

via fax: 011-504-2269-3069 Jorge Alberto Rivera Avilés President of the Supreme Court of Honduras	via fax: 011 504 2221 5667 Luis Alberto Rubí Attorney General of Honduras
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April 5, 2011

Dear Sirs:

We are very disturbed by the continuing repression and criminalization of peaceful protests taking place in Honduras, the latest of which has resulted in the death of **Ilse Ivania Velásquez Rodríguez**, a teacher and founding member of the Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH). On March 18 she was hit in the head with a projectile tear gas canister fired by police and then struck by a police tank.

Teachers are protesting the new General Education Law, which they believe to be a legal mechanism to move towards the privatization of all levels of education. On March 17, in the cities of Tegucigalpa, Comayagua, and Danlí, the preventive police and men in civilian clothing, driving cars without license plates, repressed peaceful demonstrations of teachers and members of the National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP). According to reports, as many as 50 people were detained, wounded, and beaten.

On March 28, human rights defender **Miriam Miranda Chamorro** was detained for ten and a half hours by authorities in the municipality of Tela, Atlántida Department. She is the President of the Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (OFRANEH) which has worked since 1978 to promote political, social, and economic rights of the Afro-Caribbean Garífuna community. She was the only person detained from a large group peacefully protesting in solidarity with the striking teachers. During her arrest, a number of tear-gas canisters were reportedly fired directly at her, causing her serious injuries. Police subsequently dragged, beat and subjected her to racially-charged insults. She was detained for two and a half hours before being read her rights. Four hours after her arrest, she received medical treatment for burns on her stomach, pulmonary spasms and massive body blows sustained during her arrest. She was "provisionally" released in the evening but now faces charges of sedition and blocking the public rights of way. The sedition charge carries the possibility of 10 to 15 years in prison.

On March 30 the public school teachers and the FNRP called a national strike in response to the ongoing repression and the detention of 18 teachers on March 25, who are considered political prisoners because they are being charged with sedition and illicit protest.

In light of these facts, we **strongly urge** that you

- immediately institute effective measures to ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their legitimate and peaceful activities free of all restrictions and without fear of reprisals, including judicial harassment;
- conduct an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the death of Ivania Velásquez Rodríguez as well as the injuries and charges against Miriam Miranda Chamorro and bring those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Coordinator

cc: COFADEH ~ via fax
Jorge Ramon Hernandez Alcerro, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax
Hugo Llorens, US Ambassador to Honduras ~ via fax
Jeremy Spector, Attache for Human Rights and Labor, US Embassy to Honduras ~ via fax
Benjamin Gadan, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via fax
Dinah Shelton, US member of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ fax: (202)458-3992
US Senators Brown and Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Kaptur, Kucinich, LaTourette, Latta, Renacci, Ryan, Sutton ~ via email

AFGJ/3/23_Honduras

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter: