

Honduras: Unsolved matters

Collaboration of donors and funders of grassroots organizations in Honduras
January of 2010

“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 Grantmakers without Borders (Gw/oB) members has been in consultation with grassroots organizations and members of the National Resistance Front against the 2009 coup d'état in Honduras to find out more about the political situation in the post-election period.

Several events after the November 2009 election have raised concerns among funders and donors about the effectiveness of our grant-making in Honduras. In turn, this raises questions regarding what would be most effective in the current context. For instance, the arrests of people linked to the National Front 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 (Afro-Honduran) community indicates a lingering climate of insecurity in the country.

A recent report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) also points to widespread fear among those who have opposed the coup d'état and remain opposed 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 convention. 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.

In November 2009, an informal sub-group of Gw/oB members decided to consult with the National Front, the main coordinating body of the grassroots resistance to the coup government. On December 9th, we had our first call with two representatives of Honduras' National Resistance Front: Bertha Oliva and Trinidad Sanchez. Both offered similar accounts of ongoing repression and the fragile nature of the current moment in Honduras. Also, they pointed us to the coordinating committee of the National Front to deepen the analysis of the ways to support the grassroots pro-democracy movement.

On January 11th, we interviewed Sara Rosales from the National Front. Sara updated us on the work and new strategies of the National Front, including the change in the name. Currently, the organization is called the National Front of Popular Resistance. Our conversation with Sara was very productive, as she offered us insights about the organizational structure of the National Front, its funding and grant management processes.

We are pleased to share this information with you below. At the same, we invite you to join us in our upcoming conference call on February 10th. (More information about the call at the end of this report.)

Funders/Donors group participants:

Diego Merino, American Jewish World Service
Hal Baron, Communitas Charitable Fund
John Harvey, Grantmakers Without Borders (GWOB)
Karen Lehman, Communitas Charitable Fund
Maria Aguiar, Grassroots International
Monica Larenas, Fund for Nonviolence
Saulo Araujo, Grassroots International
William Lankford, CASEP

Short bios of the Honduran participants in the consultation process:

Sara Rosales, member of the Feminist Women's Movement of Honduras. She is a member of the finance sector of the National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP).

Bertha Oliva, general coordinator of the Committee for Family Members of Disappeared Prisoners in HONDURAS (COFADEH).

Jose Trinidad Sanchez, director of the Network of Alternative Community Commercialization (Red COMAL).

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, as well as an electoral boycott called by Zelaya supporters, 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 the 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 Sara Rosales 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 was inaugurated on January 27.
3. Threats against dissident communities continue. For example, on January 16th, 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 the court system. In the weeks after the election, random detentions were still happening.

According to recent report of Inter-American 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”.

Ongoing initiatives led by the National Front:

1. The National Front is organizing meetings and workshops at community, micro-regional and national levels. These events are helping to shape the strategies of the National Front and create a general, consensual foundation of what the social movements in Honduras want.
2. On January 7th, 15,000 members of the National Front demonstrated in front of the National Congress during the vote that decided the withdrawal of Honduras from the Bolivarian Alternative to the Americas (ALBA). ALBA was created in 2004 as a regional alternative to the Free Trade Agreement to the Americas (FTAA).
3. The National Front is organizing a national gathering to analyze the current political scenario and next steps for the upcoming months.
4. Over the weekend of January 17-18, Front representatives met to discuss a new organizational structure. Approximately 60 representatives of different communities attended the meeting.
5. Members of the Front see that the struggle will be long and have reached consensus; they will be focusing their energy on the organizing of neighborhoods and sectors of Tegucigalpa, and other communities (towns and villages of Honduras).
6. The National Front is mobilizing its constituents to demonstrate during the inauguration of Porfirio Lobo on January 27th.
7. The National Front has decided upon the following as central axes of its work:
 - a) Defense of human rights
 - b) Education, training and leadership development
 - c) Mobilization
 - d) Organizing to build a new social contract
8. The National Front will continue to pursue its main goal of a democratic and grassroots-led constitutional assembly.

B. Areas of work for which the National Front is seeking support:

- a) *Human rights defense*
- b) *Training and leadership development* to form the organization in the new era of Honduras, without negatively impacting the mobilization and defense of Human Rights.
- c) *Rebuilding of communications capacity.* Community radios and dissident media outlets were shut down or destroyed by arsonists. Communications is an important theme for long-term strategies.

- d) *Organization of popular education events* about the constitutional assembly.
- e) Support for solidarity groups in other countries and travel for members of the National Front to other countries to nourish solidarity and learning exchanges between groups.

C. How to support the National Front and individual organizations in Honduras:

1. The National Front has created a finance committee responsible for the elaboration of projects, accounting, monitoring of actions and communications with funders and donors.
2. Funders should aid the initiatives of the National Front and movements as well as continue core funding to organizations that are central to social movement processes in Honduras (COFADEH, COMAL Network, Via Campesina, COPINH, OFRANEH, etc).
3. If funders choose not to support the National Front directly, they still can consult with the National Front about how and where the funds should be distributed (for example, if there are funds earmarked they can make recommendations: medicine; materials for training; to support women only; etc.)
4. Who would receive the funds; handle the administrative parts? Various options:
 - Direct funding to the National Front. The organization has a bank account and is able to handle accounting and reporting.
 - Funding through local organizations – member organizations of the National Front in coordination with finance committee representatives. Member organizations can function as fiscal sponsors for the National Front.

D. Reflections and decisions of group:

1. Agreed about the importance to continue funding the current partner organizations. Any new funding could be oriented to the National Front without detracting from existing core funding.
2. All agreed that it would be important to continue sharing information on who is funding whom to facilitate this work.
3. We discussed that human rights and other “charitable educational activities” aimed at awareness-raising and capacity building should be priorities for funding

Areas for funding that currently seem appropriate and important to fund are:

- The National Front’s organizing and educational work
- Human Rights defenders legal defense support
- Education
- Advocacy on human rights in general, and political/economic rights specifically
- Capacity building and strengthening at the base
- Communication and media

- Core support to key organizations
4. We discussed possibilities for outreach to other members of Gw/oB, IHRFG and FNTG to encourage support to Honduras and more collaboration.
 5. Send report (above) summarizing the information gathered through the consultation calls with Honduran organizations.
 6. Set-up a conference call on **February 10th**, at 10am (PCT)/12pm (CT)/1pm (EST).
Conference call number: (760) 569-6000; password: 724092#. Please RSVP to John Harvey at gwob@att.net or Saulo Araújo at saraujo@grassrootsonline.org.