

**HONDURAS Office of the National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights**

Amnesty International is concerned that the Honduran government is trying to clamp down on the Office of the National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights, which has been of paramount importance in the struggle for human rights and against impunity in Honduras.

On 20 April 1999 the National Congress of Honduras approved amendments to the Law of the National Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights which would limit the Office's scope for action and reduce the Commissioner's period of office.

Under an amendment to Article 4, the Commissioner is to be elected by a simple majority in the National Congress, where previously he was elected by a majority of the full Congress, and his time in office would be reduced from six years to four.

The amendment to Article 16 limits the Commissioner to investigating human rights violations against individuals, and stops him investigating abuses of authority or acts of improper administration by public officials.

There are concerns as well that the speed of the discussion and approval of the amendments may have breached parliamentary rules. The amendment was hurried through Congress in a record 24 hours and was put to the vote after some parliamentarians had left the chamber.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Since 1980 Honduras has been under civilian rule with a strong military influence. The *Partido Liberal* (Partido Liberal) has been in power since 1993, with President Carlos Flores Facussé taking office in January 1998.

The office of the National Commissioner of Human Rights was established in 1992, with Dr Leo Valladares as Commissioner. In October 1995 it was granted constitutional status, giving it a supervisory role complementary to the investigative role of the Attorney General. Dr Valladares was sworn in as Commissioner by the National Congress in 1996 for a period of six years.

In 1993 Dr Valladares published the report *Los Hechos Hablan por si mismos* (The Facts Speak for Themselves) which stated that former and (then) current military and civilian officials were responsible for the "systematic, clandestine and organized" disappearance of 184 people during the 1980s. Dr Valladares has continued his attempts to bring those responsible for the "disappearances" to justice; his efforts have resulted in international recognition for his work and threats, including death threats, against him and his family from anonymous sources, but suspected to be groups with connections to the military.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Spanish or your own language:**

- expressing grave concern at the amendments to the Law of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Rights which weaken the work of the institution;
- calling on the National Congress to immediately overturn the amendments;

- expressing your strong support for the work done by the Office of the National Commissioner for Human Rights and the Commissioner himself;
- calling on the President to ensure that the National Commissioner for Human Rights is provided with the support and resources to carry out his mandate to protect human rights and continue the work against impunity.

**APPEALS TO:**

S.E. Carlos Roberto Flores Facussé  
Presidente de la República de Honduras  
Casa Presidencial  
Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo  
Palacio José Cecilio del Valle  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras  
**Fax: + 504 235 6949**  
**E-mail: law\_bureau@hotmail.com**

Rafael Pineda Ponce  
Presidente del Congreso Nacional  
Congreso Nacional  
Palacio Legislativo  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras  
**Fax: + 504 238 6048**

Director of the Human Rights Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Lic Octavio Solomón Núñez  
Director de la Oficina de Derechos Humanos  
Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores  
Colonia Miraflores  
Boulevard de las Fuerzas Armadas  
Edificio Principal  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras  
**Fax: + 504 234 1484**

**COPIES TO:**

Lic. Leo Valladares Lanza  
Comisionado Nacional de Protección de los Derechos Humanos  
Avda. La Paz No. 2444  
Contiguo a Galerías La Paz  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras  
**Fax: + 504 236 7213/221 0536**  
**E-mail: conadeh5@hondutel.hn / info@conadeh.hn**

and to diplomatic representatives of Honduras accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 June 1999.

