

via fax: 011 504 2239 3298 Sr. Juan Orlando Hernández President of the Republic of Honduras	via fax: 011 504 2221 5667 Sr. Oscar Chinchilla Banegas Attorney General of Honduras
--	---

April 15, 2015

Dear Sirs:

We are horrified at the recent brutal disappearances and assassinations of four students in Comayagüela, sister city of the capital Tegucigalpa. On March 24 the bodies of three students, ages 19 to 21, were found in various neighborhoods of Tegucigalpa: **Elvin Antonio López, Darwin Josué Martínez, and Diana Yareli Montoya**, who was riddled with 21 bullets by masked attackers and took two painful days to die. The body of a fourth student was found wrapped in a sheet on March 25: 13-year-old **Soad Nicolle Ham Bustillo**, with clear signs of torture.

Teachers, parents and students from the largest public secondary schools (high schools) have been protesting against the lack of teaching materials and resources. They also oppose an announcement by Education Minister Marlon Escoto to change the class schedule, making 7pm the dismissal time for students in the afternoon shift. This is a very dangerous hour to be on the streets of Honduras. Public high schools are generally located in areas riddled with crime, and there is little or no public transportation services at that hour. Furthermore, many students live in areas where organized crime groups have established curfew hours. (Casa Alianza, an internationally reputable non-profit organization in Honduras, reports that 86 students are killed each month on the way to and from school in Honduras.)

The government has responded to the students' demands by deploying heavily armed soldiers to fire tear gas, flash grenades and water cannons, as well as by placing schools under military lockdown. On March 17, the education minister announced that the military police would begin occupying schools in the capital. The minister has asked teachers to provide the names of students participating in the demonstrations so that the government can "apply corrective measures."

We believe Soad Nicole Ham was targeted because of a brief statement she made to a Globo-TV news crew at a demonstration in the days before her death. She told reporters: "We need school desks and we receive gunshots. It's not possible for us to be seated on the floor like dogs! We don't even have chairs!"

It is clear that Honduras must work to provide more quality education to break the cycles of poverty and violence. Honduras, where over half the population lives in poverty, has the world's highest murder rate. According to the United Nations Institute of Statistics (UIS), 10% of primary-age children and 23.5% of lower-secondary age children are out of school.

It is outrageous and condemnable that a child as young as 13 to be targeted, tortured and murdered for voicing a political opinion. We **strongly urge** that you

- investigate the murders of the students named above, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- provide a quality public education which does not put the risks of children and their families at risk.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

copies: Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
James Nealon, US Ambassador to Honduras ~ via fax 011 504 2236 9037
Kelsey Cambronne, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email CambronneKL@state.gov
Christopher Johnson, Diplomacy Officer for Central America, US State Dept. ~ via email JohnsonCD@state.gov
Tracy Robinson, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202 458.3992
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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