

**House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**Briefing  
On  
Voices from Honduras: Human Rights and Accountability**

**May 18, 2018 – 9:30 a.m.  
2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Statement of Rev. Ismael Moreno Coto, S.J. (Padre Melo)  
Radio Progreso, and Equipo de Reflexion, Investigacion y Comunicacion (ERIC)**

Honorable members of the Lantos Human Rights Commission, I come before you with members of my team at Radio Progreso and the Reflection, Investigation and Communication Team, E.R.I.C., platform for the social apostolate of the Jesuits in Honduras of which I am the General Director, because we fear for our lives, the lives of many human rights defenders and independent journalists and because we are worried about our country, Honduras.

In recent days, I learned with sadness and anger, that in these times of human rights violations committed by Honduran state security forces, the government of the United States financed and recently inaugurated new installations for the armed forces and continues to firmly support a regime that is largely responsible for instability, violence, social convulsion and human rights violations. Rather than improving, any possible solution for a way out continues to be lost on the horizon as long as the illegitimate government of questionable legality, headed by Juan Orlando Hernández, persists.

I dare to appear before this Commission and I thank you for listening because in our country, Honduras, we exercise the freedom of expression in precarious conditions and at considerable political risk. Between December 2017 and January and February of this year, we have been the victims of numerous actions that threaten our lives and work. A transmission tower and antennae for Radio Progreso installed in the capital of the Republic was sabotaged. Functionaries for the Human Rights Office in the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa, rather than pressing for an investigation and expressing solidarity with us, tried to justify the events and the government's assertion that it was an error or had been caused by weather.

Thank you for listening to me, because in the same time period, on at least four occasions I received flyers and was accused on social media networks of being an instigator of violence, trafficking and distributing weapons to carry out violence, of being part of drug trafficking and money laundering rings in order to support the Honduran left. I was also accused of having burnt businesses in my city, El Progreso, the principal headquarters for our social apostolate platform. My life is a testimony to the search for human and social transformations, freedom of expression via radio and written analysis, defense of human rights with only the weapons of the spoken and written word and diverse actions on the part of citizens rooted in the mysticism of active non-violence. I give testimony to the search for human and social transformation motivated by my Christian faith as a Jesuit. I am not a member nor have I worked for any political party, though I respect and value political party participation when it is honest and committed to the search for the common good.

The worst thing about our work as human rights defenders and journalists in a country like Honduras, is the official and para-official stigmatization and de-legitimization that makes us vulnerable to those who harm us while they enjoy impunity, as well as criminalizing us before the public, which is the target of the media hate campaigns, with the goal of convincing and persuading them that we are dangerous, opposed to development, instigators of violence and bad Hondurans.

In light of this situation, I come before you, honorable members of this Commission, to firmly register the following requests, with the due respect they deserve:

- 1- That you support our demand for an Independent Investigative Commission under the auspices of the United Nations to investigate and present a report to the Public Ministry, within six months, latest, on those responsible for the assassinations and injuries during the post-electoral crisis so that the Public Ministry immediately initiates the respective prosecutorial filings.
- 2- That you support our demand for an investigation into who gave the order to sabotage the Radio Progreso transmission tower and antennae on December 9, 2017; the origin of the posters and defamations against us via the distribution of flyers and on social media; the origin of death threats, intimidations and beatings of journalists and social communicators with the corresponding due process of law and justice against those responsible for these acts.

- 3- And lastly, that you support our demand for the demilitarization of public security and in general, that the United States government suspend police and military assistance at this time when state security forces not only defend the unconstitutionality of the current regime but actively repress public protestors.

Thank you for listening. My final wishes:

- 1) That my words do not remain trapped in this room or in the archives of the Commission.
- 2) That my words are transformed into effective solidarity. We have been harmed many times by the policy of the United States.
- 3) That this time, the response is a policy that is humane, effective and in solidarity with those who suffer the consequences of an authoritarian regime.
- 4) That this time, you listen not only to the spokespersons for the regime, the same ones who stigmatize us, but that you respond to the demands of those who respectfully search for new relations between both countries; relations based not on imposition and clientelism but on sovereign decisions, full respect for human rights and the self-determination of people.

Thank You:

Ismael Moreno,sj (P. Melo)

Radio Progreso, and Equipo de Reflexion, Investigacion y Comunicacion (ERIC)