

**Highlights from the Testimonies by Honduran Women's Rights Advocates
Regarding Women's Human Rights Violations in the Context of the Coup**

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The context of women's human rights violations:

- On June 28th, 2009, the democratically elected President of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, was taken from his home in the middle of the night and flown to Costa Rica by military transport. Since June, frequent power cuts, curfews, the controlling presence of military and police and check points throughout the country, sustained media blackouts, press censorship, repression and violence have become daily occurrences.
- Since the coup, there have been more than 100 non-violent street demonstrations in the capital city of Tegucigalpa alone, all of them disbanded by the security forces of the de facto government. The violence used to disband protesters has varied, ranging from threats and blockades, to the use of tear gas, sound devices, beatings and shooting.
- Women make up over 50% of the anti-coup demonstrators and continue to increase in their numbers and leadership. Honduran *Feminists in Resistance* is an ad-hoc alliance of dozens of women's groups and individuals that coordinates pro-democracy actions and participates in the National Resistance Front, as well as documenting and attending to increasing violations of women's human rights under the de facto regime.
- It is estimated that between 4,000 and 6,000 illegal detentions have occurred since the coup; in the first 15 days after the coup, there were close to 1,000.
- Among the rawest forms of repression against women in this context is sexual violence. From dozens of documented testimonies show systematic intimidation aimed at stopping women from participating in protests and in the resistance. Women report that police and military abuses and attacks are accompanied by threats and insults, such as, "You're asking to be raped if you get involved in these things."
- The incidence of women's human rights violations far exceeds those reported; fear of retribution and threats of violence against victims and their families discourage women from coming forward. Women victims are unwilling to report abuse to the police because police forces are often the perpetrators of the violence in the first place, along with other security forces. Under the de facto regime, the Honduran government's Office of Women's Human Rights and Office for Human Rights, which are responsible for investigating and providing legal defense for victims of abuses, have refused to follow up on complaints of human rights violations against security forces

Specific Human Rights Violations:

During a fact-finding mission with international human rights experts and observers in August, over 400 cases of violations of the human rights of women were registered. Of these, 240 testimonies were documented. The following facts are drawn from those testimonies.

- Among the principle violations that women experience are physical aggression, including kicking, beating, insults, and deep contusions caused by nail-studded police batons; sexual abuse; psychological intimidation and attacks with tear gas.
- Two women, Wendy Avila and Olga Osiris Ucles, died of complications from tear-gas exposure. Nine women LGBT¹ activists were killed, with their bodies showing evidence of torture. The state refused to provide a forensic autopsy for two of the women: Vicky Hernandez and Valeria Ucles.
- The most prevalent forms of police and military violence against women involve insults and beatings aimed at women's vaginas, breasts, hips and buttocks.
- Of the 240 cases registered, 23 women were victims of groping and beatings targeted to the breasts and crotch area as well as sexual insults and threats of sexual violence.
- Of these 23 cases, 7 involve rapes that occurred in the cities of Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, Choloma, El Progreso and Danli. These were all gang rapes carried out by police and used explicitly to "punish" women for their involvement in demonstrations. It is suspected that all were pre-meditated as the police involved used condoms. These rapes all occurred while the women victims were apprehended after peaceful demonstrations or during curfews. Of these 7 cases, only 1 woman has presented a formal case to the authorities (the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights). The other victims have presented their testimonies to women's human rights organizations but have refused to register their cases with the Honduran government Office of Human Rights or Office of Women's Rights.
- While it is certain these are not the only cases, all the women who are victims give three reasons why they do not register their complaints with the authorities: 1) they fear that the inevitable police investigation will involve the men who perpetrated the crime; 2) since the coup, women do not trust the judicial system to provide an effective response; and 3) where cases have been reported, the police have refused to register the complaint, as in the case of a 17-year-old raped in the company of another woman on September 22nd.
- Since June 28th, there has been an increase in the incidence of femicide. According to a report on violence against women produced by UNDP and the Autonomous

¹ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

University of Honduras, 312 women were violently murdered between January and February of 2008; an average of 26 femicides per month. Until March of 2009, there were 16 per month. According to figures from the Office of Women's Rights, 325 femicides had been reported through the end of September (an average of 31 per month), and during the month of July alone there were 51 femicides.

- Under the dictatorship there has been a rollback of gains in women's reproductive rights. On June 29th, one day after the coup, an initiative to ban emergency contraception (earlier vetoed by President Zelaya) was approved.
- Since the Decree of September 21st that removed guarantees for individual freedoms, peaceful protests have moved from the main streets to the neighborhoods and communities. To suppress these demonstrations, the de facto government has armed the military with rubber and wooden bullets, nail-studded clubs, batons, metal tubes, tear gas and pepper gas. Neighborhood attacks have had a disproportionate effect on women. Attacks are often carried out in the middle of the night by patrols of 4 or more police officers who break into houses and then stay there for many hours. Women with children are unable to flee and are thus trapped in their homes, a situation that increases their sense of vulnerability and defenselessness.
- Women attempting to flee such attacks have been shot during fire fights, There are numerous cases of women who have been detained by police or the military for more than 3 or 4 hours. Detainees report that they were not informed of the cause of their detention and were denied the right to a legal defense. They were also been deprived of medicines, food and water during detention.
- Human rights lawyers are defending 12 cases of women who have been accused of sedition under the decree PCM-16-2009, 22nd of September, which restricts constitutional guarantees.
- The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights required the Supreme Court of Honduras to provide protective orders for 92 women who are under surveillance and who fear for their lives. No action has been taken by the de facto government.
- Numerous women human rights defenders have been persecuted and watched by security forces.
- Feminists and women leaders in the resistance, along with teachers and lawyers with the Lawyers Front against the Coup, have received death threats direct from the police and military, or by e-mail or on cellphone voicemail. The most high-profile women leaders have received threats where the caller uses their name and profession, indicating the level of police and military surveillance of women in the resistance.
- Three radio programs of women's organizations have been taken off the air and denied broadcasting licenses under coup decrees that suppress freedom of expression.

Testimony given by:

Jessica Sanchez, human rights advocate with Honduran Feminists in Resistance

Adelay Carias, human rights advocate with the Center for Women's Rights and Feminists in Resistance

For further information, contact: Lisa VeneKlasen at Just Associates, lvk@justassociates.org