

UPDATE #3 – March 2, 2018

Day 43: Conditions in Honduran Prisons

There are now 27 political prisoners being held in four different prisons around Honduras. The majority, 18 people, are in military-run, maximum security prisons “El Pozo” located in northwestern Honduras in Ilama, Santa Barbara and “La Tolva” prison in Moroceli, El Paraiso. For years, national and international human rights organizations have complained about the [dire conditions](#) inside Honduran jails. Overcrowding, risky health and sanitation conditions, rampant criminal activity, and corrupt management contribute to the various abuses that amount to torture inside Honduran prisons. In 2013, the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) wrote a report about the conditions in the prison. According to the Special Commissioner Rodrigo Escobar Gil that oversaw the inspection and investigation of the prison system in Honduras: “The prison system in Honduras is dehumanized, miserly, and corrupt. Living conditions in the prisons are completely contrary to human dignity.” Although the Honduran government claims that the construction of the maximum security jails are an attempt to address these issues, conditions remain the same or worse. Find a list of these conditions below.

Political prisoner Edwin Robelo Espinal’s long-time partner, Karen Spring, was able to enter the La Tolva prison over the last week to visit Edwin. With extreme difficulty and after weeks of trying to visit my partner, Edwin Robelo Espinal, I was able to enter La Tolva and spend a few hours with him. All other families with the exception of myself, have not been able to visit their loved ones.

Today, I will attempt to enter the prison to see Edwin again. In more ways than one, its a sad day for Honduras because today marks two years since the assassination of Honduran activist and leader, Berta Caceres of the Civic Council for Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH). Edwin and Berta were good friends and compañeros. Edwin spent several weeks in Rio Blanco working alongside Berta and the brave communities fighting to stop the construction of the DESA-owned and internationally financed Agua Zarca dam on the Gualcarque River. Edwin accompanied COPINH in several activities and worked to support Berta for years. Today, its been two years since her murder. The same Public Prosecutor’s Office that has sent Edwin and almost all political prisoners to maximum security prisons with various trumped up charges, has been politically unwilling to arrest the intellectual authors or masterminds of Berta’s murder. As we demand justice for Berta, we demand justice and freedom for the political prisoners as well!

Below is a list of the conditions inside the maximum security, military-run prisons in Honduras. This list has been developed in discussions with national human rights organizations and other families of political prisoners.

- **Hygiene and Water:** Water is scarce inside La Tolva prison and water has to be regularly trucked in throughout the day. Inmates are not able to defecate outside of a limited time period in the morning because toilets shared by 9-10 people inside each cell do not have any water for flushing. After urinating, the waste of all inmates in each cell sits inside the toilet until the following day when there is sufficient water to flush. Inmates are not given privacy when using the shared toilet in their cells. The water situation in La Tolva is expected to worsen because Honduras is entering into summer or dry season.
- **Medical Attention:** There is limited or no access to medical attention. Edwin has been sick with a harsh cold and sore throat and complains of being unable to breathe adequately throughout the night which prevents him from sleeping. Several other inmates including Edwin suffer from similar problems and although asking to see a doctor, they are forced to wait days and are still not guaranteed a visit. According to reports, only six inmates are able to see the physician per

day in a prison with a population over 1000 people. Visitors entering the prison are not able to bring in vitamins or over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen.

- Food: Unlike all other Honduran jails, food is provided inside the prison and with the exception of visits of family members, no food can be dropped off or taken into the jail for prisoners. According to information we have received, sometimes inmates have to wait between 6 to 7 hours between meals and often are starving by the time the food does come. There are several complaints that not enough food is distributed. In the month that Edwin has been detained, I estimate that he has lost approximately 5-10 pounds of body weight.
- Visits from Family Members: Each family member have to pay between 3000 and 3500 Lps (\$125 to \$150 USD) to put together the paperwork every six months in order to visit their loved ones in jail. This is extremely expensive for a Honduran family – almost half the monthly minimum wage. In the case of La Tolva, it takes family members 6 months to receive authorization and a special ID card from the National Penitentiary Institute (INP) in order to visit the jail on the weekends for a few hours. Even with an ID card, family members are forced to make a line for several hours in the hot sun in order to get permission to enter. Where La Tolva is located, there is no shade around the prison and the temperature in the hot sun range between 28- 35 degrees Celsius. There is no bathroom and no where to buy food or water. These conditions amount to torture for the political prisoners but also their families. Please take action. Contact US and Canadian authorities and demand that all political prisoners be immediately released and all charges dropped! See a broader summary of Edwin's case and the urgent action here. More information will be posted about all other political prisoners shortly at: FreeEdwinEspinalLibertad.blogspot.com and on Facebook at: [FreeEdwinEspinalLibertad](https://www.facebook.com/FreeEdwinEspinalLibertad)
