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## **Honduras: Photos and testimony of protestors shows extent of police violence**

Amnesty International today published a series of exclusive photos and testimonies revealing serious ill-treatment by police and military of peaceful protestors in the capital, Tegucigalpa. The organization warned that beatings and mass arrests are being used as a way of punishing people for voicing their opposition to the military-backed coup d'état in June.

As human rights violations increase the need for the international community to seek a solution to the political crisis becomes ever more urgent.

The photos and testimonies were gathered by an Amnesty International delegation who interviewed many of the 75 people who were 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.

Most detainees had injuries as a consequence of police beatings with batons and having stones and other objects thrown at them. When they were arrested, none was told where they were being taken, the reasons for their detention or the charges against them. All detainees were released a few hours later.

“Mass arbitrary arrests and ill treatment of protestors are a serious and growing concern in Honduras today,” said Esther Major, Central America researcher at Amnesty International.

“Detention and ill treatment of protestors are being employed as form of punishment for those openly opposing the de facto government and also as a deterrent for those contemplating taking to the streets to peacefully show their discontent with the political turmoil the country is experiencing,” said Esther Major.

Amongst those held in detention on 30 July were 10 students. They all had been beaten with batons on the back, arms and backs of the legs by police. One of them said: “The police were throwing stones; they cornered us, threw us on the floor, on our stomachs and beat us. They took our cameras from us, beat us if we lifted our heads and even when we were getting into the police wagons.”

Several of those interviewed told Amnesty International that during the demonstration, police officers wore no visible identification. They said some police officers had told them “do not look at us, sons of bitches” and that others wore bandanas to hide their faces.

F.M., a 52-year-old teacher also detained on 30 July, told Amnesty International: “We were demonstrating peacefully. Suddenly, the police came towards us, and I started running. They grabbed me and shouted ‘why do you (all) support Zelaya’s government?’. They beat me. I have not been informed as to why I am detained.”

“Using excessive force and mass arbitrary detentions as a policy to repress dissent only serves to inflame tensions further and leads to serious human rights violations,” said Esther Major. “Force must only be employed in the most extreme of circumstances, and certainly not as a method to prevent people’s legitimate right to peacefully demonstrate.”

Amnesty International is also concerned at harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders; limits imposed on freedom of expression and the number of attacks against journalists -- including the closure of media outlets and the confiscation of equipment and physical abuse of journalists and camerapersons covering events.

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.

### **Background Information**

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’etat with frequent clashes between the police, military and civilian protestors. At least two people have died after being shot during protests.

**A copy of the report “Honduras: Human rights crisis threatens, as violence and repression increase” will be available from Wednesday 18 August 2009 at 00:01hs GMT at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR37/004/2009/en>**