

November 24, 2009

Open Letter to the Secretary of State of the United States of America
The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Department of State
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We are writing to you as a world leader in women's rights. Your courageous track record on this issue has not only inspired hope among women everywhere, but also moved mountains to make an enormous difference in women's lives.

We turn to you now in recognition of your extraordinary commitment and with great respect to urge you to address the abuses of women's human rights occurring at present in Honduras. As numerous national and international human rights groups have documented, the *de facto* regime has engaged in a systematic campaign of intimidation, physical and sexual abuse, and torture. Increasingly, women have been the target of this campaign. We urge you to condemn the violence unleashed against the Honduran people, and in particular against Honduran women, and to take every peaceful measure possible to avoid further violence.

On November 2, representatives from Honduran women's organizations stood before the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) and presented a grim picture of violations of women's human rights by the coup regime.

They reported a general climate of intensified and increased physical, verbal, and psychological abuse of women that included the following:

- Women suffer physical aggression, including kicking, beating, insults, and deep contusions caused by nail-studded police batons; rape; sexual abuse; and attacks with tear gas. In at least two cases the aggression resulted in death.
- The most prevalent forms of police and military violence against women involve insults and beatings aimed at women's crotch areas, breasts, hips, and buttocks.
- Of the 240 cases registered, 23 women were victims of groping and beatings targeted at the breasts and crotch area, as well as sexual insults and threats of sexual violence.
- Of these 23 cases, 7 involve rapes (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.
- Since June 28, there has been an increase in the incidence of femicide. According to a report on violence against women produced by United Nations Development Programme and the Autonomous University of Honduras, 312 women were violently murdered between January and December 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.

- Nine women LGBT activists have been killed since the coup, with their bodies showing evidence of torture. The state has refused to perform a forensic autopsy for two of the women.
- Since the Decree of September 21 that suspended civil liberties, peaceful protests have moved from the main streets to the neighborhoods where the military has attacked residents. This has had a disproportionate affect on women, as they and their children become trapped by fear or military occupation in their homes. Women attempting to flee the attacks have been shot.
- Women have been detained by police or military for hours and even days, without charges or access to legal counsel. Women detainees have also been deprived of medicine, food, and water.
- The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights required the Supreme Court of Honduras to provide protective orders for 92 women who fear for their lives under the coup regime. The pro-coup Court has taken no action.
- Feminists and women leaders of the opposition to the coup regime have received death threats from the police and military, or by e-mail or on cell phone voicemail.
- The state institutions responsible for dealing with women's rights violations no longer function to protect women's rights or even receive complaints. Since those responsible for investigating cases are often the perpetrators of the crimes, women are unwilling to come forward to report crimes.

The situation for Honduran women constitutes a human rights crisis. As Secretary of State, you have declared women's rights to be a pillar of U.S. foreign policy. At the United Nations, you have worked to ensure that women's rights and well-being are a matter of international and global concern, and have stated that allowing women's rights to be violated with impunity in one place, jeopardizes women's rights everywhere. Today, we urge you to confirm that in Honduras women's rights are human rights and must be protected.

It was the rupture of democratic order in the country that gave rise to the current crisis in women's human rights in Honduras. Therefore, only an immediate return to constitutional government can stop the rapid deterioration of women's rights. Hastily improvised elections--without the full participation of Honduran society, international recognition, or the reinstatement of the elected president--cannot be free or fair and do not guarantee a return to rule of law. Only a return to rule of law can reestablish legal institutions for redress of human rights violations and end the current situation of impunity for crimes against women.

We ask that you investigate the violations of women's human rights in Honduras. We urge you to condemn the orchestrated campaign of violence against women being waged by the current *de facto* regime. Finally, we urge you to insist on a withdrawal of armed forces from the streets, neighborhoods, and homes of Honduras.

The current abuse of women of Honduras imperils the future of Honduras and the region, as it deeply marks the lives and futures of Honduran women. We look to your leadership now. Please step forward, as you have done elsewhere, and work to stop the violence now.

Sincerely,

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