

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS UNDER ATTACK

Police officers fired tear gas into the office of Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared in Honduras (Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras, COFADEH). The incident occurred amid increasing tension and concern for human rights following the break-up of a demonstration celebrating the return of deposed President Manuel Zelaya on 21 September.

On Tuesday 22 September around 15 police officers parked outside the entrance to the office of the human rights organisation COFADEH and allegedly tried to enter the building. Without issuing a prior warning, the police officers then fired tear gas canisters at the office. At the time the office was fully staffed and around 100 people, including women with children were also in the office. The 100 people were in the office to provide their testimonies regarding abuses committed by police during the break-up of a demonstration that had just happened outside the Brazilian Embassy in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at the reports documenting mass arrests and the excessive use of force being used by police against demonstrators in Honduras, including using beating as a method of punishment. Amnesty International has been informed that dozens of protestors were taken to unauthorised detention sites across the capital on 22 September. Most of those detained have since been released, but concerns remain that illegal detention methods have been used. Amnesty International is also very concerned at the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders, and this latest attack against COFADEH is indicative of a serious deterioration in the human rights situation in the country.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Spanish or your own language:

- Demand that Roberto Micheletti and the *de facto* authorities stop all attacks on human rights defenders immediately;
- call for the *de facto* authorities to stop using excessive force against protestors and respect freedom of expression and association.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 04 November TO:

Mr
Roberto Micheletti
Casa Presidencial
Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo
Palacio José Cecilio del Valle
Tegucigalpa,
Honduras
Fax: **504 239 3298**
Salutation: Mr Micheletti

(Note: it is not possible to confirm that this fax number is still the correct one for the office inside the Casa Presidencial – please send letters as well as faxes to ensure the message arrives).

And copies to:

Bertha Oliva
Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH)
Barrio La Plazuela, Avenida Cervantes,
Casa No. 1301, Apartado Postal 1243
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

COFADEH is a renowned Honduran human rights organisation which has been at the forefront of seeking justice and reparation for relatives and victims of enforced disappearance and torture.

Concerns about human rights in Honduras have intensified since the democratically elected President José Manuel Zelaya Rosales was forced from power on 28 June and expelled from the country by a military-backed group of politicians led by Roberto Micheletti, former leader of the National Congress. There has been widespread unrest in the country since the *coup d'état* with frequent clashes between the police, military and civilian protestors. At least two people have died after being shot during protests.

A research mission to Honduras by Amnesty International took place from 28 July – 2 August 2009. The delegates collected many first hand testimonies of human rights abuses against protestors. Amnesty International delegates interviewed many of the 75 people detained at the Jefatura Metropolitana N°3 police station in Tegucigalpa after the police, supported by the military, broke up a peaceful demonstration on 30 July. The report illustrates many cases of ill-treatment, including beatings with batons, by police and military against the protestors.

During the mission Amnesty International was able to confirm that detention and ill-treatment of peaceful protestors are being employed as a form of punishment against those openly opposing the *de facto* government: other protestors who support the *de facto* regime did not suffer the same abuses. Evidence contained in the report shows that during the mass arrests of protestors by the police and military, some women and girls were subjected to gender-based violence. At least two people have died after being shot with firearms allegedly by police or members of the military during protests.

The human rights situation outside of Tegucigalpa is believed to be equally or even more serious. The checkpoints along the primary roads in Honduras are currently manned by military and police who often delay or refuse entry to human rights organizations to areas where human rights violations are reportedly occurring.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that using excessive force, ill treatment and mass detentions to repress dissent will only serve to inflame tensions further and lead to serious human rights violations. Force must only be employed in the most extreme circumstances, and not as a method to prevent people's legitimate right to peacefully demonstrate.

Amnesty International found that limits have been imposed on freedom of expression and there have been a number of attacks against journalists - including the closure of media outlets, the confiscation of equipment and physical abuse of journalists and camerapersons covering events.

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