

via email: comunicacionsdhjgd@gmail.com

Sr. Héctor Leonel Ayala Alvarenga

Minister of Human Rights, Justice, Interior and Decentralization

via email: mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com

Sr. Óscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas

Attorney General of Honduras

February 11, 2018

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Minister Ayala:

We are writing to demand the release of human rights defender **Edwin Robelo Espinal**, who was arrested by police on January 19, on the eve of a week-long nationwide strike. Edwin faces a laundry list of trumped up charges: arson, property damage, and use of homemade explosive material. Edwin is also under state investigation for terrorism and criminal association related to damages to the Marriott Hotel, a multi-billion dollar US chain, during a January 12 protest in Tegucigalpa. Edwin Robelo Espinal is currently in pre-trial detention.

At the end of an initial hearing inside military facilities on January 22, the judge ordered pre-trial detention and sent Edwin to La Tolva, a high-security prison. The prison, run by a military coronel, has extremely restricted visitor access and harsh detention conditions, e.g., prisoners are only allowed one-hour of sunlight every two weeks. On January 31, a delegation of five human rights defenders, including three from a US faith-based delegation visiting Honduras, attempted to visit Edwin Espinal, but, after waiting five hours, were denied entry by the military coronel in charge. Edwin's attorney, Karol Cardenas from COFADEH (Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared in Honduras) was allowed to see him for one hour, but was not allowed to inspect the conditions of his detention cell.

Because of his political activism, Edwin has been detained more than a dozen times since 2009. Security forces have been him several times, most recently in December 2017 during a protest against election fraud in Tegucigalpa. In 2010, Edwin was abducted and tortured by Honduran police, who were later acquitted on all charges for their abuses. As a result of this constant persecution, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) granted Edwin protective measures in 2010. The measures were renewed in 2013, shortly after an illegal raid on his family's home.

Edwin's current detention on trumped up charges is one more example of systematic political persecution and targeting of pro-democracy activists opposed to the government and the disputed presidential election. Honduran law and due process are being violated. The case is being heard in national jurisdiction courts that have no jurisdiction over the charges against him. The judge presiding over the case is the same judge that ordered the raid on Edwin's house in 2013, which, according to Honduran law, is illegal. Edwin's legal representatives from COFADEH, which has provided long-term legal and human rights support for him since 2009, were given only one day (a Sunday) to prepare his defense. He was then sent to prison to await trial, which could take two years.

To ensure Edwin's immediate safety and access to justice, we demand that Honduran authorities

- immediately release Edwin.
- if not immediately released, transfer Edwin to a detention center as determined by COFADEH
- transfer Edwin's case out of the national jurisdiction courts and into the regular court system.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Honduran Solidarity Network ~ via email
Marlon R. Tábora Muñoz, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via website or fax and US mail
Heide B. Fulton, Chargé d'Affaires, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email
Jason Smith, Human Rights and Labor Representative, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email
Olivia Franken, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
Joel Hernández, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email
Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via 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: