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## **Scholars and Human Rights Organizations Demand End to U.S. Military and Police Aid in Honduras**

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Over 40 Honduran scholars, with the support of over 300 additional signatories from 29 countries (including over 200 signers from the U.S.) sent a letter to President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton today demanding an end to U.S. police and military aid, including training, to Honduras. The letter also demands that the U.S. submit to a Honduran popular referendum to determine whether U.S. military bases should remain in the country, rejecting the Drug War as a reason for the increasing U.S.-led militarization of the country. It states:

Combatting drug trafficking is not a legitimate justification for the U.S. to fund and train security forces that usurp democratic governments and violently repress our people. Everyone here in Honduras, including the staffers of your DEA offices in Tegucigalpa, know exactly who the drug traffickers are and where to find them. The most powerful drug lords in this country also financed and backed the coup that removed the few barriers to drug trafficking that existed; they are powerful princes of agribusiness, business and finance, large landowners and members of Congress. They have financed presidential campaigns, they have family ties to politicians at all levels and from all political parties. Some of them are allies of the U.S. embassy, which recognized...at least one of them as a drug trafficker. The problem is not that the police and armed forces lack resources and training. The police and armed forces are an integral part of the problem; many of their members are deeply complicit in the drug trade. They profit from transactions on South American product that passes through our country on its way to yours and on the residue that is distributed here...But those very few who dare to speak this truth from within have been tried for abuse of authority...or murdered...by U.S.-funded and trained Honduran police.

The academics' letter follows May's joint Honduran police-U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency raid that killed four innocent civilians and the news that soldiers deputized by Honduran President Porfirio Lobo to act as police officers and driving vehicles donated by the U.S. government shot and killed two teenagers last week for not stopping at a Tegucigalpa police road block.

Rodolfo Pastor Fasquelle, Professor of History at the Colegio de México, and former Honduran Minister of Culture, Arts and Sports, said today: "Since the Honduran signatories of our letter to Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton sent it to our friends and colleagues abroad to sign, high-level changes in the police institution have taken place. These changes do not bode well. The national police are now under the control of even more corrupt figures than before, which constitutes both an admission that reforms have failed, and a reaffirmation of the Honduran state's policy of giving impunity to the criminals within its security apparatus. It is not in the least reassuring to us, following the DEA massacre of innocent indigenous Miskitu people, to hear the U.S. Ambassador to Honduras Lisa Kubiske insisting that the end of U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan means that the military resources from those disastrous wars will be used in our country."

The Honduran academics' letter also references the ongoing bloody conflict in the Bajo Aguán region highlighted in the letter sent by 94 Members of Congress this March to Secretary Clinton, demanding a halt to military and police aid. Marc Edelman, professor and department chair of the Department of Anthropology, and a member of the executive committee of the Human Rights Program at Hunter College, participated in the International Public Hearing on the Human Rights Situation of the Peasant Communities in the Bajo Aguán this May 28-30. He said today:

The International Public Hearing on the Human Rights Situation of the Peasant Communities in the Bajo Aguán, was held in Tocoa, Honduras on May 28. The Bajo Aguán region is the site of the most acute agrarian conflict in Central America in the past fifteen years. The Hearing highlighted the deeply

troubling absence of effective institutions in Honduras. Testimony from peasant victims of human rights violations suggests that violence committed by the private security forces of large landowners, the National Police and the military frequently goes unpunished and that rural people have nowhere to turn to seek redress. Since the 2009 coup, Honduran human rights organizations have documented the assassinations of 48 individuals affiliated with peasant organizations in the Bajo Aguán, as well as those of a journalist covering the conflict and his pregnant wife. One peasant was also 'disappeared' in 2011 and remains missing. The entire zone has been militarized with the excuse of controlling drug trafficking, but it is the rural communities that have borne the brunt of the militarization.

Adrienne Pine, assistant professor at American University and author of *Working Hard, Drinking Hard: On Violence and Survival in Honduras* helped to collect signatures from colleagues in the U.S. She states: "94 Congress Members, hundreds of academics from Honduras and around the world, dozens of high-profile human rights and press freedom organizations, and citizens from Honduras and the U.S. are demanding the same thing of the Obama administration: stop funding and training the murderous Honduran police and military, and stop killing innocent Hondurans in the name of the War on Drugs. In the wake of the DEA-led massacre of pregnant women and children in the Moskitia, it is high time this administration start listening to citizens and experts. Rather than starting another unwinnable war against people in a nation ruled by a U.S. supported, coup-installed president, the U.S. should be spending its resources on shoring up our own democracy."

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