

via email: mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com, gosorto@gmail.com

Oscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas
Attorney General of Honduras

via email: karlacueva144@gmail.com

Lica. Karla Cueva
Secretary of State for Human Rights Affairs

November 30, 2020

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Secretary Cueva:

We are disturbed to learn of the knife attack against former political prisoner Raúl Álvarez during the evening of November 29 in Tegucigalpa. Suffering from serious stab wounds, he was taken to the Hospital Escuela (at the National Autonomous University) and admitted into surgery at 8:30pm. We are glad to learn that his health condition is stable.

Raúl Álvarez, a former police officer, was arrested along with Edwin Espinal in January 2018 during a period of nationwide protests about the legitimacy of the re-election of President Juan Orlando Hernández. The two were accused of vandalizing the Marriott Hotel and a Burger King in Tegucigalpa during a large demonstration march. The government and the mainstream media steered the public's attention away from the militarized crackdown on thousands of protesters and instead focused on broken windows and burned lobby furniture at the hotel.

Both men maintain that they were framed by authorities. Nevertheless, they were confined in "pretrial detention" for about 20 months in the maximum-security prison La Tolva, which is run by the Honduran military. There they received death threats from fellow inmates (cf our letter of July 19, 2019). An international solidarity campaign was conducted for more than a year until August 9, 2019 when both Raúl Álvarez and Edwin Espinal were released, pending trial. (The trial against Raúl Álvarez on the charges of aggravated damages and arson against Burger King was scheduled to begin in early December but has been delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.)

Raúl Álvarez and Edwin Espinal continue to be active in the campaign to release a third political prisoner, Rommel Baldemar Herrera Portillo, who is still being held at "La Tolva" prison. He is imprisoned in "pretrial detention" because he is facing criminal charges of "damages" and "aggravated arson" against the United States Embassy in Honduras during a peaceful protest march in defense of public health and public education. Raúl Álvarez and Edwin Espinal, along with many other supporters, had been preparing to participate in a vigil and hunger fast in front of the Supreme Court of Justice in support of Rommel Herrera Portillo in early December.

We **strongly urge** that you

- conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into the attack against Raúl Álvarez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- expedite the process to drop the false charges against Raúl Álvarez, Edwin Espinal, and Rommel Baldemar Herrera Portillo

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai and
Co-Coordinator



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Dr. Roberto Herrera Cáceres, National Commissioner for Human Rights of Honduras (CONADEH) ~ via email
Luis Suazo Barahona, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via email and US mail
Joel Hernández, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail
Isabel Albaladejo Escribano, Representative to Honduras of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH) ~ via email
COFADEH: Committee of the Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras ~ via email
HSN: Honduras Solidarity Network ~ via email
Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective – Honduras Team ~ via email
US Embassy in Honduras: Colleen Hoey, Chargé d'Affaires; Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer ~ via email
David Tagle, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, González, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

30 NOV 20_HSN_Honduras

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