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Honduran Police-Evaluation Authority Hands In Files on Cops Investigated for Crimes

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The Dirección de Evaluación e Investigación de la Carrera Policial (DIECP) has provided the Ministerio Público (MP) with some 100 files on approximately 200 investigated members of the Honduran Policía Nacional (PN) as part of a slowly ongoing process officially aimed at cleansing the deeply corrupt force.

The idea is for the MP to carry out proceedings, the DIECP announced in a four-paragraph, legally worded communiqué it issued on Sept. 26. The directorate reported that "102 files containing crime investigations carried out by DIECP were brought before the Ministerio Público for it to continue proceedings according to law. The files, involving more than 200 members of the career police were started on reports and other news of crimes received by the DIECP or were begun by it. In some cases the investigation shows that the alleged or investigated crimes were not committed, thus they are referred to the Ministerio Público."

Four days prior to the files being delivered at the MP, the head of the PN Gen. Ramón Sabillón told the local morning daily El Heraldo that the 200 cops are under a "disciplinary administrative investigation" and said that the police purge does not stop, pointing out that, in the past two years, 1,400 PN members, including officers, have been separated from the force (NotiCen, Jan. 26, 2012).

"It’s the police who has had the strength, the will to have a transparent public force, serving the community with high quality," added Sabillón.

El Heraldo reported that the police chief "regretted that the cleansing progress did not foresee the deficit the force would face once the bad members were expelled."

Three days before DIECP’s announcement, José Murillo, a member of the nongovernmental Alianza por la Paz y la Justicia (APJ)—made up of civil-society organizations and networks—said, "The police have responsibly taken on the cleansing process during the past months, and that creates much expectation in the people."

Some human rights activists see purge as a sham

But Honduran human rights activist Bertha Oliva counters, saying the results of the police-cleansing process launched in May 2012, during former President Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo’s administration (2010-2014), adds up to zero (NotiCen, Jan. 24, 2013). Some police have been separated from the force, often not because of the purge but because of internal conflict, Oliva told NotiCen.

"Look, here in Honduras, regarding security in recent times, any number of units aimed at combating corruption inside police forces and aimed at improving the practices of police officers have been invented, but, to this day, the results have been the same for a long time … nothing," Oliva said.
Oliva thus referred to the seven Honduran police forces—some of them military—which, under the umbrella of the PN, include the Dirección Nacional de Investigación Criminal (DNIC), Dirección Nacional de la Policía Preventiva (DNPP), and the Dirección Nacional de Servicios Especiales de Investigación (DNSEI). Also, as of last year, the Policía Militar de Orden Público (PMOP) and the Tropa de Inteligencia y Grupos de Respuesta Especial de Seguridad (TIGRES), whose acronym is the Spanish word for tigers (NotiCen, Sept. 5, 2013).

"What has happened?" asked Oliva "Some police are being separated but actually not to purge the police but because of internal problems between the police bodies themselves. To us, it's internal dispute and an internal power struggle, and that type of unit—DIECP, for example—is used for getting even."

The directorate "would make sense, in a certain way, had it produced results aimed at combating corruption and improving practices within the Ministerio de Seguridad, but that hasn't been the case," Oliva said. "It would be beautiful, were it to operate that way, but we haven’t seen a purged police (NotiCen, April 18, 2013). What we've seen is a diminished police, because it looks like the idea is to go back to the 1980s—a single unit." She referred to the military structure then in force for both national security and internal safety.

"The military have actually absorbed the Ministerio de Seguridad, and it won’t be long before it is formalized," the activist added. "Honduras seems like a country at war because of the number of soldiers, armed to the teeth and carrying out security operations on the streets. Maybe you’ll see four police and 10 military."

"So, one realizes that what’s actually happening is that they’re inducing the citizens to call for military presence as better than police presence and then make it legal and formal," Oliva warned. "There already is a military police. What we’re going to have soon is the military providing for internal safety."

Oliva predicted that "police who disagree with that are going to be jailed, but not necessarily those who have committed crimes. That’s the way it worked in the 1980s, and it produced the expected results for the purposes at that time … combating terrorism and international communism."

Oliva, co-founder and head of the Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos en Honduras (COFADEH), said, "Today, with the excuse of the struggle against drug trafficking and organized crime comes the justification for uniting the army and the police. But the purpose is to dismantle social forces. What’s being sold is that drug trafficking must be fought against."

In Oliva's view, police cleansing is only a matter of "image selling" to lead Hondurans as well as the international community into waiting for DIECP to produce results. "In reality we don’t have results according to what they’re selling but "completely the opposite.""

**US cut off some aid to DIECP**

As early as June last year, The Christian Science Monitor reported that the US "suspended all aid it was giving the Honduran Dirección de Investigación y Evaluación de la Carrera Policial (DIECP). It's been apparent for a while that the DIECP wasn't working well." The paper cited an anonymous US Embassy employee’s statements to the local morning daily Tiempo.
A US State Department spokesperson told NotiCen last week that "the suspension remains in effect," while "other US assistance to the government of Honduras is not affected."

Last year, "after re-evaluating assistance" to the directorate, "we determined that certain institutional reforms are necessary before the DIECP can fulfill its functions and therefore suspended US advisory assistance to the institution until further notice," the source added.

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