

# **Call to end the repressive policies of the State of Honduras**

## **By feminist and human rights networks and organizations**

*Ms. Navi Pillay*

*United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

*Ms. Margaret Sekaggya*

*United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders*

*Ms. Rashida Manjoo*

*United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women*

People from all over the world, representing national, regional and international organizations and networks have signed this letter to express deep concern for repression and human rights violations suffered by the Honduran people. We denounce, in particular, the attacks on and persecution of human rights organizations and women human rights defenders (WHRD) who work tirelessly to condemn the repressive policies, high rates of violence and impunity that prevail in Honduras.

In the past few months, policies such as the “Municipal Education Law” (a step toward privatizing public education), and the suspension of 2010 salaries for more than 6000 teachers and professors, among other measures, have motivated large-scale mobilization and protest across the country and an ongoing teachers’ strike. In a bid to contain the social unrest, the Porfirio Lobo regime declared the strike unlawful and legalized the salary suspensions and the mass firing of those teachers and professors who refused to drop their demands. In addition, the Lobo administration has deployed state security forces to stop, often with brutal violence, the peaceful protests organized by the teachers and diverse social movements:

- Protesters have been attacked using tear gas and physical violence, leaving many wounded and some with bullet injuries.
- On March 18<sup>th</sup>, as a direct result of the violence carried out by the repressive state agents in Tegucigalpa, teacher Ilse Ivania Velásquez Rodríguez was killed.
- On March 24<sup>th</sup>, the following teachers were detained without charge in Tegucigalpa, and later transferred to a women’s prison in Támara: Ingrid Liseth Sierra, Nuria Evelyn Verduzco, Linda Melina Guillén Fonseca, María Auxiliadora Espinoza and Wendy Méndez. Among them was a professor with a 9 month-old baby from whom she was separated and denied access.

These are not isolated incidents. From the beginning of Mr. Lobo’s term, peaceful protests and demonstrations have been suppressed while persecution against feminist and women’s organizations has only increased. WHRD who sympathize with and support the national resistance movement are especially at risk. Recent examples include: the chain of threats

suffered by Sra. Gladys Lanza and *el Movimiento de Mujeres por la Paz "Visitación Padilla"* (Women's Movement for Peace) since July 2010; the continuous intimidation of women communicators/women active in the media from *la Voz de Zacate Grande*; on March 28<sup>th</sup>, Mirian Miranda (president of the *Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras*) suffered prolonged exposure to tear gas, underwent an arbitrary 12-hour detention and was denied medical treatment; and the assault of members of feminist organization, CESADEH, and the looting of their premises. WHRD also confront an entrenched culture of impunity and violence against women which has left 50+ cases of femicide in 2011 so far.

In 2010, there were five documented WHRD assassinations: two members of the Resistance Front (Claudia Brisuela and Teresa Flores), a member of the *la Red de Mujeres Jóvenes de la Colonia "Cruz Roja"* (Jessica Gálvez) and two activists from the LGBT movement (Gamaniel Parson and Neraldys).

Mesoamerican feminists and women's rights activists denounced these attacks before the United Nations Human Rights Council in March 2011 where the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders presented a report on the global situation of WHRD. At this event, Honduras pledged to provide security for its people and protect WHRD – a direct contradiction to the ongoing and systematic practice of intimidation, repression and indifference to the assassinations of women who are on the frontline of human rights work.

In light of this urgent situation we call on the United Nations to:

- Denounce the failure of the State of Honduras to comply with signed human rights treaties and agreements;
- Apply all measures possible to end the human rights violations of the Honduran people and the political persecution of the defenders of human rights in Honduras.
- Push the Honduran government for an impartial investigation to identify and prosecute those responsible for the attacks against WHRD in accordance with the human rights obligations of the country.

Sincerely,

Confluencia mesoamericana Las Petateras, Red de Salud de las Mujeres de América Latina y el Caribe, Articulación Feminista Marcosur, Asociadas por lo Justo (JASS), Asociación para los Derechos de las Mujeres y el Desarrollo (AWID), Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres

Liga de Mujeres Desplazadas de Colombia (Colombia), Observatorio Genero Democracia y Derechos Humanos (Colombia), Red de Apoyo Entre Mujeres por la Justicia Remjus (Colombia) Causa Abierta (Colombia), Programa de las Américas (Estados Unidos), Comité de Mujeres del Frente Nacional de Lucha (Guatemala), Sinergia Noj', UNAMG (Guatemala) Asociación de Abogad@s Mayas de Guatemala (Guatemala), Colectiva Actoras de Cambio (Guatemala), UDEFEGUA (Guatemala), Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz (México), Marcha Mundial de Mujeres en México (México), Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad (México), Centro de Derechos Humanos de la Montaña Tlachinollan (México), Consorcio para el Diálogo Parlamentario y la Equidad Oaxaca (México), Servicios Humanitarios

en Salud Sexual y Reproductiva (México), Grupo de Mujeres de San Cristóbal De Las Casas (México), Mujeres por México en Chihuahua (México), ProDesc (México), Red Mesa de Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez (México), Comité de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos "Hasta Encontrarlos (México), Movimiento pacto por la Cultura y Colectiva: arte, comunidad y equidad (México), Centro de Derechos Humanos de Las Mujeres (México), COSYDDHAC (México), *Mujeres Transformándose en Mujeres* (México), Centro Diocesano de Derechos Humanos Fray Juan de Larios (México), Defensores Oaxaqueños por los Derechos Humanos Isabel (México), Liga Mexicana por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos Oaxaca (México), Centro Las Libres de información en salud sexual región centro (México), Alternativas Pacíficas (México), H.I.J.O.S (México), Instituto Guerrerense de Derechos Humanos (México), Punto Focal Nicaragua de la Campaña 28 de Setiembre por la Despenalización del Aborto en América Latina y el Caribe, CODIM (Panamá).

Patricia Toledo (Red de Defensoras, Feminista en Resistencia, Honduras), Josie Chávez (Cuadernos Feministas, México), Yunuhen Rangel (México), Lucía Lagunes (México), Erika Cervantes (México), Cirenía Celestino (México), Emelia Ortiz (Triqui, México), Odette Alonso (Escritora, México).