

URGENT ACTION



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25 September 2009

UA 255/09

Fear for safety/excessive force/arbitrary detention

HONDURAS

Protestors

Reports indicate that at least five people have been killed in the political turmoil in Honduras since 21 September, when deposed President Manuel Zelaya returned to the country. Mass demonstrations against the *de facto* authorities have taken place in various cities across Honduras, and there are reports of many demonstrators having been beaten and some shot by security forces, and of wide-scale arbitrary detentions.



On Tuesday 22 September, police officers are alleged to have shot dead 18 year-old José Jacobo Euceda Perdomo in the city of San Pedro Sula. A further four people are reported to have died in Tegucigalpa, including a 65-year-old man who died of gunshot wounds received during a demonstration.

During the 22 and 23 September, reports indicate that police entered poor residential neighborhoods of the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa and the second city San Pedro Sula, searching for opponents of the *de facto* authorities who had taken part in demonstrations since 21 September. Police are reported to have remained in the residential neighborhoods for several hours, during which time they fired live ammunition and tear gas, and entered homes without warrants late at night, beating and detaining many individuals. Young people appear to have been particularly targeted in these raids.

The location of those who were detained in Tegucigalpa remains unclear: some were taken to the main police stations, while others may have been held in the residential neighborhoods. Such irregular methods of detention place individuals at risk of grave human rights abuses, since they may never be formally registered as being in detention. While many are believed to have been released, it is possible that others remain detained in unknown locations.

Tension has also remained high during the day in some areas. The curfew was lifted for several hours on 23 September in Tegucigalpa, and in the aftermath of a demonstration against the *de facto* authorities there were reports of beatings and arbitrary detentions of demonstrators or those suspected of being demonstrators. Witnesses have reported seeing soldiers randomly beating people on the street with wooden clubs.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Concerns about human rights in Honduras have intensified since the democratically elected President José Manuel Zelaya Rosales was forced from power on 28 June and expelled from the country by a military-backed group of politicians led by Roberto Micheletti, former leader of the National Congress. There has been widespread unrest in the country since the *coup d'état* with frequent clashes between the police, military and civilian protestors. At least seven people are reported to have died in unclear circumstances since 28 June. Curfews have been imposed sporadically and often with little notice since 21 September, leaving people with few opportunities to buy food and fuel.

Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

Tensions have mounted since the return to Honduras of deposed President Manuel Zelaya on 21 September. The resulting demonstrations against the *de facto* authorities have met with wide-scale repression from the security forces, leaving many wounded and reports of five dead since 21 September. While a high-level delegation from the Organization of American States was due to visit the country on the weekend of 26 September with the objective of securing a negotiated solution, recent reports indicate that the *de facto* authorities have proposed a delay of several days.

A research mission to Honduras by Amnesty International took place from 28 July – 2 August 2009. The delegates collected many first hand testimonies of human rights abuses against protestors. Amnesty International delegates interviewed many of the 75 people detained at the Jefatura Metropolitana N°3 police station in Tegucigalpa after the police, supported by the military, broke up a peaceful demonstration on 30 July. The report illustrates many cases of ill-treatment, including beatings with batons, by police and military against the protestors.

During the mission Amnesty International was able to confirm that detention and ill-treatment of peaceful protestors are being employed as a form of punishment against those openly opposing the *de facto* government: other protestors who support the *de facto* regime did not suffer the same abuses. Evidence contained in the report shows that during the mass arrests of protestors by the police and military, some women and girls were subjected to gender-based violence.

The human rights situation outside of Tegucigalpa is believed to be equally or even more serious. The checkpoints along the primary roads in Honduras are currently manned by military and police who often delay or refuse entry to human rights organizations to areas where human rights violations are reportedly occurring.

Amnesty International is deeply concerned that using excessive force, ill treatment and mass detentions to repress dissent will only serve to inflame tensions further and lead to serious human rights violations. Force must only be employed in the most extreme circumstances and not as a method to prevent people's legitimate right to peacefully demonstrate.

Amnesty International found that limits have been imposed on freedom of expression and there have been a number of attacks against journalists - including the closure of media outlets, the confiscation of equipment and physical abuse of journalists and camerapersons covering events.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:

- Calling for the *de facto* authorities to stop using excessive force against protestors and respect freedom of expression and association;
- Urging the *de facto* authorities to immediately release all detainees, unless they are charged with a recognizable criminal offense and are immediately granted access to lawyers and relatives.

APPEALS TO:

Mr Roberto Micheletti
Casa Presidencial
Boulevard Juan Pablo Segundo
Palacio José Cecilio del Valle
Tegucigalpa, HONDURAS

Fax: 011 504 239 3298

Salutation: Mr Micheletti

(Note: it is not possible to confirm that this fax number is still the correct one for the office inside the Casa Presidencial - please send letters as well as faxes to ensure the message arrives.)

COPIES TO:

Ambassador Roberto Flores Bermudez
Embassy of Honduras
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Washington DC 20008

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PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

Check with the AIUSA Urgent Action office if sending appeals after 6 November 2009.