

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

February 15, 2021

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Secretary Cueva:

We are horrified at the events surrounding the death of nursing student **Keyla Martínez**, age 26, following her arrest on February 6 for an alleged violation of a curfew imposed because of COVID. It appears she suffered torture, strangulation, and possible sexual abuse at the hands of police in jail.

Keyla Martínez, a nursing student in her final year of studies, was on a weekend visit to her hometown of La Esperanza in Intibucá Department. After dinner with friends on February 6, she was riding in a car with a friend, Dr. Edgar Velásquez Orellana, when police stopped them and arrested them because, police said, they were not returning from work and were therefore breaching the curfew. The officers also claimed that Keyla Martínez was drunk. This is questionable because she had not been drinking at dinner.

At the police station, they were locked alone in separate cells. Dr Velásquez, who is currently in hiding for fear of reprisals, said he heard Keyla Martínez shouting for help before all went quiet. Police claim they discovered Keyla during a routine check trying to hang herself with her blouse, but that she was still alive. They took her to the hospital, but she was dead on arrival.

An autopsy found that she had died from “mechanical asphyxiation.” The former director of forensic medicine revealed that she had suffered torture, strangulation, and possible sexual abuse. Prosecutors are now investigating her death as a homicide. The National Police announced the immediate suspension of the police officers working the night of the arrest but, to date, no legal action has been taken against them. Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas Director at Amnesty International, stated that “This killing has all the hallmarks of an extrajudicial execution and must be investigated as such.”

Since the news of the murder of Keyla Martínez, hundreds of people have peacefully protested outside the police station to denounce her murder and attempts by the police to cover up their role in her death. The National Police and a command of the Special Forces, which were reportedly sent to the city, attacked the demonstrators with teargas and rubber bullets. Videos on social media and reports from human rights organizations show police pushing citizens and hitting them with shields and batons.

We are concerned about the high rate of femicide in Honduras, which consistently ranks among the top five nations in the world for murders of women and girls. Equally concerning is the high rate of impunity for those who commit these murders. It is reported that in 2019, 406 suffered violent deaths; 321 in 2000. We therefore **strongly urge** that you

- conduct an exhaustive and impartial investigation into the death of Keyla Martínez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- assure that the Office of the Attorney General be granted access to questioning the police officers who were at the station while Keyla Martínez was in detention
- take all means necessary to prevent violence against all those who peacefully exercise their civil right to protest the injustices against Keyla Martínez and crimes against all women

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai and
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Blanca Sarai Izaguirre Lozano, 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
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Women, 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
CDM: Centro de Derechos de Mujeres ~ via email
US Embassy in Honduras: Colleen Hoey, Chargé d’Affaires; Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer ~ via email
Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
Amnesty International ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, González, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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