

# Why Are Hondurans Fleeing Their Homeland?

In the summer of 2014, tens of thousands of women and children fled the dramatically escalating violence in their home countries in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, known as the Northern Triangle, and embarked on a dangerous journey through Mexico in search of refuge in the United States. What

made them come? What continues to drive citizens from their homelands? Sisters of Mercy have participated in several delegations, most recently in December 2015, to be in solidarity with Hondurans and to find out more about what forces families to choose such a dangerous journey to seek safety.



## CORRUPTION & IMPUNITY

After a 2009 military coup destabilized Honduras and devastated government institutions, the door opened for impunity and corruption at the highest levels. The U.S. actively legitimated and supported the post-military coup regime which created the conditions for skyrocketing crime and violence, drug trafficking and an increase in poverty—all “push factors” for the massive migration north. Six and a half years after the coup, residents share that San Pedro Sula remains the most violent city in the world (about 171 murders / 100,000 population in 2014), even surpassing places like Ciudad Juarez, Bagdad and Mogadishu. Ninety percent of cases are never

investigated. The lack of response and investigation leads street gangs to thrive, as well as death squads. Government and business leaders have been linked to the corruption. Police and military commit human rights abuses with near total impunity and the judicial system barely functions. Journalists, land activists and labor leaders, lawyers and community organizers trying to fight the injustices have been harassed, intimidated, and even assassinated since the coup.

## VIOLENCE

Since the 2014 exodus of Honduran citizens over their borders, violence in Honduras has exceeded the levels that occurred in the Central American region during the civil wars of the 1980s. Local residents estimate that 70-80 young men are killed every month. Gangs take over whole neighborhoods overnight, threatening to kill families who don't abandon their homes, nor turn over their kids to the gang. Femicide, the killing of women simply because they are women, is particularly gruesome as women's bodies are found dismembered in large garbage bags—with little response from the government, other than to give the military a central role in the country. The Obama administration has responded to Hondurans fleeing this plight by discouraging migration and deporting families back into the “furnace of violence.”

## ECONOMIC GREED

While poverty is named as another of the reasons why Hondurans are fleeing, a key question is: *why* is there poverty? In effect, Honduras is ruled by transnational corporations (especially in the extractive sector), local elites and politicians of the extreme right. International actors, including the United States, the Organization of American States (OAS), the United Nations and the European Union are viewed as supporting this arrangement, as it serves the interests of international capital. Deregulation and privatization are increasing,

and the public sector is being gutted in the service of maximizing profits.

The government demonstrates little or no interest in agricultural reform to help the people of Honduras sustainably grow food on their land. Instead, it is intent on selling land to transnational corporations and large landowners for industrial scale agriculture, as well as to mining interests.

## DRUGS AND ORGANIZED CRIME

Honduras is a transit point for drugs coming from Colombia and Peru on their way to the United States, with cartels becoming quite powerful. Banks, including some of the largest, play a pivotal role in the drug trade by providing financial services, including money laundering, to drug traffickers. HSBC (a major British bank) and Wells Fargo were named as having been implicated in the drug trade. Nevertheless, the U.S. government tends to be very lenient toward the international banks. They have been fined but not indicted nor prosecuted for criminal activity. Many feel the U.S. “war on drugs” is ineffective in curbing the flow of drugs through Honduras, and question if it is a pretext for deeper U.S. militarization in the region.

## WHAT WE CAN DO

Citizens of the United States should recognize that our country’s actions to support our perceived self-interests have a direct, negative and lasting impact on the people of Honduras.

For example:

- U.S. policy to accept the 2009 coup, and politically and economically support the post-coup governments in Honduras, has contributed significantly to the widespread impunity and corruption, the attacks on human rights defenders, and the spiraling violence and poverty driving outward migration.

- U.S. policies to deport Hondurans, to militarize the U.S.-Mexico border, and to not address comprehensive immigration reform means that children, women and men can be deported to their deaths.
- U.S. policy to send police and military aid to the Honduran government has served to deepen the violence and embolden the corruption and impunity on the part of government and economic elites.

The Honduran people who are courageously working for justice call for ongoing solidarity from the U.S. faith community. There is a need for U.S. citizens to learn more about the situation in Honduras and to speak out for changes in U.S. policy, including urging the U.S. to strongly and publicly denounce human rights violations, particularly by security forces. Human rights groups, both Honduran and international, continue to issue reports which serve as useful resources for monitoring developments (e.g., see a report by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/Honduras-en-2015.pdf><http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/Honduras-en-2015.pdf>). We are encouraged to continue doing the following:

- Pray for justice and peace in Honduras
- Elevate concerns with Members of Congress about the human rights crisis in Honduras
- [Advocate for the U.S. to end aid to Honduran security forces until human rights abuses are addressed; and to cut funding for the Alliance for Prosperity in Honduras](#), which prioritizes business interests over human rights and development for impoverished communities; and to encourage the Honduran government to meaningfully address the root causes of migration (e.g., House of Representatives bill HR 5474, introduced by Rep. Hank Johnson on June 14, 2016 and support land reform for small farmers)

- Advocate with elected officials for refugee status for persons fleeing the Northern Triangle and for an end to deportations
- Foster people-to-people solidarity efforts (e.g. delegations)
- Watch this video clip of assassinated indigenous leader Berta Cáceres' daughter - theme "Berta didn't die, she multiplied" - for a better understanding of the current situation in Honduras.  
[http://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/18/slain\\_activist\\_berta\\_caceras\\_daughter\\_us](http://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/18/slain_activist_berta_caceras_daughter_us).
- Read the report of the Sisters of Mercy delegation to Honduras in December 2015 for an analysis of current conditions titled: *A Furnace of Violence: Honduras, US Policy, and the Root Causes of Migration*  
<http://www.sistersofmercy.org/files/images/Justice/Initiative/2015-Honduras-delegation-report---Eng.pdf> (Spanish language version also posted)

*The Sisters of Mercy have ministered for 50+ years to the people of Honduras and have been responding to human rights abuses occurring there ever since a coup in that country in June 2009.*

*Details of this report are derived from conversations with local community members, leaders and advocacy groups during the Sisters of Mercy delegation visit to Honduras in December 2015.*

*Access a report from the 2015 delegation online [here](#). For more information on Honduras and ways to take action, visit [our website](#).*