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New report documents human rights abuses in Honduras, sheds light on the increase in caravans through Central America

U.S. military support to region is a long-term investment in violence, forced migration

Faith delegation hears reports of femicide, land grabs and civilian arrests with torture and starvation

***** Expert voices in U.S. and Honduras available for interviews. See list at end.**

CAMBRIDGE, Mass./WASHINGTON, D.C. — Wednesday, October 24, 2018 — A new report from three human rights groups released on Wednesday chronicles ongoing human rights abuses in Honduras, ranging from imprisonment, abuse and torture of civilians and death threats, to high rates of femicide and accelerating land grabs of Indigenous communities' farms, homes and ancestral territory.

The report, "[Struggling for Transformation: A Faith Delegation's Observations of Human Rights Violations in Honduras](#)," arrives as a caravan of several thousand mostly-Central American migrants and asylum seekers continue their journey to the southern U.S. border. The members of the caravan, many with small children, are fleeing violence, poverty, human rights violations and corruption in Honduras. They face an extremely perilous journey through Mexico in the hopes of eventually reaching safety in the United States.

The caravan has drawn the ire of President Donald Trump, who pressed the Mexican government to prevent the caravan from crossing the Guatemala-Mexico border, saying he would bring military troops to the U.S.-Mexico border and threatening to close the border — despite U.S. laws and international covenants upholding the right to seek asylum.

The new report further corroborates the root causes of the migrants' desperate flights, spotlighting U.S. complicity. Authored by members of social justice organizations the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based [Unitarian Universalist Service Committee](#), San Salvador, El Salvador, and Berkley, Calif.-based [SHARE El Salvador](#), the report reveals findings by a 13-member delegation of U.S. faith leaders and human rights advocates who traveled to Honduras in May 2018 to observe conditions in the country firsthand. The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Institute Justice Team in Washington, D.C. collaborated on the report.

The U.S. delegation that conducted interviews for the report accompanied a group of Honduran journalists and human rights defenders from Radio Progreso/Equipo de Reflexión,

Investigación y Comunicación (RP/ERIC) as the Honduran group returned home following a May tour in the U.S., raising awareness of the crises in their country. In recent years, two of Radio Progreso's staff have been murdered.

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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

'Rat feces and stones' instead of rice

According to the report, civilians have been arrested, many times without warrants, and detained in sub-standard prison conditions for days, sometimes weeks. Some experienced physical torture, mock executions, beatings and starvation.

Honduran citizen Daniel Ordoñez testified to the delegation in May about the treatment he was subjected to. "We were all naked and placed in a cold area. We were completely naked for 16 days. They are cultivating false witnesses," Ordoñez said. "So they sent us to prison. ... They gave us 'rice and beans' but it was actually rat feces and stones."

Land grabs and displacement

José Artiga is executive director of SHARE El Salvador, which has offices in the United States and El Salvador. Artiga said land grabs of ancestral territory are also escalating in Honduras.

Artiga said, "Indigenous communities are being displaced from their farms and lands, often to make room for corporate farms and high-end development projects, and many of those are financed by the Honduran state, Western governments and international financial institutions."

"The U.S. government's policies in Honduras support the displacement of people; we must stop military aid to the corrupt and illegitimate government of Juan Orlando," said Artiga.

He said many of the land displacement cases are in open violation of international law, which protects the right of indigenous communities to remain on the lands they occupy.

"In this environment, it should be easy to understand why thousands of people feel no other recourse but to flee in hopes of finding asylum and survival," said Kathleen Erickson, with the Sisters of Mercy – Washington, D.C.

Violence against women in recent years is widespread in Honduras, says UUSC Vice President of Programs and Chief Program Officer and human rights lawyer Rachel Gore Freed. "Our delegates to Honduras met with members of women's organizations who reported that women face violence from partners, ex-partners, gangs, organized crime, and from the police and military.

"Police not only threatened women during protests of last November's contested elections, but in some parts of the highly militarized countryside, rapes are happening with impunity.

"And yet, U.S. Attorney Jeff Sessions feels compelled to disavow severe domestic violence and death threats by gangs as grounds for women's asylum claims," Freed said.

"When is the United States going to assume its responsibility as a protector of human rights and a leader in promoting international law, rather than descending into the depths of nationalism and perpetuating its own abuses of asylum-seekers?"

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EXPERT VOICES IN THE U.S. AND HONDURAS AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT:

José Artiga, Executive Director, [SHARE Foundation El Salvador](#)

Kathleen Erickson, Sister of Mercy – Washington, D.C.

Anne Connolly, Sister of Mercy – Washington, D.C.

Yolanda Gonzalez Cerdeira, Research Coordinator, Equipo de Reflexión y Investigación (ERIC)

Rachel Gore Freed, Vice President of Programs, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Hannah Hafter, Senior Grassroots Organizer, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Josh Leach, Policy Analyst, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

Rev. Kathleen McTigue, Director of the UU College of Social Justice

Carolina Sierra, Executive Coordinator, Foro de Mujeres por la Vida

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