**Honduras Coup Update - May 2012**

**There was a sudden surge of political killings during May. There were at least nine political assassinations.**

**In addition, there was a massacre on 11 May against indigenous Miskito people on a boat. A U.S. State Department helicopter that the US government confirms carried U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents and security contractors opened fire. Four people were killed - two pregnant women, a 14-year-old boy and a 21-year-old man - while at least four more were seriously injured.** This is in the context of the new Caratasca US military base, installed after the coup in the name of fighting drugs and terrorism, in this isolated region, where the 400kms long Patuca River is the only transport route other than by air. It is a zone full of natural resources – petroleum, forests, and rivers. Witnesses said when the helicopters landed, those who came out to check the boat were tall, Anglo-Saxon, with clear skin, spoke little Spanish, in military-wear and seemed to be US military staff. US and Honduran authorities have not interviewed witnesses. Community leaders of MASTA affirmed in a statement that those who were on the canoe are fishers not drug traffickers.

**Under threat from Dinant palm giant Miguel Facussé, thousands of farmer families in Bajo Aguan MUCA (Movimiento Unificado de Campesinos de Aguán) on the right bank now face imminent eviction and bloodshed due to lack of political will by the state to enforce the signed agreement of April 2010. The regime is simply pressuring farmers to immediately sign a payment plan, which is against their interests.**

MUCA Right Bank essentially decided to hold off signing the payment plan (Left Bank has signed it) until the agreement signed in April 2010 is fully complied with – it means not just 4,000 hectares but an additional 7,000, and state spending on education, health, and infrastructure for the communities.

As the month ended Dinant applied to the Security Department to reactivate a 1.5 year-old eviction order against the settlements of MUCA Right Bank, and against Marañones (left). Lobo´s response is to blame the farmers, “MUCA´s stubbornness can provoke the militarisation of Bajo Aguán by not signing.” There are also reports that near the settlements, in the last 2 weeks of May, there had been a re-militarisation, with heavy arms and checkpoints, including military personnel from the USA, Colombia, and Israel.

Although Prosecutors announced they will be charging police, military and civilians involved in human rights violations in Bajo Aguán, including on 50 assassinations, farmers do not have faith in the process / do not believe actions to end impunity will be taken.

**As murderous scandals involving the police pile up, supposed reforms to the Honduran justice systems proceed, and create a state intelligence body to investigate crimes. The reforms continue to be shaped by dismissing some high heads of police and replacing them with police accused of grave human rights crimes. For example, the newly appointed police director Juan Carlos ´El Tigre’ Bonilla has been accused of starting death squads and been linked to at least 3 assassinations and forced disappearances between 1998 and 2002, although one case was absolved in 2004. The newly appointed Commissioner of Dirección Nacional de Servicios Especiales de Investigación Santos Armando Rodríguez Flores, was accused by a father of assassination of two youths in Bajo Aguan on 28 October 2011 that remain unresolved.**

**At the same time, a repressive reform was passed by two-thirds of congress to increase the time police can detain crime suspects from 24 hours to up to 48 hours.**

**A crackdown on civil society groups was announced** as interior and population secretary Áfrico Madrid requested CNBS (National Banks and Insurance Commission) not to process financial transactions where civil organisations have not complied with reporting requirements - he said 3,500 of 8,000 have not and are illegal.

**Under the neoliberal government,** transport fares were increased and there are moves to introduce modern transport services by private interests that would further increase transport costs. Citibank fired 180 Honduran employees for trying to organise a workers´ union, and Hospital Atlántida told 274 employees not to come to work anymore, saying it has no capacity to pay them, after not having paid them for 5 months already. Sitraunah (autonomous university workers union) ignored unionists´ demands and a hunger strike, indifferent to the conditions of people having been on hunger strike for a month.

**False climate solutions**: International Finance Corporation and Banco Atlántida announced **$50 million in loans** to feed the biofuels and hydroelectricity industries.

**Major human rights reports and stats this May:**

* Several **European Union Ambassadors condemned threats against human rights defenders and journalists** in Honduras, expressing concern at threats against international (including one French) volunteers and Cofadeh.
* **Amnesty International** demanded re their last months´ campaign with Honduras, ´Not one more death, attack or threat against journalists and human rights defenders.´
* **Homicide statistics for 2011 in Honduras:** 7,104 / 86.5 every 100,000
* **Inter-American Press Society condemned recent kidnappings of journalists** in Mexico, Honduras and Colombia.

**Shameless and contradictory acts patting the coup regime and its military on the back:** an article depicted Honduran military students in San Pedro Sula in a reforestation project, Honduras Verde, carrying pro-environment placards as they took the streets, and Lobo decorated and sent off 8 select army officials to participate in war games – Olimpiadas Fuerzas Comando Colombia 2012.

**Persecution – surge in political assassinations in May 2012**

**Summary of killings this month:**

1 May: A young Lenca Indigenous man, Santos Rodríguez, was killed in his home.

2 May: Singer and unionist, Sitraunah, Rigoberto Matute, was run over and killed.

3 May: University lecturer, Sitraunah, Miguel Barahona, assassinated by hitmen.

5 May: LGBTI human rights activist, journalist and aspiring candidate, Erick Martínez (32), went missing on 5 May and was found dead on a highway kerb 2 days later.

8 May: Community leader, Choloma Cortés, and sympathiser of the resistance party, Edilberto Solano, were assassinated by hitmen on a motorcycle.

16 May: An organised farmer, Juan José Peralta (60), of the Marañones MUCA settlement was riddled with bullets by palm oil giant Facussé´s (and known oligarchy) security guards.

18 May: An organised farmer, José Del Cid (41), also of the Marañones MUCA settlement was shot and killed by unidentified persons.

20 May: Resistance activist who was involved with leftist parties, ´el Pollito´ (dear little chicken) Jesús Pineda (55) was shot by unknown hitmen.

31 May: An organised farmer Erick Rivera (40), previously of Marañones, was shot dead by unknown persons despite being with a bodyguard.

**Assassinations, captures, threats and militarisation against Bajo Aguan farmers this month**

* On 16/5/12 MUCA Marañones farmer **Juan José Peralta (60) was chased and assassinated** by Miguel Facussé´s security guards, whose shots also **critically wounded his son Juan Peralta (28) of the Rigores movement, and his son-in-law Antonio Vélez of Marañones**, when they were driving and carrying corn and wood towards the National Agrarian Department office and the La Confianza farm. He leaves behind a spouse Virginia Barrera.
* On 17/5/12 at 3pm, DNIC (investigative agents), police and army members (of the Xatruch operation) **detained 8 farmers** and freed them at 5pm, without showing an arrest warrant.
* On 18/5/2012, **Jose Efraín Del Cid (41) was assassinated by shots in his face**, by unidentified persons, when travelling in Sonaguera with another farmer Marcos Días Licona who managed to jump out and escape death. Both farmers belong to the Nueva Panamá farmers cooperative of MUCA Marañones in the left bank of Aguán river.
* On 24/5/12, in Tocoa, a police patrol **captured farmer Sangenaro Reyes Martínez (68),** of the ´Guadalupe Carney´ community (Movimiento Campesinos Aguán). Police claimed to have a capture order. He had just left the Salamá community looking for Agrarian Department staff, after the sudden militarisation of Tocoa by Facussé´s guards. It is expected that he will get substitutive measures to prison for being elderly. He has been judicially persecuted for some time as one of several farmers accused in a past confrontation in which one MCA farmer and several investigative ex agents and relatives of the police Henry Osorto died, though the farmers do not have the capacity nor the weapons used.
* On 24/5/12, at the Tocoa, **police detained José Luis Dubon and Marlen Hernandez** of La Lempira farmers settlement of MUCA
* On 24/5/12, in El Progreso, **17 MUCA leaders travelling back from negotiations with INA Minister César Ham were detained for 2 hours without any judicial orders** or having committed any crimes. This is the third time this happened. Police held a checkpoint near the ranch of Micheletti. DNIC agents tried to take the car keys of the captured farmers without a judicial order for this. Previous detentions were on 2 February 2012 against 13 leaders at Arizona, and on 11 February 2012 against 12 leaders at Tela.
* On 28/5/12, 10 police were chasing unknown persons on a motorcycle, when they stopped and intercepted **Doni Obed Diaz Vasquez (29)** La Confianza farmer, giving him death threats and accusing Doni of carrying weapons when he simply worked on the land. They tried to force him into a vehicle using death threats but other farmers´ presence impeded the kidnap.
* On 31/5/12, **ex farmers leader of Marañones Erick Federico Rivera Ochoa (40) was shot dead** despite being with a bodyguard, by unknown persons who waited for him as he left a supermarket in San Juan Pueblo, Atlántida.
* Death threats by Miguel Facussé´s guards against MUCA leaders Vitalino Álvarez, Juan Ramón Chinchilla, Adolfo Castañeda, and Ramon Sánchez have been reported.
* The Marañones settlement is at risk of military intervention, with heavily armed contingent stationed nearby.

**Assassination, detentions and attacks against Indigenous activists**

* On 1/5/12, in Intibucá, 3 police invaded Mrs María de Los Santos Domínguez Benítez´s home and humiliated her. They searched for her son, and when they could not find him, and her other son **Santos Alberto Rodríguez** protested the invasion, police **shot him in the head killing him instantly.** Santos is a human rights defender, active Copinh member (Council of Grassroots Indigenous Organisations Honduras - as is his brother) and anti-dam anti-privatisation activist (against Proyecto Hidroeléctrico Agua Blanca) for which they have been under threat by landowners who have been making a land invasion. His community – San Bartolo - is applying for its Indigenous community land title (unlikely to be granted because of transnational interests). There are reports that the police responsible, Benedicto Galo Peña, has not been arrested.
* On 15/5/12 **police indiscriminately chased Copinh members of the Lenca communities** of Cuchilla, Ceguaca, Santa Bárbara, **and captured Copinh members Presentación Casteñanos Muñoz, Bonifacio Tróchez and Nelson Gómez,** who have maintained for a month an ancestral recovery of their land. Also: Honduran police and woodchoppers attacked the Tolupan Indigenous people of the Lavanderos community in the Montaña de la Flor.
* On 19/5/12, **member of land grabber family Luis Crespo arrived threatening and wounding with gunshots Julio Lino of the Garifuna Cristales community** in Trujillo. Julio was shot in the chest during an occupation to reclaim the Garifuna community land and territory. The community has had ancestral community titles since 1901 but that have been invaded and usurped. Due to community pressure, Julio Crespo the son, who was detained, was freed that afternoon without explanations by the authorities.
* On 24/5/12, La Paz police **unfairly detained 16 labourers** **including 3 Copinh members** relatives of Copinh executive member Sotero Chaverría – his brothers Isabel and Jorge, and his son Allan (17), and two other underage persons Ángel River (13) and Seljin López (14), on their way to their workplaces which are under a Buenos Aires community title. When questioned, subcommission Jesús Rodriguez said, ´it´s just that they were inside an area where operations were undertaken, and they didn´t carry documents and this is a crime’. There were no antecedents, and they were in their own community territory. Everyone was freed except Cristian David Aguilar Rivera, accused of usurpation of lands and left in a cell full of human faeces.

**Killings against unionists of sitraunah – Autonomous University Workers´ Union**

* On 2/5/12 **Rigoberto Matute was killed, run over by unidentified driver and vehicle**, when taken to hospital he was not attended by emergency within an hour and most likely died from medical negligence. Rigoberto was a singer, a friend of the resistance, a sitraunah leader. He used to sing at the meetings ´and in the end life continues the same´
* On 3/5/12 university **lecturer Miguel Angel Barahona Fiallos was assassinated** outside his home by hitmen, in Colonia San Miguel, El Progreso. Miguel was member of Sitraunah. Miguel was a lecturer in pedagogy, and coordinator of masters program in UNAH-VS and had worked 35 years there.

**Persecution against others opposing being exploited**

* Final year Medical students on internship have been on **strike** and university authorities announced that these will be individually **penalised** by having their internships re-started from zero hours, to the suspension of between 45-60 days from the internship
* On 4/5/12, workers of Sinohydro (transnational hydroelectricity company) who made demands on their workers´ rights and were forming a union, were forced off the buses that were taking them to their worksites and repressed with beatings and kicks in the arms and head by the army in the Patuca III region.

**Threats, and a killing, against journalists**

* On 1/5/12, **journalist Edgardo Castro**, director of the program ´El Látigo Contra la Corrupción´ of **Globo TV, received 800 text messages of which 100 were death threats** – he received precautionary measures with UN and OAS. He had suffered threats since the coup and had also been beaten. He alleges oligarchy people have paid children of farmers and workers to send the threats. In his work he speaks in favour of farmers, of the minimum wage, of defence of workers and against citizens´ insecurity.
* On 4/5/12**, police officer Ávila verbally threatened 12 journalists** who tried to cover and photograph the finding of three bodies in Cortés, saying they will be assassinated because of their work. Then JBN National TV correspondent **journalist Selvin Martínez** proceeded to photograph and video the police, whose response was to photograph Selvin and stare at him. Selvin and his family have suffered attempts before and after this – on 26/4/12 gunshots were fired at his family home, and on 17/5/12, there was a kidnap attempt against his spouse, Dilcia Moreno, when a young man got off a tourist van, carrying two others, asking her for directions and for the time. When she said she had no watch they followed her and they told her to get into the car, saying her spouse is further up waiting for her. She questioned him how he knew his spouse, he said get in the vehicle. She got scared and quickly went into a shop.
* On 9/5/12 in the midnight hours HRN **news director Alfredo Villatoro was kidnapped** on his way to work by unknown persons, his vehicle appeared abandoned. On 15/5/12 he was **found dead** in a residential area Las Uvas in Tegucigalpa
* On 28/5/12 *Radio Globo* News Director David Romero and Canal 36 owner Esdras Amado López , who are critical of the coup, expressed concerns about an indirect death threat in which David Romero learned from a source he trusts. This was that an ex-head of military intelligence and current strategic information of Hondutel, Guillermo Pinél Cálix, had said in a discreet meeting while analysing the national reality, that if Alfredo Villatoro had been killed for being a liar, that then the same could not happen to the journalists Esdras Amado and David Romero. Esdras said, ´we know about his role in the coup…that he was close to Micheletti and practically these affirmations put us on a list and that the same that happened to Alfredo Villatoro can happen to us.´
* On 28/5/12, **journalist Antonio Cabrera of news of Radio Frescura** 90.9 in Tela said he was receiving death threats by text message from unknown persons, generally during his morning news. ´Your days for keeping talking are numbered´; ´you are going to be the last journalist to have their tongue cut´ – he received amongst other messages. Antonio feels the threats may be related to his reporting about the illegal logging at the Parque Nacional Lancetilla, by the Escuela Nacional Forestal authorities. He has also reported critically on the local government, on the quality of drinking water services, of electricity, and discovery of a clandestine cemetery and how the authorities hide the identities of the bodies found there.

**Persecution against students**

* On 7/5/12, **Socialist Student Front student leaders Erlin Gutiérrez and Kelyn Nuñez** **were suspended** by the teachers college UPNFM university authorities for **2 academic periods** (until September), **accused of inciting protests** in favour of public education in March 2012, saying they are very grave crimes. They were told that when they return from their suspension they will return on the condition of not participating in protests or politically associating and expressing themselves on the university campus.
* On 21/5/12, **dozens of anti-riot police repressed a protest** by hundreds of high school (Normal Mixta) and teachers college students in solidarity with 2 teachers college students suspended for protesting and 2 other students penalised for the same. **17 were detained and one charged**, police initially arrested two women students, hurting one of the students´ forearms, and when students reacted to this police brutality the police detained 15 more, beating three severely, including Pedro Joaquín Amador who remained imprisoned and charged – he was one of the students who had been penalised for protesting.

**Killings and threats against LIBRE party members who have other roles in the community too – such as, as community leaders, lgbti defenders, journalists**

* On 5/5/12, **Erick Martínez Avila (32)** was reported missing. He was **found dead** on 7/5/12 (by strangling) on the kerb of a highway from Tegucigalpa towards Olancho. Erick is an lgbti human rights defender, journalist, resistance leader – a member of the Sexual Diversity Table of FNRP, he worked in Monitoring, Evaluation, and PR for the lgbti group Kukulcán, founded Movimiento de Diversidad en Resistencia, is an MP pre-candidate for LIBRE (announced 3 weeks before) and is a member of Los Necios political organisation.
* On 8/5/12, in Choloma Cortés, **Edilberto Solano, was assassinated** by two unknown persons on a motorcycle who ambushed and repeatedly shot at this community leader and sympathiser of LIBRE. He is secretary general of the Socialist Morazánico Party.
* On 10/5, the youth **Fanny Gevawer** in the last two days had received strange calls and threatening messages on her phone, with insults that are politically and ideologically tinted – for supporting and defending lgbti rights, rights to therapeutic abortion, to the morning-after pill and to women´s struggle. Fanny is OPLN/LIBRE MP candidate – four faces depicted in the Necios publication article about Necios candidates were of Erick Martínez, Fanny Gevawer, Mario Zepeda and Ana Rivera. Erick was assassinated 7/5/12. Fanny is a graduate in marketing, secretary of Necios, and has worked on increasing the participation of women in the different spaces.
* On 20/5/12 **Jesús Pineda ´Pollito´ (dear little chicken, 55) was assassinated** by unknown hitmen with five gunshots in the head. He was shot from a white car near his home in the Satélite area. He is of FNRP Colectivo Plaza la Libertad in San Pedro Sula, and is part of a motorcycle contingent that goes to the protests. He had been involved in various party political campaigns from UD before the coup, to supporting the independent candidate Carlos H Reyes in 2009 who withdrew because of the coup, and recently he joined the Fuerza de Refundación Popular of the Libre party. He leaves behind two daughters and two sons, and had a small furniture workshop for which he personally made deliveries.

**Threats against International Human rights defenders**

* A French woman representing an NGO, a young volunteer, suffered death threats in Tegucigalpa according to the French Ambassador in Tegucigalpa Philippe Ardanaz .
* Two European volunteers (English, and French) of an international Project of protection based in Tegucigalpa were threatened in April.

**Snapshot of solidarity actions within and outside of Honduras, with Honduras**

*In Honduras*

* Despite a rainy morning, hundreds of thousands mobilised nationally on May Day, protesting labour conditions, against corruption, and injustice. On hearing news of the police killing against the Copinh youth Santos Benítez the same day, they also protested this killing and demanded justice. For example, in El Progreso, a 10 minutes video if you want to watch: <http://youtu.be/5N5dZh2zkxs>
* On 23/5/12, 1500 women and men of Movimiento Campesino de San Manuel MOCSAM re-occupied 3000 manzanas of land usurped by sugar companies Azucarera del Norte ´Azunosa´ and Compañia Azucarera Hondureña from which they were evicted on 26/4/12. Over 100 farmers were arrested by military and police on the 26th. Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xul4-1gdkUQ&feature=youtube_gdata_player>
* Roger Ivan Bados Popular Education School held workshops: grassroots power , grassroots cinema as a means of consciousness raising, and held a grassroots cinema showing Quien Dijo Miedo.
* Villagers whose community/family members were killed by shots fired from the US anti-drugs helicopter began to form self-defence groups to confront police repression and repression from others allied to the police, and publicly condemned the US military occupation.
* Copinh held an Encuentro in Defence of the Nature´s Goods and in Solidarity with Copinh, represented by a number of communities, organised cultural, spiritual and festive activities, where people exchanged corn, pumpkins, pacayas, malangas, bananas, chinapopos and café of the highlands. There was cultural and artistic exchange including of music, poetry, juggling. There were children there and people hiked to get there and camped there for the Encuentro, in the bush. They discussed ideas and had political debates towards building grassroots and Indigenous power from the communities´ perspectives and historic struggles. They made a declaration pointing to the grave problem and threats of hydroelectric, mining concessions and the privatisation of forests with REDD and other such false solutions to climate change. They said these are new forms of colonialisation. They denounced threats, harassment and attacks.

*Separate protests:*

**Medical students** went on strike, demanding an allowance increase. H**ospital admin employees** went on strike, demanding to be paid the agreed increase.

**Sitraunah** held a sit-in protesting anti-union persecution and violation of the university workers´ rights, denouncing the authorities´ indifference about the condition of the people on hunger strike.

**Farmers** near El Salvador travelled to the city to have a hunger strike demanding basic services.

**Women, feminist and young feminist** organisations in Honduras gathered to publicly protest the Congress prohibiting and criminalising the use of the morning after pill.

**Teachers** took to the streets nationally, demanding that the teachers’ pension institution be under teachers´ control, for the plunder to end.

**100s of high school and teacher students** protested and were repressed, in solidarity with suspended student activists.

**Journalists** held a vigil in the rain, demanded an end to impunity in crimes against journalists.

*Outside Honduras*

* On 2 May 2012 a Canadian documentary maker showed on Telesur (South America leftist TV channel) a report ´Informar y Resistir en Honduras´.
* In Washington, a protest was held outside an award ceremony of an extreme right wing Latin American organisation (CHLI), where coup president Lobo was decorated
* A two-day human rights delegation from the US, organised by Rights Action and Alliance for Global Justice, visited the community of Ahuás in the Moskitia region of Honduras where they suffered the massacre executed from US DEA helicopters. The delegation demanded a formal and genuine investigation, the withdrawal of US forces, and the suspension of US military aid in Central America.
* An International Public Hearing was held to make preliminary conclusions, hearing the testimonies from victims of repression in Aguan, an area of conflict from structural violence under neoliberal policy. The hearing reflected on topics related to agrarian reform, as current policies had allowed land grabbing to take place; and on the grave human rights situation that farmers families live with there. Twenty-six experts from international organisations and networks participated, from 12 countries of the Americas and from Europe. It was also attended by representatives of Inter American Human Rights Commission, UNHCHR, European Parliament, amongst others. The Honduran regime was absent.
* In London, an award ceremony was held giving awards to journalists under threat. It was attended by over 100. There was support for Honduran journalist Dina Meza.