LA **VOZ** DEL **PUEBLO** TOOLKIT

ADDRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS IN HONDURAS

MEET THE DIRECTOR

Jeremy Zipple, S.J., is Executive Editor of America Films. In this position, he oversees film and video content production for America's various platforms and is forging productions partnerships with other broadcast and media outlets. Jeremy is a veteran documentary producer, whose films have appeared on PBS, National Geographic Television, Discovery, TLC, and other networks. From 2007-2012, he was a staff producer at National Geographic Television in Washington, where he developed, directed, wrote, and produced documentaries on a broad range of topics, from biblical archeology in the Near East to a rat plague in northeast India to ancient Mayan civilization in the Yucatan. As a Jesuit, Jeremy has had assignments at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Houston, in a prison in Worcester, Massachusetts, and teaching film at Loyola University New Orleans. He is an (obnoxiously proud) graduate of Boston College.

Directed by Rev. Jeremy Zipple, S.J., executive editor of America Films, *La Voz Del Pueblo* is a collaborative effort of America Media, Ignatian Solidarity Network, and the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States.

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is intended to accompany the *La Voz Del Pueblo* documentary to promote further learning, discussion, and action. You may find the documentary online at: ***igsol.net/lavoz***

The website also features:

- Biographies of featured staff members from Radio Progreso
- Instructions for ordering "Human Rights in Central America" advocacy postcards
- A gallery of photos from the documentary
- Social media materials to share and promote the documentary with your network

For questions or feedback related to *La Voz Del Pueblo* and/or the accompanying toolkit, please contact: ***info@ignatiansolidarity.net***

JESUITS

IGNATIAN SOLIDARITY NETWORK

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THE DOCUMENTARY

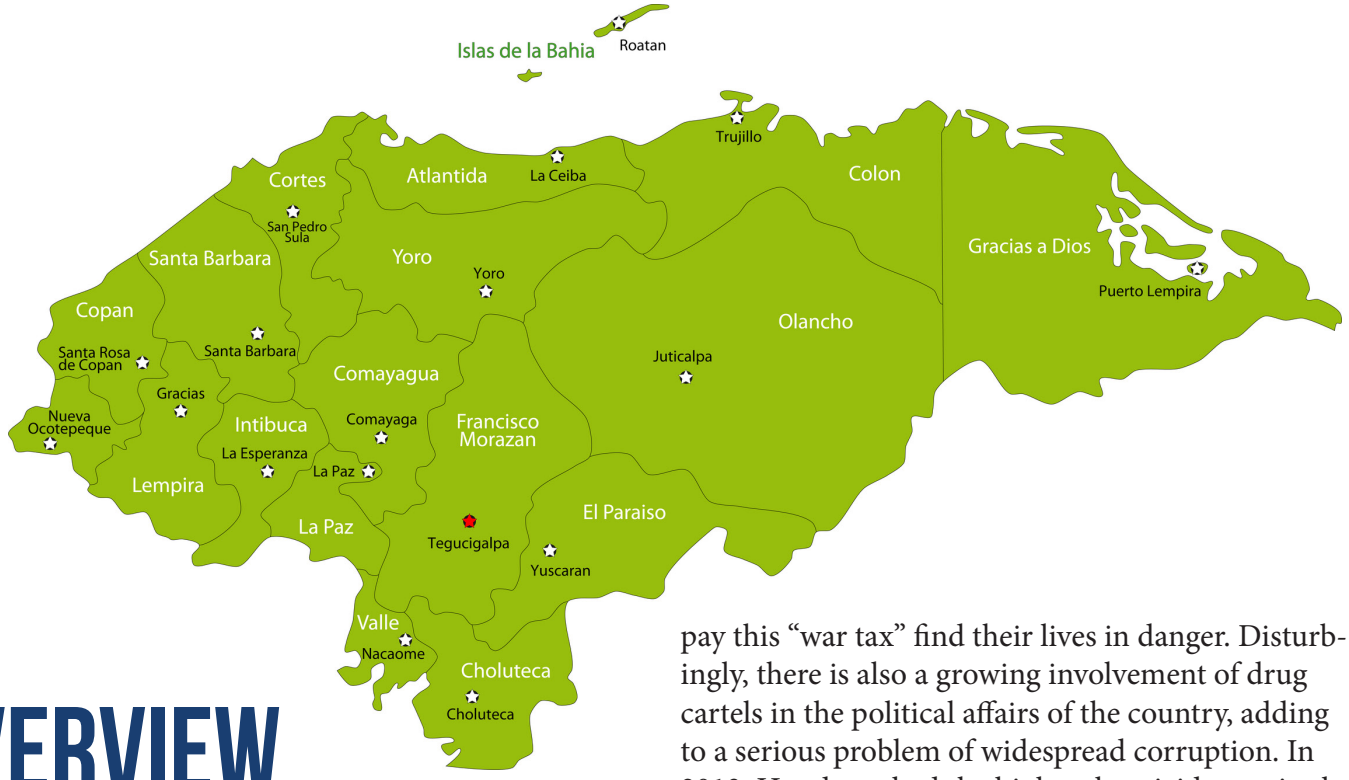
The most violent country on the planet isn't halfway across the globe—in the Middle East or Africa—it is a 2.5 hour flight from Houston.

Most U.S. citizens are at best dimly aware of the bloodshed that is the defining feature of present-day Honduras. Last summer, 2014, Honduran children surfaced on the southern U.S. border by the tens of thousands, prompting a Texas congressman to decry this "invasion of our nation." Likewise, protesters in California met the young immigrants with angry slogans like "return to sender!" But did protesters have any understanding of the situation these youth were escaping? The violence they'd be thrown back into if they were indeed "returned to sender"?

Yes, many U.S. citizens are ignorant of the Honduran reality and, even more, ignorant of the ways the U.S. shares blame for this tragedy. It is U.S. drug consumption that fuels Honduran violence—80% of cocaine consumed in the U.S. is trafficked through Honduras. And it is a century of U.S. political, military, and business intervention in Central America which has contributed to Honduras' political chaos and economic devastation. In this country where violence is rampant, where political corruption is a disease as virulent as any, where 90% of violent crime remains unprosecuted, there are almost no media outlets willing to call to task the powerful elite—drug cartels, politicians, and business leaders—who perpetuate this system to their own advantage.

Radio Progreso is the exception.

La Voz Del Pueblo is an 18-minute short documentary that explores this difficult Honduran reality through the perspective of journalists at the Jesuit-run radio station, Radio Progreso. If Honduras is a violent reality for the average citizen, it is even more so for journalists. Some 40 journalists have been murdered in the past five years—silenced for confronting the power of the military, government, and narcos. Radio Progreso is the only national media outlet in Honduras that is non-commercial and not beholden to government and business interests, which means its staff is under constant pressure. In the film, we hear the brave stories of three young RP journalists, who've faced harassment and death threats as they bravely carry out their work. Our camera tracks the reporters as they visit one of the most violent, gang-ridden neighborhoods in Honduras and as they report on multinational mining corporations engaged in a violent land-grab from defenseless campesinos (poor village farmers). We also meet the extraordinary director of Radio Progreso, Jesuit Father Ismael "Melo" Moreno Coto. Moreno's life, too, has been threatened, too many times to count, but he carries on. As he says in the film, "I feel my mission is to work with my brothers and sisters to shine the glory of God in the midst of barbarism."



OVERVIEW

The Central American country of Honduras is one of the poorest and most violent countries in the Western Hemisphere.

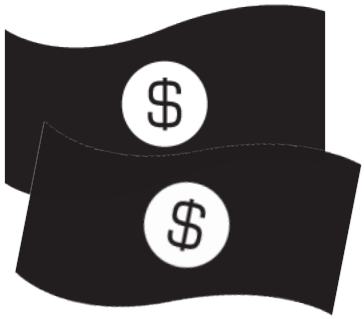
Situated between Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the Pacific Ocean, the beautiful and lush landscape of Honduras stands in stark contrast to its harsh social and political reality.

Honduras has a long history of political instability and authoritarian rule, although in the 1990s and first decade of the twenty-first century the country took steps to reduce the power of the military in political affairs, and to begin to tackle endemic poverty. These efforts came to an abrupt halt with a political coup in 2009, which removed the elected President at the time and led to increased poverty, inequality, and human rights violations throughout the country. The coup further undermined democratic practices in Honduras, contributing to instability and violence levels that were already unprecedented, with widespread gang activity, paramilitaries, and a growing influence of drug cartels as its hallmark. Gangs disrupt ordinary life by extorting businesses, taxis, teachers, and other members of the community, gaining control of neighborhoods and terrifying their residents. Those who refuse or are unable to pay this "war tax" find their lives in danger. Disturbingly, there is also a growing involvement of drug cartels in the political affairs of the country, adding to a serious problem of widespread corruption. In 2013, Honduras had the highest homicide rate in the world.

The Honduran government has largely responded to the violence through the increased militarization of the police and security forces, which are now involved to a greater extent in various spheres of government, including areas normally under civilian control. For example, an Inter-American Human Rights Commission delegation to Honduras in December 2014 noted the Armed Forces were involved in carrying out citizen security tasks, maintaining high-security detention centers, and education of children and youth in a guardians of the homeland program. Ending corruption and violence has been difficult in a country that lacks effective programs to ensure accountability of its police and security sectors or an independent judiciary. Consequently, impunity in Honduras, for almost all crimes, ranges between 95 and 98 percent.

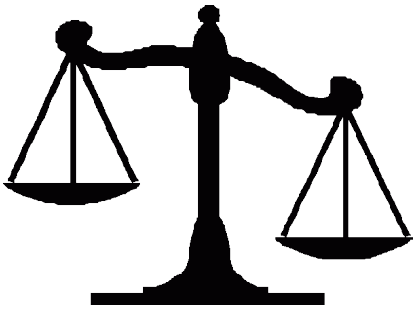
This report highlights some of the most vulnerable social groups in Honduras and the challenges they face in Honduras today. In an environment where impunity reigns, many are left with few options other than seeking refuge beyond their borders. The dangers confronted in the harrowing migration journey north (including extortion, assault, kidnapping, and possible death) are, for many, considered worth the risk, compared to the ongoing violence and threats they face in their home communities today.

POVERTY STATISTICS



30 PERCENT

of the population lives on less than $2.00 a day.



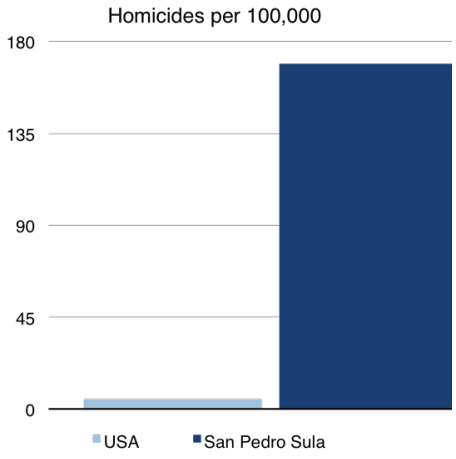
HONDURAS

is the most unequal country in Latin America.

OVER TWO THIRDS

of Hondurans live in poverty, and nearly 1/2 suffer from extreme poverty, with even higher rates in rural areas.

VIOLENCE STATISTICS



In 2014, the homicide rate in San Pedro Sula was 171 people per 100,000 inhabitants. The U.S. homicide rate was 4.5 per 100,000 in 2013.

The murder rate for young adult males ages 20-34 **exceeds 300 per 100,000.**

A woman loses her life an average of **every 17 hours** in Honduras.

The Honduran government estimated in the Fall of 2013 that **70 percent** of the regular police is corrupt.

CAMPESINOS, THE RURAL POOR, AND LAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

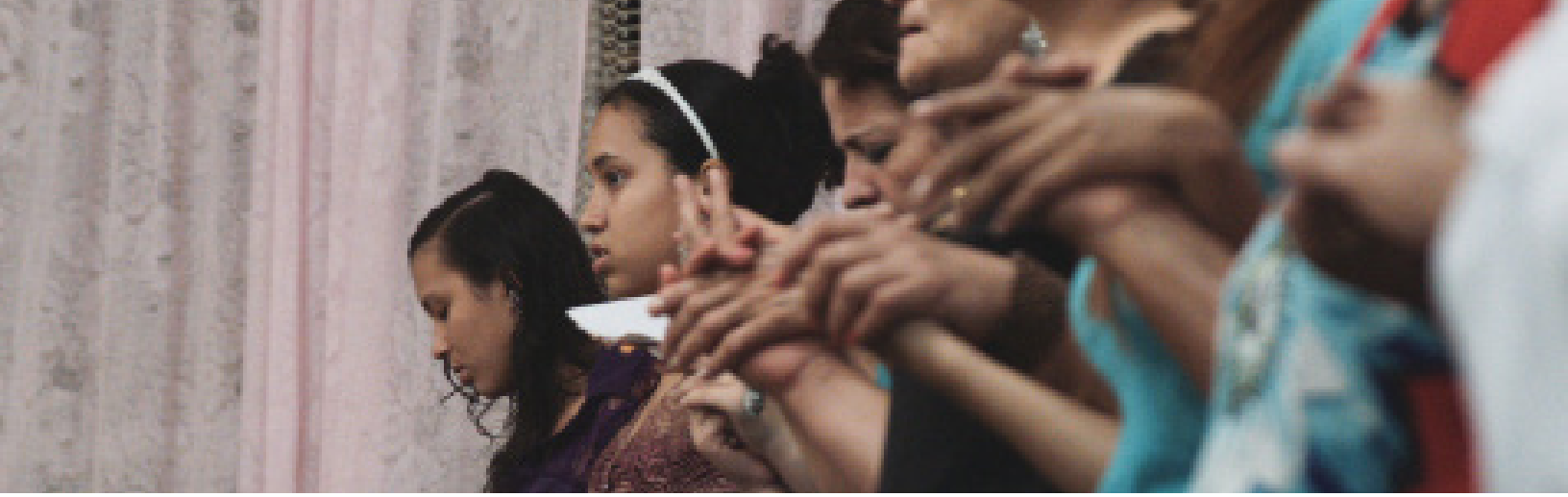
Unequal land ownership and access to land, as well as ongoing land disputes in parts of Honduras, have left numerous Hondurans landless, unemployed, and in poverty.

Much of the current crisis can be traced back to the passage of an agrarian law in 1992, which allowed for the sale of large tracts of land that previously could be held collectively. Since then, thousands of acres of land have been transferred from campesino communities made up of small-scale subsistence farmers to large agro-industrial companies. As of 2013, a quarter of the land is owned by less than one percent of farmers. In addition to this concentration of land ownership, farmers are increasingly becoming victims of violence. Between the coup of 2009 and February of 2013, at least 60 land rights activists and indigenous leaders were killed. Drug cartels force subsistence farmers to abandon their land so that they can build airplane landing strips and other infrastructure that support their illicit activities. Private security militia hired by wealthy landowners are used to respond to political protests and enforce evictions. Often, they work in tandem with government security forces and are accused of perpetrating human rights violations. Those responsible for such human rights violations have little fear of prosecution, given the high levels of impunity in Honduras.

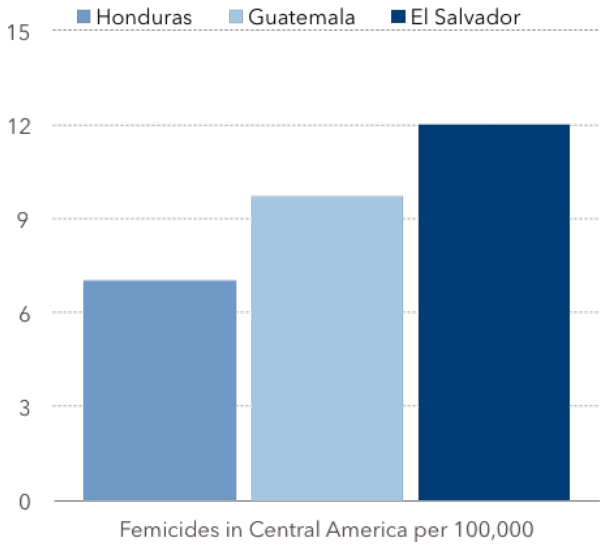
BAJO AGUÁN REGION

The Bajo Aguán region is a prime example of the conflicts surrounding land that have occurred in Honduras. Prior to the 1930s, this region was controlled by a small group of wealthy families with ties to transnational business interests such as Chiquita, formerly known as the United Fruit Company. Chiquita left in the 1930s and the area became one of the most diverse crop regions in the country producing coconuts, pineapples, grapefruits, and almost half of the country's bananas.

Food crops have steadily been replaced by African palm plantations. Oil from African palms is a staple ingredient in processed foods and biodiesel. Based off of contentious court orders, soldiers have forcibly evicted peasants from land claimed simultaneously by small farmers as well as Honduras's largest palm oil company, the Dinant Corporation. Although Dinant denies it, witnesses have implicated private security forces from the company in multiple human rights violations, and the deaths of scores of farmers, including the death of Matías Vallé, a founding member of the United Peasant Movement (Muca). Without a rigorous judicial system, many victims of land disputes and their families may never see justice.



WOMEN AND GIRLS



Violence against women and girls in Honduras has skyrocketed in recent years. In July 2014, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women noted that violent deaths of women in Honduras increased 263.4 percent between 2005 and 2013. Women and girls are victims of sexual assaults, disappearances, and homicides at the hands of spouses and boyfriends, gang members, security forces, and more.

Women and girls are targeted for violence for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they are gang members themselves, and killed by a rival gang. However, in most cases, they are not directly involved in the gangs. Some are victims of vengeance attacks, targeted because they are the mothers, sisters, or girlfriends of an actual target. They are assaulted or killed to send a message to their male family member involved in a rival gang, or victimized as part of police retaliation for a gang attack on police officers. There are also a growing number of cases of women and girls raped, tortured, and killed after resisting the "romantic" advances of a gang member or other powerful male in their community.

This gender-based violence has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of girls fleeing the country, including a marked increase arriving at the U.S.-Mexico Border. This trend is particularly true with respect to children coming from Honduras. According to the Pew Research Center, in FY2013, of all the unaccompanied minors from Honduras apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border, 69 percent were boys and 31 percent were girls (a higher percentage of girls than had been seen before). By FY2014, 40 percent of the unaccompanied minors from Honduras were girls, a greater percentage than any other country.

Although the crime of femicide was included in the Honduran Penal Code in 2013, it is rarely implemented, impeding progress in the prevention, investigation, and sanction of such crimes. Crimes against women, as with other serious crime in Honduras, rarely face serious sanctions. In the last six years 93.5 percent of such crimes were never prosecuted, leaving over 2,500 women without any form of justice.

YOUTH

Honduras is a very young country with 50 percent of the population below the age of 19. It is essential, therefore, that Honduras control rampant levels of violence, poverty, and insecurity so that its young population can reach its full potential.

However, currently the Honduran Government institutions have been woefully unable to protect youth and guarantee the rights of children and adolescents, thereby jeopardizing the future of its young citizens.

Gangs make life particularly precarious for children and youth in Honduras. One Honduran official noted that gangs are now operating in 40 percent of the country. Both boys and girls are forcibly recruited to join gangs. Sadly, many girls are recruited to become "community property" of gang members. A Honduran study in 2012 reported that most gang members joined between the ages of 11 and 20. Since gangs are often seen as a youth problem, young people in general are often targeted by anti-gang policies, such as mano dura, which is characterized by mass incarceration of suspected gang-affiliated youth. Adolescents in Honduras have essentially become scapegoats for violence within the country.

Staying in Honduras can be quite dangerous for young people. Sixty percent of all homicides each month are children under the age of 18. Some sources, such as Casa Alianza say the number is actually even higher, at more like 88 percent. Faced with these odds, it is understandable why many children and their families decide to migrate.

The United States became more aware of these children's plight this summer when thousands of refugee children and their families arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border. Honduran children and families are fleeing at higher rates than in any other Central American country—more than 18,000 unaccompanied Honduran children arrived in the United States in FY2014. These numbers make sense given the stark reality of life for children and youth in Honduras.

DANIEL CHACON, 10 YEARS OLD

Early one Saturday morning in August 2013, 10-year-old Daniel Chacon awoke early to set off with his 14-year-old brother to collect discarded boxes to sell for pennies to recycling collectors in the Medina neighborhood in San Pedro Sula. Around 2 p.m. in the afternoon, Daniel's brother was heading back to the buggy they used to transport the boxes when he heard shots ring out. By the time he got back to the buggy, his little brother was dead.

MILAGRO NOEMI MARTINEZ, 19 YEARS OLD

After being told repeatedly by narco-traffickers that she would be theirs or end up dead, Milagro Noemi Martínez, a petite 19-year-old from the Nueva Suyapa slums of Tegucigalpa, decided to try and migrate to the United States with her 21-year-old sister and a friend who had also been threatened by gangs. In Mexico, they were stopped and deported back to Honduras. Now out of fear, she stays locked in her mother's house all day.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND HONDURAS

The United States has a long and complicated history with Honduras. The U.S. military intervened in Honduran politics throughout the early 20th century to protect the foreign investments of large U.S. corporations like the United Fruit Co.

Later, Honduras served as a base of operations during the U.S.-supported 1954 coup in Guatemala, as well as the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, and during the years of civil war and Cold War proxy wars in Central America in the 1970s and 80s.

Despite the deterioration of the security situation in Honduras following the 2009 coup, in her book *Hard Choices*, former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton admits to continuing to provide aid to Honduran security forces (in 2012, U.S. aid for security purposes reached approximately $27 million), and even taking steps to ensure President Zelaya would not return to the presidency. The military and security support the United States has given to Honduran security forces is particularly concerning given the rate at which police and military troops have been implicated in human rights violations. The Honduran police have been accused of running death squads that target political opposition and gang members and even engage in the "social cleansing" of young men seen as dangerous or undesirable. Attempts to purge the police of criminal and corrupt elements have been slow and largely unsuccessful. For example, in June 2013, the entire investigative police unit (1400 officers) was suspended over allegations of corruption. Another factor that must be considered is the degree to which the ongoing demand for drugs in the U.S. provides substantial profits for illicit actors in the region, further fueling violence throughout the hemisphere, including in Honduras. The U.S. State Department estimates that up to 87 percent of all US-bound drug flights from South America transit through Honduras. Additionally, much of the U.S. efforts to combat drug-trafficking (through the so-called war on drugs) has served to shift the locations and dynamics of the problem, rather than resolve the complex problem overall. In Latin America, U.S.-funded approaches to fighting drug trafficking have relied heavily on military, police, and political systems not known for accountability to their own citizens, producing questionable results at best, and unintentionally undermining human rights and civilian control of security sectors at worst.

Violence, insecurity, and poverty have been problems in Honduras for a long time. This toxic mix has been poorly addressed within the country and historically received limited attention from the international community, although this may be changing. With the arrival of thousands of children and families to the U.S.-Mexico border this summer, the United States and many international institutions have recognized the urgent need to address the

serious problems plaguing Central America, and particularly Honduras.

In the face of consistently high homicide rates, rampant corruption, and widespread impunity, the United States Government is currently in a position of trying to solve a problem it helped create. Investment in community development, jobs, and education, as well as accountable, transparent and democratic government systems, not further militarization, will have a much greater impact on solving the numerous problems currently plaguing Honduras.

In late 2014, the governments of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador presented a joint "Plan for the Alliance for Prosperity," designed to increase international donor investment in infrastructure, security, and economic growth and investment. The Plan does not yet provide many details on country-specific strategies, and as such, it is not yet clear if it represents hope for a new beginning in the Northern Triangle countries of Central America, or the danger of increased funding, in the case of Honduras, for a government that has shown little regard for human rights and much needed institutional reforms. The impact of international aid in Honduras will be dependent on the country's commitment (and the commitment of the international community) to root out institutional corruption, develop accountable government systems which effectively engage its own citizens, and create real and lasting social, political and economic opportunities for its people.

In an opinion piece for *The New York Times* Vice President Joe Biden recently wrote, "There is no reason Central American cannot become the next great success story of the Western Hemisphere." In February 2015 the Obama administration announced that it will ask Congress for $1 billion in economic, social, and security funding for Central America. The aid request triples the amount available for the three countries (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala) in recent years, with a particular positive focus on increased funding for economic and social development (which generally includes funding for rural and small business development, health and education, youth violence prevention and employment programs). The funding request also includes resources for the problematic security sectors in the region, with the intent of combatting drug trafficking, tackling violence and crime, and restricting migration. Many details are not yet known on this funding, but it is clear that its impact for good or ill will be determined by which organizations the U.S. partners with, and the strength of oversight and monitoring mechanisms to ensure it contributes to, rather than undermines the well-being of the most vulnerable in each society.

Jesuit organizations in Honduras have communicated their opposition to U.S. funding or support of further militarization of the Honduran society and the police and security sector, given the high rates of abuse and corruption and lack of current political will for substantial reform of these sectors.

Instead, the Honduran Jesuits have called for U.S. foreign assistance to support human rights organizations that protect and defend the rights of women and children threatened by violence, journalists and an independent media that serve as the foundation for greater transparency and efforts to hold government institutions accountable, and local community and municipal governments working to strengthen democracy and create economic opportunity. Additionally, U.S. support for the well-respected international bodies such as the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), the U.N. High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCHR) and the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) could further contribute to important protections for the most vulnerable and new hope for people of Honduras.

EXTRACTIVE MINING IN HONDURAS

Honduras, because of its physiographic and geological characteristics possesses a highly developed continental crust with a diversity of mineral deposits, such as: antimony, iron, mercury, gold, silver, lead, and zinc; as well as abundant reserves of non-metallic minerals, such as: limestone, marble, plaster, bentonite, kaolin, perlite, granite, opal, and zeolite.

In the 1990s, the Honduran government began to concede licenses for mining exploration. At the same time, the State and the National Association of Metallic Mining of Honduras (ANAHMIN) acknowledged the need to revise the legal framework regulating the mining industry. The law then on the books had been in force since 1968 and was considered obsolete. While the land titling and tenure system was undergoing reforms, this process of conceding mining exploration licenses continued. Towards the end of 1998, thirty days after Hurricane Mitch hit Honduras, the National Congress passed a law under which were 35,000 km2 of land were granted through 155 mining concessions, which accounted for 31.4% of Honduran territory. The law was supported by international business interests in Canada and the United States and linked to long-term development plans the Canadian government brought to the fore as part of its hurricane recovery package. The law allowed foreign mining companies to purchase subsurface land rights and offered them tax breaks, a distinct change from the mining laws of the post-colonial era which protected the subsurface rights from international intervention.

After the coup d'état on June 28, 2009, the process of privatization and exploitation of natural resources in Honduras accelerated. Under the new regime Congress passed the Water Act, which eliminated through executive order some of the articles that meant to protect against dangerous depletion of water and other existing resources in protected zones. The executive order unleashed a veritable storm of licenses to exploit water, forestry resources, and fast-tracking the privatization of forests, rivers and dams throughout the nation.

In 2010, the government of Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo Sosa put into effect the Law of the National Vision – the National Plan. More than a proposal to revive the nation in an equitable, economic, and social manner, as it was meant to appear, it was a business plan that formed a part of a larger plan for the great Honduran entrepreneurial expansion, wherein it

would be important to construe an image of Honduras as being "open for business" for international business interests, starting with natural resources and strategic infrastructure. The plan divides up natural resources without establishing adequate policies for conserving them, ignoring the extreme environmental and institutional vulnerability of the nation.

In January of 2013, a new mining law was passed, oriented towards exploiting natural resources and guaranteeing that national and foreign mining companies would have the regulatory climate necessary to achieving their economic interests. The law contains very weak language and loopholes that allow little analysis and input for local communities to understand the negative impact such activities would have on their livelihoods and health. Presently in Honduras, 98 metallic mining projects have been approved and paid for in perpetuity with the sole condition that the companies pay government entities US $3.50 per year per hectare. There are presently 329 new applications for the mining of metals, some 194 concessions for the mining of non-metals that have already been granted and that together represent nearly one million hectares, and another 233 requests pending for mining non-metals. The 292 mining projects approved up to this moment comprise 46.6% of the nation's territory, almost all paid for by transnational capital. However, 562 requests were are in process to be approved. If they pass muster 65.8% of the nation's territory would be conceded to mostly foreign mining interests. The mechanism the State utilizes to strip indigenous and non-indigenous communities of their territorial and natural resources claims as its legal basis decrees that protect the concessions awarded to hydro-electric energy companies and transnational mines.

One of the characteristics of these concessions is that the State grants priority to the beneficiaries of foreign capital in order to increase income (by way of taxes) so as "to attend" to the growing demand for social services and employment in mining zones. The discourse around the government policy is supposedly meant to attract foreign investment that would enable the integration and development of the nation, since the economic base is internally weak. However, in point of fact, the current policy seems aimed at a model which will secure foreign investment in way that will continue to enrich only a handful of Honduran nationals while displacing and dispossessing rural communities. The model forces mining operations into an acute conflict with community interests, thereby creating a new source of social and political conflict in an already violent region. Communities, land rights activists, local leaders and parish priests have reported that strong-arm tactics are often used by both private security guards and national police who cater to the whims of the transnational mining interests rather than protect the rights of the local citizenry.

The families who find their livelihoods destroyed, usually poor farmers and small land owners are often forced to migrate to Honduran cities where they join the many urban poor in gang controlled neighborhoods where outsiders are viewed with suspicion and antagonism.

In reality, these decrees are of suspect legal legitimacy because their content contravenes other constitutionally protected rights and potentially threaten the future existence of the communities where the hydroelectric and mining projects are located.

The businesses that operate in the extractive industry in the country up to this point are Canadian, Chinese, Australian, Italian, and American and the banks that finance the mining businesses are from different parts of the world, including the United States, which is among the top ten financiers of mines in the world. In addition, it is important to highlight that much of the equipment and materials used by the industry are produced in the United States.

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