

Honduras: Unsolved matters

Collaboration of donors and funders of grassroots organizations and communities in Honduras

“The situation in Honduras is graver than we could even imagine – a continuous violation of human rights.”

- Bertha Oliva, (COFADEH)

Dear colleagues,

A small group of the Grant-makers Without Borders (GWOB) members has been in consultation with grassroots organizations in Honduras to find out more about the political situation in the post-election period.

Several events after the election have raised concerns among funders and donors about the effectiveness of our grant-making in Honduras. For instance, the arrests of people based on random charges and longer detentions without access to a lawyer are serious charges to which the current government has declined to respond. Also, the ransacking and destruction of a community radio of the largest Garifuna community indicates a lingering climate of insecurity in the country.

A recent report by the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights IACHR also points out a widespread of fear among those who have opposed the coup d'état and remain dissident to the regime after the election of November 29th.

“The sectors of Honduran society that condemn the coup d'état told the IACHR that they feared suffering reprisals on the part of security agents and distrusted the actions of those institutions that have not forcefully condemned the interruption of the democratic institutional order and have failed to act in the face of publicly known allegations. The *de facto* authorities and the Supreme Court of Justice of Honduras systematically deny the existence of these violations, a circumstance that results in a state of inactivity and tolerance that makes it easier for such acts to be repeated with impunity.”

Excerpt from the IACHR's press release on the new report

Without constitutional human rights guarantees, the path toward the promotion of social and economic development in Honduras is closed. Regardless of the thematic focus of our grant-making, insecurity and fear will prevent partner-organizations from realizing their long term goals of cultural, social and economic rights.

As funders and donors, we are asked to think creatively about how best to continue to support our partners in Honduras without undermining their political efforts to build toward a new social compact and a constitutional assembly. Constitutional reform is the main demand of grassroots organizations that have now been dismissed from the negotiating table. The thwarting of that effort to build toward the constitutional assembly is the root cause of the lingering social conflict in Honduras.

A. Summary of our findings:

Political scenario and human rights situation in Honduras

1. Contrary to what mainstream pundits projected, the presidential elections of November 29th did not resolve the political turmoil in Honduras. Due to the militarization of the country, lack of credibility in the system and fear, less than 40% of people voted in the election. Porfirio Lobo, the Democratic Union Party candidate, won the election in a landslide. Even though he is a member of a rival political party of the coup leader Roberto Micheletti, Lobo is politically in line with current regime. During his victory speech, he undermined the legitimacy of the constitutional president Manuel Zelaya's governing rights by saying "Zelaya is history". He also refused to recognize that the vast majority of the population decided not to participate in the election in a clear expression of resistance to the repressive regime.
2. Personal conversations with Honduran organizers indicate that the majority of the population remains in opposition to the regime which will undermine the capacity of the new president to govern. Lobo will be inaugurated on January 27.
3. Threats against dissident communities continue. Last week, a community radio in the Afro-descendent Garifuna territory of Triunfo was ransacked and set on fire. The Faluma Bimetu community radio played a key role in the education and organizing efforts of the Garifuna community. Local families have constantly been harassed by politicians and brokers of investors interested in building resorts and other tourism business in Triunfo.
4. Several organizers are living in hiding or have left the country in fear of persecution and death threats.
5. Women and children are the segments of society most affected by the repression.
6. Human rights violators remain at large. Dozens of activists, organizers and human rights defenders have pending judicial cases against them. Some are still in jail.
7. The legal defense of imprisoned activists as well as human rights safeguards of citizens are in jeopardy. There is little probability of winning in court, due to the lack of impartiality of court system. In the weeks – post-election, random detentions were still happening.

According to recent report of InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), there are no safeguard guarantees in Honduras. "IACHR verified the ineffectiveness of judicial remedies to safeguard human rights. The violations of the rights to life, humane treatment, association, personal liberty, a fair trial, freedom of expression, political rights, and the rights of women and minority groups were exacerbated by the lack of an institutional order that would make it possible to channel complaints, investigate the facts, punish those responsible, and provide remedies to the victims."

8. The Truth Commission set up as part of the negotiated political agreement had little credibility, due to the continue government repression. According to a human rights defender, "the truth commission under the present conditions is offensive and has no credibility".

For more information about this donor/funder collaboration, please contact Saulo Araújo at saraujo@grassrootsonline.org or John Harvey at gwob@att.net.