homes, with one of the latest victims a **neonatologist, Samuel Santos**. **On September 1, while he was away at work, Military Police raided his house and intimidated his wife and children**. He has received no explanation for the raid, although one media outlet has said it was a mistake. Dr Santos is a representative of the Honduran Medical College (CMH), and announced strikes by doctors in protest at conditions at the Mario Catarino Rivas Hospital, where he works. In July, the management of the hospital had been taken over by a supervisory board (*junta interventora*), with security provided by the Military Police. This followed the death of a young man who had been hospitalized after being beaten up. He died of multiple organ failure, apparently as a result of neglect, with his wounds infested with maggots. His death highlighted the dysfunction of the hospital, with rampant corruption, lack of drugs, and entire floors controlled by criminal gangs. However, the staff at the hospital had complained that by the end of August, there had been no improvement in the medical situation at the hospital.²⁹

(On August 31, five doctors and a biomedical technician at the La Granja branch of the IHSS (Honduran Social Security Institute) in the capital **were suspended for 8 days without pay for publicizing the lack of drugs and general medical supplies**. They had defied an edict by the IHSS supervisory board that no staff could give written or verbal statements to the media.)

Colonel Alfaro transferred from FUSINA

It was announced on September 18 that Colonel Germán Alfaro has been replaced as head of FUSINA (National Inter-Institutional Security Force) by Colonel Ponce Fonseca³⁰, in a straight job swap, with Colonel Alfaro taking over Colonel Ponce's post as head of the army's Department of Organization, Operations, and Training. There are conflicting accounts of why he was transferred – according to [El Libertador](#), it was because he had failed to reduce levels of violence, the stated aim of FUSINA, in the north of the country where he was based. FUSINA's [spokesman](#), on the other hand, claimed that Colonel Alfaro had not been sacked but simply rotated. Either way, his transfer will come as something of a relief to human rights defenders whom he regularly stigmatized, both as head of FUSINA and before that as head of the Operation Xatruch joint task force in the Bajo Aguán (see, for example, P.19).

Until January this year, Colonel Alfaro's successor, Colonel Ponce, was [in command of the 105th Infantry Brigade](#), based in San Pedro Sula, which controls the whole Sula Valley as well as the departments of Cortés, Santa Bárbara, Yoro and Atlántida. He was responsible for the training of the

28 See, for example, Proceso Digital [Policía Militar cumplió hoy un año de haber sido presentada como cuerpo élite](#) and El Heraldito [Espectacular demostración militar en fiestas cívicas](#)

29 See report by the CONADEH [Informe del CONADEH: Maltrato a pacientes, falta de medicinas y personal, problemas que agobian al “Catarino Rivas”](#)

30 In newspaper reports, his first name is sometimes given as 'Héctor', and others as 'René Orlando' or variations on these.

Military Police contingent based in the city before they became operational. His cousin is the retired colonel Francisco Javier Lima Bueso, deputy security minister.

[FUSINA](#) was formed in February, and coordinated by the Public Prosecution Service, with its main task 'oversight of the daily operations of the country's security and justice bodies'.

MILITARY

Murders

A judge [ruled](#) on September 4 that **eight soldiers would go on trial for the murder of Marco Tulio Medrano Lemus**, in La Lima, a town close to San Pedro Sula. It appears, from a [newspaper account](#), that the soldiers were undertaking policing duties at the time. The farm laborer's body was found on the banks of the Chamelecón River on August 27. At 10.30 the night before, four soldiers in ski-masks, who were specifically looking for Marco Tulio Medrano, found him in the street. When one of the soldiers told him to stop, he tried to flee on his bike but was caught. The soldiers asked him whether he was the head of the *mara* (gang) or if he knew who it was. The soldiers put a plastic bag over the victim's head, and subjected him to other acts of physical and psychological torture, such as firing a pistol near him, and telling him they were going to kill him. Another four soldiers drew up in a station wagon and Marco Tulio Medrano was forced inside and taken away. The many witnesses to the torture and abduction were terrified and tried to take cover.

On September 13, two soldiers were [committed for trial](#) for **the murder of two brothers, Zenia Maritza and Ramón Eduardo Díaz Rodríguez**. On April 11, the victims were just leaving a supermarket in El Pedregal neighborhood in Comayagüela when their car was intercepted by a pick-up. The brothers were forced to get into it by several heavily-armed men in bullet-proof vests and ski-masks, and were found executed on wasteland the next day.

On September 30, it was [announced](#) that **three more soldiers are to be tried in the case of Ebed Yanes**, killed in May 2012. The 15-year-old, who was on a motorbike, failed to stop at a military checkpoint in the early hours of the morning in a suburb of Tegucigalpa, and was then pursued by soldiers in a vehicle who shot him repeatedly. It is due to the persistence of Ebed's parents and COFADEH that charges have finally been brought against the three officers - a second lieutenant, lieutenant colonel and colonel - for abuse of authority, failing in their duties as public servants and perverting the course of justice (*encubrimiento*). The accusations against these officers include switching the weapons used in the killing and telling the soldiers involved to deny that they were at the scene at the time. Three other officers – a colonel, lieutenant colonel and a major – had the charges against them dismissed at the same hearing. **So far, only one soldier, a sergeant, has received a prison sentence for homicide**, while the other two, a second lieutenant and a corporal, also believed to have fired at Ebed, were found guilty of the same charges the officers now face, and handed non-custodial sentences, even though the second lieutenant was in command of the patrol which pursued Ebed and must have given the order to fire. COFADEH, which has taken the case, tried to get the charge of homicide extended to the second lieutenant and corporal, but without success.³¹

An [article](#) by Proceso Digital provides details of **other murders committed by soldiers since 2012**. Strangely, **it fails to mention the killings of two Lenca leaders**, both members of COPINH - [Tomás García](#) during a peaceful protest against the hydroelectric project in Río Blanco in July 2013, and [José](#)

31 Defensoresenlinea [“No nos cansaremos de alzar la voz hasta que se haga justicia”](#)

[Husbaldo Guzmán Argueta](#), shot in the face at point-blank range in June this year while going about his community's business in the center of Colomoncagua, a town near the Salvadoran border.

Torture of two miners

There were [reports](#) that, in early September, two miners were tortured by soldiers near San Juan Arriba, El Corpus, Choluteca department, in the south of the country, at a mine whose entrance had collapsed in July, killing eight people. Film footage on national TV showed two soldiers, who were guarding the mine, put cloths over the heads of both miners and then throw water over them to simulate drowning, apparently to punish them for working in the mine when it had been closed after the collapse. The army spokesman, Colonel José Sánchez, denied any ill-treatment and said that 'it was a normal arrest' and that the 'cloths' were actually the miners' tee-shirts (rather given the lie by the film footage), but (slightly contradictorily) that both soldiers had been brought before an examining magistrate regarding the action they had taken.

ZEDEs

The **National Lawyers Guild released its [report](#)** on a delegation to Honduras with the Alliance for Global Justice last June to research and investigate the implementation of ZEDEs (Employment and Economic Development Zones). It identifies numerous potential violations of international law under the ZEDE structure. It found that, [even before the ZEDEs came into existence, it was evident that the rules](#) provided for their governance and formation would violate the human rights to self-determination and democratic participation. Furthermore, the history and current political climate of Honduras strongly indicated that once the ZEDEs came into existence, they would put at risk the human right to the use and enjoyment of one's own property, as well as the rights of indigenous groups to prior consultation and to ownership of their traditional lands. The delegation was concerned that a host of other human rights were at risk, including the right to livelihood, the right to remedy, the right to housing and the right to development.

KOICA, the Korean International Cooperation Agency, presented its [preliminary report](#) on the **feasibility of establishing ZEDEs in the department of Valle** in southern Honduras. The study suggests the development of world class port facilities in Amapala, on the island of El Tigre in the Gulf of Fonseca, with a free trade zone in Alianza to provide warehousing and logistical support for the shipments. In Nacaome, the Koreans suggested developing an agricultural research center. Amapala and Alianza qualify as low population density coastal regions not requiring approval of the local populations under the ZEDE law. This is a source of [great concern](#) for the **members of ADEPZA** (Association for the Development of Zacate Grande), who could be profoundly affected by the ZEDE in Amapala, but are not being consulted and are being denied information.

Proyecto de Acompañamiento internacional en Honduras (PROAH) <http://proah.wordpress.com>

Honduras Accompaniment Project <http://hondurasaccompanimentproject.wordpress.com>

Friendship Office of the Americas <http://friendshipamericas.org>