

2-3-2011

Honduran Human Rights Camp Says Skyrocketing Homicides Part of State Policy; Government Blames Organized Crime

George Rodriguez

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen>

Recommended Citation

Rodriguez, George. "Honduran Human Rights Camp Says Skyrocketing Homicides Part of State Policy; Government Blames Organized Crime." (2011). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/9852>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Honduran Human Rights Camp Says Skyrocketing Homicides Part of State Policy; Government Blames Organized Crime

by George Rodriguez

Category/Department: Honduras

Published: Thursday, February 3, 2011

Citizen safety does not exist in Honduras, where the unstoppable, rising rate of homicides, particularly political killings, is a part of state policy, local human rights advocates strongly allege.

Lack of respect for human life, albeit historic in this Central American nation, grew dramatically in 2009 as a result of the bloody June 28 coup that toppled President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya ([NotiCen July 2, 2009](#)) and has kept growing ([NotiCen, April 22, 2010](#)), activists say—acknowledging that they are also at risk.

There is no such state policy, rebuts Honduran President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo's administration, which civil-society sectors deem a continuation of the coup and illegitimate since it rose from the November 2009 elections held by the de facto régime that was harshly ruling the country.

Figures by the Observatorio de la Violencia of the Instituto Universitario de Democracia, Paz y Seguridad (IUDPAS), part of the state Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH), for the January-June 2010 semester, placed homicides at 2,929, 27.3% more than in January-June 2009.

Referring to the 2009 report by the Comisionado Nacional de Derechos Humanos (CONADEH), released in March 2010, the head of CONADEH Ramón Custodio—a staunch supporter of the 2009 coup, said, "Violent events against life in Honduras have reached alarming levels."

"Between 2005 and 2009, at least 18,435 people were victims of homicide," the 123-page report stated. Comparative figures in the document showed that, from 2007 to 2008, homicides per 100,000 people in Honduras soared from 49.9 to 57.9, while in El Salvador the figure dropped from 57 to 52, in Guatemala they rose from 45 to 48, and in Belize went from 30 to 32.

On the other end, homicides in Panama increased from 13 to 19, in Nicaragua remained at 13, and in Costa Rica moved from 8 to 11.

The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH) said that the Lobo administration's first semester—January 27-June 27, 2010—saw 67 political homicides. COFADEH is now estimating the figure for the second half of last year, and the number will certainly rise, according to the group.

Honduran human rights activist and COFADEH president Bertha Oliva told NotiCen she is certain the violent trend will continue escalating this year. "There were symptoms of lack of respect for life...undoubtedly, but it has grown and skyrocketed, and I doubt the situation can be brought under control in 2011," said Oliva. "This has shot up after the military coup. Here, after the coup, the situation people live in is one of uncertainty about knowing that our lives are secure."

"Even worse is that if before there was a possibility for victims' relatives to go before public, state institutions—in this case, the Ministerio Público—with a degree of hope and request an

investigation...and seek punishment, after the military coup it's highly unlikely that people will again trust this institution," Oliva said. "So, people live in absolute lack of governance, and murders are frequent. There're things that are happening here."

"One thing that we must be clear about is organized crime, murders, homicides by organized crime, another is drug trafficking, and the other is political persecution, but for us the most serious is political persecution," said the COFADEH leader. "Murders that are taking place because of political persecution are of strong concern to us. We're up against a well-structured strategy."

"They don't always attack a community's or a town's or a province's totally visible leader but a relative....This has an immediate effect on the visible leader, which is immobility. That's why it's difficult to even identify who will be the next victim among those leading such spaces as the Frente Nacional de Resistencia," Oliva said, referring to the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (FNRP).

An early, spontaneous expression of opposition to the coup, the FNRP has grown into a politically organized opposition movement now headed by Zelaya as its general coordinator ([NotiCen, Jan. 13, 2011](#)).

"But there's no doubt that selective and systematic death for political motives in 2010 persists and is very powerful," a phenomenon that, "as we see it, will keep up because of double standards," said Oliva. "Now, they're saying that there's the intention to harmonize, reconcile, and tend to this country's poor, but that's what is said, and the poor are being detained."

At the same time, campesinos are being driven off their lands, their communities, and this includes arrests, torture, police and military tracking "of community leaders' relatives," Oliva told NotiCen, adding that the golpista structure of repression, terror, uncertainty "remains intact" under the present government.

The Lobo administration's view is the other side of the Honduran political coin.

On the first anniversary of his four-year administration, Lobo told a Jan. 27 press conference at the Casa Presidencial that "we have a lot pending on the issue of crime control and respect for human rights."

"I don't deny there's an atmosphere of lack of safety we're fighting against," Lobo went on to say. But "there's no state policy whatsoever to murder anyone or to violate human rights."

"Let's separate things," Lobo told journalists. "One thing is that there is crime and another thing is [to say] that the state is murdering people, and from one thing to the other there's a great distance."

Regarding human rights, "There are problems that are good for export, but they create an image abroad that harms us, that affects us, that, many times, in the end can also affect programs that come or poor people," said the president.

Public Security Minister Óscar Álvarez says that most murders in Honduras are linked to drug trafficking, but different sectors "pin" the killings on the police. This is so, because "we're in a society with decadent values, and...part of society is after easy money from drug-trafficking, which causes those people to be murdered or killed while fighting against other groups for drug-trading territory," Álvarez asserted.

Also, in the minister's view, "youngsters grow up and no one controls them, fathers go around on their own, on the other hand the mother is in the United States, so they grow up like little animals on the streets. Later on, those youngsters go to school...and many times the professor they admire so much they later see on television taking to the streets, throwing stones, burning tires. Regardless of whatever they're protesting against...the image a child has is that the way to live in this world is protesting, complaining and going against authority."

"What we're witnessing is a culture of lack of respect for authority, and the issue must be taken up instead of saying that it's the police's fault," said the government official.

-- End --