

Rural Groups Rally to Press Canada to Demand Release of Political Prisoners in Honduras

From Elmvale to Ottawa

OTTAWA, May 1, 2018 /CNW/ - A mother and daughter with the full backing of their rural Ontario community are in Ottawa seeking support from the Canadian government for the immediate release of political prisoners in Honduras.

Karen Spring, a human rights activist from Elmvale, Ontario, has lived and worked in Honduras since 2009. Her spouse, Edwin Espinal, has been jailed on disputed charges in a maximum-security prison since January 19. Espinal and 20 other political prisoners were arrested in a wave of violent state repression against protesters following highly controversial general elections in November.

"The Canadian government has paid little attention to escalating human rights abuses in Honduras, while promoting Canadian economic interests over the years," Spring remarked. "The current Honduran government's legitimacy rests on its international support, making it urgent that Canada take action to publicly demand the prisoners' immediate release and that the charges be dropped.

" Edwin Espinal has previously suffered repression and harassment. As a result, the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights ordered in 2010 and 2013 that he be given special protection.

Karen's mother, Janet Spring, part of the Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor, is deeply concerned about the inhumane conditions incited on the political prisoners. They are allowed only two hours of sunlight a month, 5-10 minutes of access to water per day, and are exposed to prisoners with TB and who have already been convicted of serious crimes.

"The government has shut down the phone system and refused to allow their lawyers any communication with the political prisoners," commented Janet Spring. "We have not heard from Edwin in almost three weeks and are very concerned for his safety. We have come to Ottawa seeking justice for our family member and the other prisoners, with support from our whole community.

" On April 18, the Springwater Township Council voted unanimously to demand that the Canadian government intervene in Espinal's case and that of the other prisoners, including to suspend aid until the overall human rights crisis is adequately addressed.

The Springs' local Members of Parliament, Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North) and Alex Nuttall (Barrie – Springwater – Oro Medonte), hosted the delegation's press conference in Ottawa to show their support for the immediate release of the political prisoners.

"The Republic of Honduras must protect freedom of assembly and expression, including public, peaceful, political demonstrations," Stanton stated. "They must honour that obligation and

release people like Edwin Espinal, who is in military prison merely for speaking up on behalf of Hondurans.

" The daughter of Berta Cáceres, a world-renowned indigenous activist murdered in Honduras in 2016, added her voice to urge that the Canadian government get involved. Berta Zúniga Cáceres has traveled the world since her mother was assassinated, believing like the Springs - that political pressure from the international community is necessary to put a stop to the abuses in Honduras.

"The same country that murdered Berta Cáceres shamefully holds political prisoners for protesting against a deadly system that terrorizes its citizens, including human rights defender Edwin Espinal, a friend of my mother's," said Cáceres in a written statement. "Canada and other governments must full their duty and do everything within their power to pressure the Honduran government to respect basic human rights and due process.

“Other foreign officials are already speaking out. In the US, sixty congressional representatives have endorsed an Act calling for the suspension of all security assistance to Honduran military and police until such time as human rights violations by Honduran state security forces cease and their perpetrators are brought to justice.

Since November elections in Honduras, at least 23 people have been killed by security forces according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras, none of which are being investigated. The Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS) found that the election was plagued with an "abundance of irregularities and decencies" that prevented "full certainty regarding the outcome.

“Ignoring these concerns, the Canadian government recognized the presidential victory claimed by Juan Orlando Hernandez just before Christmas.

The Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor will be taking a delegation to Honduras in May to investigate the situation of the political prisoners and to better understand the bilateral relationship between Honduras and Canada. Berta Zúniga Cáceres and the Council of Indigenous and Popular Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) that her mother founded will receive the delegation in Honduras.

SOURCE Solidarity Ottawa

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