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## **Honduras: Sharp rise in police beatings, mass arrests and harassment of activists**

Amnesty International today denounced a sharp rise in police beatings, mass arrests of demonstrators and intimidation of human rights defenders in Honduras since the June coup d'état and warned that fundamental rights and the rule of law in the Central American nation are in grave jeopardy.

According to reports received by the organization, yesterday morning around 15 police fired tear gas canisters at the building of the prominent human rights organization COFADEH. Around 100 people, including women and children, were inside the office at the time. Many had come to denounce police abuses during the break up of a demonstration earlier outside the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa, where ousted Honduran President Manuel Zelaya has taken refuge.

“The situation in Honduras can only be described as alarming,” said Susan Lee, Americas Director at Amnesty International. “The attacks against human rights defenders, suspension of news outlets, beating of demonstrators by the police and ever increasing reports of mass arrests indicate that human rights and the rule of law in Honduras are at grave risk.”

“The only way forward is for the de facto authorities to stop the policy of repression and violence and instead respect the rights of freedom of expression and association,” said Susan Lee. “We also urge the international community to urgently seek a solution, before Honduras sinks even deeper into a human rights crisis.”

Following the break up by police of a mass demonstration outside the Brazilian Embassy yesterday numerous demonstrators were reported to have been beaten by police and some several hundred detained across the city. Reports also indicated similar scenes of human rights violations across the country.

Amnesty International received information that dozens of protestors were taken to unauthorised detention sites across the capital last night. Although most of those detained have been released, mass arbitrary arrests may make those detained vulnerable to human rights abuses such as ill-treatment, torture or enforced disappearance.

Amnesty International has documented the limits which have been imposed on freedom of expression since the coup d'état, including the closure of media outlets, the confiscation of equipment and physical abuse of journalists and camerapersons covering events. Radio Globo and TV channel 36 yesterday suffered power stoppages or constant interruptions to their transmissions which prevented them from broadcasting.

### **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'état with frequent clashes between the police, military and civilian protestors. At least two people have died after being shot during protests.

On 19 August Amnesty International published testimonies and evidence which documented excessive use of force and beating of protestors by police in a report titled Honduras: Human rights crisis threatens, as violence and repression increase. Amnesty International was able to collect evidence and confirm from first hand testimony 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 from security forces. 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 by firearms allegedly by police or members of the military during protests.

President Zelaya returned to the country on Monday 21 September and is currently in residence at the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras.