

## **Day #22 - Still Limited Access to Political Prisoners Edwin Espinal, Raul Alvarez and Others**

### **US and Canadian Authorities Silent about Political Prisoners**

UPDATE #2 – February 13, 2018

Although family members have been able to have a few brief (and expensive) phone conversations with political prisoners Edwin and Raul, family and human rights organizations have largely been unable to see or visit them. This is also the case with other political prisoners around the country.

There are 11 other political prisoners detained in the US-style maximum security prison “El Pozo” in Santa Barbara accused of trumped up charges related to anti-fraud protests. For more contextual information about the “El Pozo” prison, other maximum security prisons in Honduras, and the imposition of the US Prison model in Honduras, read the article: [How The US Imposes the Worst Of Its Prison Paradigms Abroad.](#)

Family members of the 11 other political prisoners have also been unable to visit them or get authorization from the National Penitentiary Institute (INP) to enter the prison. In total, there are an estimated 30 political prisoners around the country, and dozens more that face charges but were released while waiting further legal proceedings.



Picture of the US-style maximum security prison “La Tolva” where Edwin Robelo Espinal and Raul Eduardo Alvarez are being held. Picture from Honduran newspaper, La Prensa.

### **Case of Political Prisoners Edwin Espinal and Raul Alvarez**

On February 7, well-known and respected human rights defender, Bertha Oliva of the Committee of the Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH), was denied entry into the

maximum security prison, La Tolva. Oliva traveled to the prison to specifically visit Edwin Espinal, verify the conditions of his detention, and ensure his safety. Without any legal justification to deny Oliva and COFADEH representatives entry into the prison, they were turned away by the prison Director Najera Rivera.

On February 8, another Honduran human rights organization, International Ecumenical Human Rights Observatory (EIDH) accompanied the National Committee of Prevention Against Torture, Cruel, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment (CONAPREV), a Honduran government institution to the La Tolva prison. Since CONAPREV is the government authority responsible for inspecting and verifying detention and prison conditions throughout the country, Honduran human rights defender, Carlos del Cid of EIDH was able to enter the prison. As a result of the visit, we have been told the following information.

#### **What We Know About Conditions of Detention:**

- Edwin and Raul were taken out of isolation sometime between February 3 and February 6 (unverifiable dates) and placed in another area of the prison with other prisoners. Previously, Edwin was held in a small cell in isolation for approximately 15 days and Raul for 20 days.
- Despite family members dropping off personal items (clothes, hygiene products, and books) to the prison, neither Raul or Edwin have received them. According to prison regulations, family members are welcome to drop off specific items and after inspection, are given to the prisoners. This has not happened in Raul and Edwin's case.
- The prison has significant water problems and authorities are constantly having to bring water in via truck to the prison.
- Both Edwin and Raul commented how difficult it is to not have regular communication or visits from family members.

#### **“Legal” Case: No Rule of Law and Complete Violation of Due Process**

It has been three weeks since Edwin and Raul's legal hearing where the judge ordered pretrial detention. Raul and Edwin's lawyers have gone to the National Jurisdiction court 3-4 times to request a copy of their legal file and the so-called evidence being used to incriminate them. To date, the lawyers have been denied a copy of the file and the evidence. By law, the court and Prosecutor's Office are required to provide a copy and their unwillingness to do this to date, is reminiscent of the failure of the Public Prosecutor's Office to hand over key evidence and the investigative file in the Berta Caceres murder investigation. The lawyers of the political prisoners are unable to properly defend Raul and Edwin without a copy of the legal file.

The Appeal Court still has not responded to the appeal presented by COFADEH requesting to annul the case against Edwin and Raul and demanding their immediate release. Please see contact information of the Appeal Court to continue to pressure the court to both respond and annul the charges given the serious irregularities and failure to adhere to due process in both the detention, investigation, and legal proceedings against Edwin and Raul.

#### **Response from the US Authorities About Political Prisoners**

Dozens of emails and calls have been made to US and Canadian authorities. We thank everyone for their support. To our knowledge, there has not been any response from US Embassy authorities including Human Rights Representative, Jason Smith, and the US Charge d'Affairs Heide Fulton. A representative from the US-based organization Witness for Peace and HSN Honduras-based

Coordinator and Edwin's long-time partner, Karen Spring, will be meeting with the US Embassy about the political prisoners and human rights abuses in the context of the electoral crisis on February 13. The issue of their non-response will be addressed in the meeting.

### **Response from Canadian Authorities About Political Prisoners**

Canadian authorities have also not responded to several demands to act to secure Edwin's release. Canadian Embassy representatives were asked to visit Edwin in prison to verify the conditions of his detention but this has not happened.

When Global Affairs was contacted concerning Karen's safety (as a result of a defamation campaign against her in relation to Edwin's case), the Deputy Director, Philémon Leroux responded by sending a form letter:

"the Government of Canada takes the safety and security of Canadians abroad very seriously by providing credible and timely information on the security situation of every country, including Honduras. Kindly note however that the Government of Canada cannot guarantee your safety and security while you are abroad. If you believe that your personal safety is at risk, we highly recommend you find a safe place, whether it be in Honduras or back in Canada."

Is this the Canadian government's response to human rights defenders? Why is Canada investing and maintain economic and political ties with a government that defames, threatens, murders and imprisons human rights defenders?

PLEASE CONTINUE TO CONTACT CANADIAN and US AUTHORITIES! ~ Thank you for your support ~