

## An Urgent Plea – Spring Family is Asking for Continued Support – Violent Repression in Honduras Continues – Karen Spring and Edwin Espinal

Since the fraudulent election of Juan Orlando Hernandez in November 2017, the people of Honduras have experienced escalating violence and repression by the military regime. The US and Canadian backed Honduran military has been terrorizing, murdering, looting, tear-gassing and harassing citizens that have participated in pro-democratic rallies or meetings. They have incarcerated many people and placed them in maximum security prisons across Honduras without proper due legal process.

Our daughter Karen continues to work for the Honduran Solidarity Network (HSN), a network of over 30 organizations from Canada and the United States that support human rights work in Honduras. Her spouse of 8 years – Edwin Espinal (a Honduran national) – has been detained in La Tolva prison since January 19, 2018 for his work with the human rights and social movement organizations. Human rights organizations based in Canada, the United States, and Honduras have been calling for his release and other ‘political’ prisoners arrested at the same time, and have been pressuring the Honduran government, the Canadian Embassy, and the US Embassy for his release, yet without success. Despite the advocacy work of our local Members of Parliament – Bruce Stanton and Alex Nuttall – who have taken this human rights issue to the Honourable Minister Freeland, the Government of Canada has done little to support our efforts.

In a recent statement by Minister Chrystia Freeland on the escalating violence against the people, Freeland remarks that, “Canada calls upon the Honduran authorities to reinstate constitutional rights and guarantees without delay. Democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law must be upheld,” yet the military regime continues to repress any opposition with extreme force. Pro-democracy workers are detained and sent to US style military run prisons like La Tolva, where Edwin is being held. He has been allowed two monitored ten minute conversations with his legal representative; national and international human rights workers have not been allowed to enter the prison to verify the conditions of his detention.

Edwin was held in solitary confinement for 15 days then transferred to another area. It is a strict military-run prison, overseen by a military colonel. The cells are cold and windowless and detainees are allowed only one hour of sunlight every two weeks. The scant information that we have retrieved is that water in the 1000 male prison is scarce so bathing is limited and prisoners’ health is compromised. Treatment is harsh, which includes abuse and intimidation. In some cases, prisoners are transferred to other facilities without their family’s knowledge. Family members are denied access, which is a form of psychological torture for the detainees and family members. Edwin could be held for up to two and a half years before he goes to trial and sentenced by a judge for the crimes he is accused of, which is a laundry list of trumped up charges including terrorism and criminal association.

International human rights organizations, and family members cannot advocate for prisoners’ human rights, legal rights, or human condition because there is no rule of law. If family members are permitted to visit detainees, it takes approximately half a year to obtain limited access; these visits are strictly monitored. Documentation that allows visitation is expensive; many families cannot afford to pay the legal documentation fees. Travel to the prison is difficult for family

members due to the location which is in a rural area one hour and a half hour drive from the capital city of Tegucigalpa. Family members must make the trip to buy phone credit for their loved ones. Face-to-face contact with family members is forbidden, except in limited cases where family members wait approximately six months to apply for special permission by the National Penitentiary Institute. Phone calls are limited and expensive. All calls are monitored. Edwin and others are being held for a period of 2 to 3 years awaiting 'trial' in a legal system that is fraught with corruption, secrecy, falsification, and perversion without legal watchdogs able to monitor their safety and wellbeing.

It is very concerning to our family, friends, and community members to understand that the Canadian government has fiscally supported the Honduran government for a total of \$36 million in aid this past year. In 2014, Canada ratified a Free Trade Agreement with the Hernandez government, with the stipulation that human rights of the Honduran people be upheld. In 2014, trade between Canada and Honduras amounted to \$289 million with exports of \$45 million and imports of \$244 million. In international development assistance, Canada provided \$27 million in regional initiatives funding for economic growth, to promote gender equity, human rights, labour rights, and judicial reforms.<sup>1</sup> However, Minister Freeland remarked to our MP that, "As a Honduran national, his [Edwin Espinal's] judicial process cannot be influenced by a foreign government's interventions. Regrettably, the Consulate has no options in promoting his case." Yet the Government of Canada must abide by their commitment through the Free Trade Agreement of 2014 to demand the Hernandez government of Honduras to uphold the Honduran peoples' "democratic principles, human rights" and that "the rule of law ... be upheld." Our government must therefore demand the release of Edwin and other political prisoners.

Our family is reaching out to our very supportive community of Elmvale, Springwater, County of Simcoe and beyond, to beseech you to **continue** to write to your Members of Parliament and demand that the Government of Canada abide by the democratic and human rights principles they so vehemently purport on their Global Affairs Canada website. In addition, we ask you to continue to circulate our plea for help to others.

We thank you so much for your ongoing support. For further information refer to our website: [simcoecountyhondurasrightsmonitor.wordpress.com](http://simcoecountyhondurasrightsmonitor.wordpress.com).

Sincerely  
Janet and John Spring

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/costa\\_rica/bilateral\\_relations\\_bilaterales/canada\\_honduras.aspx?lang=eng](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/costa_rica/bilateral_relations_bilaterales/canada_honduras.aspx?lang=eng)