

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

National Commissioner for Human Rights of Honduras (CONADEH)
via email

May 11, 2023

Dear Commissioner:

We call upon your government to investigate a series of threats, extortions, computer hacks, and social media attacks against the staff of **ERIC (Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación, y Comunicación) and Radio Progreso** in San Pedro Sula, Cortes Department. ERIC-Radio Progreso is a Catholic project sponsored by the Society of Jesus (Jesuit priests), which is dedicated to giving voice to poor, marginalized, and vulnerable communities in Honduras.

We are worried because **Father Ismael Moreno Coto** (known locally as Padre Melo), a Jesuit priest and director of Radio Progreso, has been the victim of a disinformation campaign and threats. The disinformation intensified on May 5 when UNE-TV social communicator Rony Martínez accused Padre Melo of having a commitment to the conservative National Party and the former president on Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, whose regime is often characterized as a narco-dictatorship. Rony Martínez told viewers that Padre Melo was renting a part of the building at the Loyola Center of the Society of Jesus in Tegucigalpa to the conservative National Party. We note here that Padre Melo is neither the owner nor the administrator of that building and has no say-so about rental decisions.

We are concerned that the mainstream media is participating in a campaign to defame Padre Melo. It would appear that the May 5 broadcast was an attempt to shape public opinion against Padre Melo, to place doubt in the viewing public as to whether Padre Melo is someone who can be trusted. This is not the first time that Padre Melo has been victim of a smear campaign and threats or that Radio Progreso has been attacked in some way (cf our letters 24 Jan 2018, 22 Dec 2017, 11 May 2010). In March 2017, a smear campaign accused Padre Melo of receiving "dirty money from drug-related activity and of using Radio Progreso to discredit Honduras" (cf our letter 12 Apr 2017).

We have great respect for Father Ismael Moreno Coto. He made a public presentation when we hosted him in Cleveland, OH, in 2010, and our staff and members have visited him and the staff of ERIC-Radio Progreso multiple times over the past 14 years. Because of our concern for his well-being, we urge that authorities in Honduras

- conduct a transparent investigation into the attacks against the staff of ERIC-Radio Progreso, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- offer protection measures to Father Ismael Moreno Coto and the staff of ERIC-Radio Progreso, in strict accordance with their wishes
- guarantee that ERIC and Radio Progreso are able to report and provide analysis on the political situation in Honduras without fear of reprisal

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington, DC ~ via email and US mail
Carlos Pulido, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ~ 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
Alice Shackelford, UN Resident Coordinator in Honduras, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email
Radio Progreso ~ via email
ERIC: Equipo de Reflexión, Investigación, y Comunicación ~ via email
US Embassy in Honduras: Ambassador Laura F. Dogu and Human Rights Officer Ariel Jahner ~ via email
US State Department: Bryan Schell, Honduras Desk Officer ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email
US Representatives Balderson, Beatty, Brown, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

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