

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Honduras: Elections should mark a turning point for human rights**

Presidential candidates in Honduras must promise to address the dire human rights crisis in the country if there is any chance of putting an end to the escalating levels of violence, insecurity and impunity, said Amnesty International ahead of elections on 24 November.

The organization has written to all eight presidential candidates urging them to set out their commitment to human rights.

“The human rights situation in Honduras is dire and the future of the country hangs in the balance,” said Guadalupe Marengo, Amnesty International’s Americas Deputy Programme Director.

“These elections could mark a turning point, and the presidential candidates must commit to concrete changes to stop the widespread human rights abuses and violations perpetrated against the people of Honduras.”

The letter to presidential candidates details the deep human rights crisis in Honduras, including the consistent killings, physical attacks and threats against human rights defenders.

“Those defending human rights face terrifying risks every day to carry out their vital work, in a society blighted by high levels of inequality, insecurity and impunity,” said Marengo.

“The upcoming elections offer a fresh opportunity for the new Honduran leadership to turn the corner on this awful situation. We are looking forward to seeing plans and proposals that prioritize the protection of human rights and those who defend them”.

In May this year, an Amnesty International delegation visited Honduras and documented the harassment, threats and attacks faced by Indigenous, Afro-descendant and peasant leaders, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) activists, lawyers and journalists.

In July, three human rights defenders were killed in the space of 10 days. On 24 July, judge Mireya Efigenia was shot at noon in El Progreso in the north-west of the country. The lifeless body of LGBTI activist Herwin Alexis Ramírez Chamorro was found on 21 July on the banks of the river López Bonito, in the northern coastal area of La Ceiba. Tomás

García, a prominent indigenous leader, was shot dead by the army during a peaceful protest in Río Blanco, Intibucá, on 15 July.

“The human rights situation in Honduras seems to deteriorate every day. It looks like no one is safe from the widespread violence and insecurity. Those defending human rights are particularly exposed to abuses and attacks,” said Guadalupe Marengo.

A key concern is that the police and army are actually contributing to the violence instead of combating it, something which is exacerbated by an almost total lack of accountability for the abuses they have committed. This is evident in cases such as that of Ebed Yánez. On 26 May 2012, the 15-year-old teenager was shot dead at an army checkpoint in Tegucigalpa, when he was riding a motorbike.

Amnesty International has urged Honduran presidential candidates to commit to: the comprehensive protection of human rights defenders; strengthening the justice system and the rule of law; eradicating impunity for human rights abuses; and ensuring justice and reparation for victims of human rights violations, in particular for those individuals and groups who are particularly vulnerable.

“We hope to see their public commitment to address these critical issues before 24 November, the day of elections”, said Marengo.

“The Honduran people have a right to live their lives free from fear and threats and to count on state institutions to uphold their human rights. We hope that the presidential candidates will respond with the urgency that this situation merits. Human rights must be at the core of these elections and reflected in the plans proposed by all eight presidential candidates.”

### **Background information**

According to United Nations figures, the Honduran homicide rate was 92 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011, the highest in the world. A full 82 per cent of the homicides committed in the country in 2010 involved the use of a firearm.

In April this year, the former Attorney General told the National Congress that only 20 per cent of homicides in the country are investigated.

According to the National Institute of Statistics, for 2010, more than 60 per cent of the population was living in poverty and more than 40 per cent in extreme poverty.

The Honduran police and army played a crucial role in the coup d'état that ousted President Manuel Zelaya in June 2009. Following elections the current President, Porfirio Lobo, came to power in January 2010. The Honduran authorities have failed to address serious human rights violations that followed the coup d'état and the elections. During this time police and military officers were responsible for mass arrests, beatings and torture. No one has been sanctioned for these violations yet.

You can read the whole text of the letter in [here](#):

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR37/014/2013/en>

You can read the presidential candidates' manifestos that Amnesty International has received in response to the letter here:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/honduras-elections-should-mark-turning-point-human-rights-2013-11-05>

Some previous Amnesty International materials on Honduras are available at:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/honduras>