



*Office of Cheryl Hardcastle, Member of Parliament
NDP Critic for International Human Rights*

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Room 509-S
Center Block
Ottawa, Ontario

February 1, 2018

RE: DETAINMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST EDWIN ROBELO ESPINAL BY HONDURAN AUTHORITIES

Dear Minister Freeland,

It is deeply upsetting that I must write to you again on a matter about which I have already written two other communiqués to you in recent weeks: the human rights situation in Honduras.

The first statement outlined my concerns with the growing body of evidence detailing irregularities during the recent Honduras General Election, including voter intimidation and voter fraud that favoured the incumbent National Party candidate, President Juan Orlando Hernández.

The second expressed the extreme disappointment New Democrats and civil society groups around the world felt at the Government of Canada's silence during these events. While we were happy to see the official statement released around this time by your office, where you expressed your concern with the escalating violence in Honduras, post-election, we could not help but notice your glaring omission as to why this violence was occurring—it being a direct result of President Juan Orlando Hernández having blatantly stolen the election.

Even the Organization of American States has called for new presidential elections in Honduras after finding copious irregularities in its electoral process.

I therefore find myself once again writing to you on a matter of great urgency. Long-time Honduran human rights activist Edwin Espinal has been jailed on charges related to protests against election fraud in Honduras. For years he has been subject to state harassment, violence, and threats since the 2009 coup d'état.

Edwin faces a laundry list of charges: arson; property damage; and use of homemade explosive material related to damages to the Marriott Hotel, a multi-billion dollar US chain, during a January 12 protest in Tegucigalpa.

Yet thousands of Hondurans from all walks of life attended the January 12 demonstration to protest not only election fraud, but also the killings of more than 30 anti-fraud protesters and bystanders by state security forces; and the arrests of dozens of political prisoners during the ongoing post-electoral crisis.

Edwin is currently in pretrial detention. Although the case has been appealed by respected Honduran human rights organization COFADEH (Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared in Honduras), Edwin could remain in detention for two or more years waiting trial.

For context, Edwin has been detained more than a dozen times since 2009 and has been subject to multiple beatings by security forces. The most recent beating was in December 2017 when he participated in a protest against election fraud in Tegucigalpa.

As a result of this constant 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.

The illegitimate and corrupt government of Juan Orlando Hernandez appears to be targeting its own citizens – people like Edwin – while doing nothing to investigate the numerous killings and arbitrary arrests by State forces of social movement activists, protesters, journalists, lawyers, etc.

In fact, a January 18th 2018 Action Alert from Amnesty International (“Human Rights Defenders Under Attack”) declared that the “violence against human rights defenders monitoring and denouncing the violent repression of protests in the aftermath of the presidential elections has increased, with defenders reporting a murder, smear campaigns, threats and intimidation against them.”

Minister, we urge you to utilize the considerable leverage Canada has in Honduras to secure Edwin's immediate release, as well as that of the more than 40 political prisoners throughout the country, and push the authorities there to drop all charges against them.

As you stated in a second recent statement on Honduras, "Democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law must be upheld." We could not agree more. We therefore hope that you move quickly to secure the release of Edwin Robelo Espinal, as well as every other political prisoner currently detained by Honduran authorities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cheryl Hardcastle". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a thin black rectangular border.

Cheryl Hardcastle, M.P.
NDP Critic for International
Human Rights