

via U.S. mail Sr. Juan Orlando Hernández President of Honduras	via fax: 011 504 2221 5667 and U.S. mail Sr. Óscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas Attorney General of Honduras
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September 23, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned about attacks and arbitrary detention by police officers of four human rights defenders on September 8 at the National University of Honduras (UNAH) in Tegucigalpa: **Hedme Castro, Ariel Díaz, Carlos del Cid** and **Tommy Morales**. Hedme Castro is the General Coordinator of the Association for Participative Citizenship. Ariel Díaz is the General Coordinator of Youth for the Defense of Human Rights. Carlos del Cid is a member of the International Ecumenical Observatory on Human Rights. Tommy Morales is a journalist and member of the Association for Democracy and Human Rights Association (ASOPODEUH).

At about 5:00am on September 8, more than 500 police set up a blockade where a group of students was peacefully occupying several buildings at UNAH during a protest. Hedme Castro and Ariel Díaz arrived with other human rights defenders to mediate the situation; authorities allowed them to enter the campus in a minibus, along with a university student and members of the National Commission for Human Rights (CONADEH). Inside, they were joined by Carlos del Cid and Tommy Morales. Later, as the group was about to exit the university, they tried to help a group of seven students whom the police had locked in a building, deprived of water and food for several hours. When authorities refused to release them, the students jumped out the window and entered the minibus. The police surrounded the minibus and kept them trapped. At about 3:00pm, the police forcibly opened the minibus windows and sprayed pepper spray inside. The police dragged the passengers out of the minibus, beat them, and sprayed pepper spray directly at their faces.

The police escorted the CONADEH members away. The four human rights defenders and eight students were detained and later released. Hedme Castro was released without charge. Ariel Díaz, Carlos del Cid and Tommy Morales were accused of “concealment” and “attack on State security.” The eight students face charges of “illegal occupation.” All of the accused must appear before a judge at a later date.

This is a further evidence of the violent response to peaceful protests against restrictions which the Honduran government placed on education in 2014 (cf out letter of July 4). We **strongly urge** that you

- immediately drop all charges against Ariel Díaz, Carlos del Cid and Tommy Morales, as well as other university students;
- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attacks against Hedme Castro, Ariel Díaz, Carlos del Cid and Tommy Morales, and other university students, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;
- take all necessary measures to ensure the security of Hedme Castro, Ariel Díaz, Carlos del Cid and Tommy Morales, as well as other university students, in accordance with their wishes;
- refrain from using the justice system to intimidate, harass and discredit human rights defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinators

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Amabassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
 Heide B. Fulton, Chargé d’Affaires, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via fax 011 504 2236 9037
 Olivia Franken, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
 James Cavallaro, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax or email
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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