

May 26, 2011

To: Contractors and bidders on contracts for U.S. construction on military bases in Honduras

It has come to our attention that your company has expressed interest in a contract for construction of barracks for enlisted soldiers at the Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras, or that you were awarded a Defense Department contract for construction on Soto Cano or another military base in Honduras.

We write so that you will consider the ethical and political implications of such contracts for the people of Honduras, the rest of Central America, and of the United States, and urge you to withdraw from such contracts and bidding on them.

Several scholars state that any foreign military base violates Honduras' constitution, as acknowledged by the U.S. General Accounting Office.¹ Article 205 of the constitution requires congressional approval of just the transit of foreign troops on Honduran territory.² The use of 'hooches' instead of permanent barracks on Soto Cano attempted to paper over this prohibition by making the U.S. base "temporary," which would be definitively changed by the upcoming contract.

Moreover, the current expansion of the U.S. military presence increased during the de facto government of Roberto Micheletti in 2009. A large percentage of Hondurans view the current government as illegitimate, as it resulted from the November 2009 presidential elections, which were widely boycotted. The United Nations, Organization of American States, and European Union refused to send observers to the elections, because conditions did not exist to conduct a fair election.³

In fact, the Soto Cano base was reportedly used as a way station for the plane that illegally and forcibly took President Manuel Zelaya out of Honduras, a fact implicitly recognized by the State Department.⁴ The foreign military presence your contract would support violates Honduran sovereignty and the principles of democracy.

One of the missions of Joint Task Force – Bravo based in Soto Cano is training of Honduran armed forces. Yet the Honduran army is responsible not only for its participation in the 2009 coup, for which it has not been held accountable, but for ongoing violence against Honduran opponents of the current regime.

Human Rights Watch documented the killing of 18 journalists, coup opponents and human rights defenders in 2010.⁵ Repression resulting in human rights violations is practiced by all state security forces (all branches of the Armed Forces, National Police and all Command Structures, Municipal Police, and private security guards), according to a study by the Humanist Institute of Development Cooperation.⁶ The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights of the Organization of American States cites "generalized impunity for human rights violations" and the return of death squads operating in Honduras with the aim of political persecution.⁷

Of many hundreds of cases of violations, "no one has been held criminally responsible for the human rights violations and abuses of power committed after the coup," Human Rights Watch stated in December.⁸

Defense Department spending in Honduras on contracts has more than doubled since 2007,⁹ and violence and drug trafficking in the country has also spiraled during the same period.¹⁰ Following the coup, as a result of growing insecurity, including killings carried out by the military and military-trained police forces, Honduras has among the highest murder rates in the world (more than five times the Iraq rate).¹¹ Whether or not the U.S. military presence is contributing to the violence, it certainly is not reducing it.

We recognize that U.S. forces in Honduras have been used to respond to emergencies produced by seasonal hurricanes. Yet no act of good will changes the essential mission of military forces to wage war and to use or threaten to use violent force. Responses to hurricane disasters do not require a U.S. military presence in Honduras, as the U.S. General Accounting Office has reported.¹²

No person of conscience seeks to profit from the suffering of others, nor cause violence and destruction to civilians who are peacefully advocating a better society. By supporting anti-democratic, violent and wealthy sectors in Honduran society, the U.S. military is contributing to such violent outcomes.

We imagine that you seek to support yourself and families through this work. But we suggest that, in this case, it is not worth the costs.

We will support continued nonviolent resistance to violence, human rights violations, and illegitimate authority in Honduras, including the U.S. military presence in Soto Cano and elsewhere in the country. We invite you to respond to this letter, to the address below.*

Sincerely,

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Sister Jean Stokan, Director
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team

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* Please respond to: HondurasLetter@forusa.org

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San Jose Peace and Justice Center

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* Please respond to: HondurasLetter@forusa.org

Notes

¹ U.S. General Accounting Office, “Honduras: Continuing U.S. Military Presence at Soto Cano Base is Not Critical,” GAO-NSIAD-95-39, p. 10.

² Constitution of Honduras, Article 205, Section 26, at http://www.honduras.net/honduras_constitution2.html

³ Congressional Research Service, *Honduran Political Crisis, June 2009-January 2010*, p. 10; <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sgsm12482.doc.htm>

⁴ State Department cable, June 29, 2009, from Secretary of State, 09STATE67105, at <http://www.wikileaks.fi/cable/2009/06/09STATE67105.html>

⁵ Human Rights Watch, *After the Coup: Ongoing Violence, Intimidation, and Impunity in Honduras*, December 2010, p. 47.

⁶ HIVOS, Instituto Humanista de Cooperación al Desarrollo, “Impunidad en Honduras (Post Golpe de Estado de 28 de junio de 2009,” October 2010, pp. 28-29.

⁷ IACHR, June 2010, <http://www.cidh.oas.org/Comunicados/English/2010/59-10eng.htm> and IACHR, June 2010, “Preliminary Observations of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on its Visit to Honduras, May 15 to 18, 2010,” para. 65.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, *After the Coup*, p. 19.

⁹ Based on contract data available at www.usaspending.gov

¹⁰ “American officials say the 2009 coup in Honduras kicked open the door to cartels,” the *New York Times* reported in March. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/24/world/americas/24drugs.html>

¹¹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_intentional_homicide_rate and <http://www.southcom.mil/AppsSC/news.php?storyId=2604>

¹² U.S. General Accounting Office, *op. cit.*