The State of the LGBT** Movement in Honduras
As reported by the 2013 Honduran Equality Delegation

All contact information and references are listed at the end of this report

Purpose of the Honduran Equality Delegation

The Honduran Equality Delegation (HED), comprised of fourteen LGBT human rights activists from across the US, visited Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula from November 21st to December 1st, 2013, to document and address the state of LGBT rights and to observe the Honduran presidential election. The HED was part of a 166 member election observer team from the Honduras Solidarity Network, the largest election observation delegation in the country, which observed in ten of the 18 departments (states) of Honduras.

Our HED delegation had three main purposes - to amplify the voices of the Honduran LGBT community, to establish solidarity and accompaniment during the elections and into the future, and to investigate the state of human rights in Honduras with the purpose of demanding the US government end its support of a repressive government.

Melissa Stiehler of the Cross Border Network and HSN coordinated the delegation with sponsorship from EQUAL, the Alliance for Global Justice and Global Exchange.

The Honduran Equality Delegation is the first effort of its kind to take a grassroots approach to connecting with Honduran LGBT activists who, despite the risks, remain deeply committed to securing social and political inclusion within the broad coalition which has grown in resistance to the 2009 coup.

“We hope that building these relationships will provide new tools to address violence against LGBT communities internationally,” HED coordinator Melissa Stiehler explained, “and amplify the voices of the Honduran LGBT community against repression.”

Background

The post-coup resistance movement has a long history. Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras in October 1998. When it was clear the Honduran government’s bureaucratic and corrupt response to the hurricane failed to meet the needs of people across the country, various sectors of society began mobilizing to make demands. This broader mobilization contributed to a dialogue years later with Manuel Zelaya, the first President to address issues of the poor majority of the population in a meaningful way.

On June 28, 2009, a military coup accepted by the U.S. government overthrew Zelaya, kidnapping and transporting him by helicopter to Costa Rica and
involuntary exile. A wealthy landowner representing the traditional Liberal Party, Zelaya evolved his thinking to implement policies that supported poor, landless, and working class people and sought measures for environmental protection against mining companies and agribusiness. He pushed for Honduras to join ALBA, the regional cooperation alliance founded by Hugo Chavez, which would place Honduras into Venezuela’s orbit. Most importantly, Zelaya proposed a process to rewrite Honduras’ deeply illiberal 1982 constitution, bequeathed to the populace by a previous military dictatorship.

Transnational corporations, the Honduran elite, and the U.S. government observed Zelaya’s political conversion with alarm, because his policies appeared to threaten business interests and the political power structure, hence the coup against Zelaya. An illegitimate election in November of the same year, organized and tightly controlled by those responsible for the June coup, consolidated the power grab. This election was held in an atmosphere of dramatically increased militarization and was boycotted by the opposition.

Infuriated by the coup and the illegitimate elections that followed, massive numbers of Hondurans protested, demonstrating throughout the country during the months following the removal of Zelaya. The National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP) emerged out of these street demonstrations and became a nationwide grassroots movement. This movement formed from a coalition that included women, youth, workers and labor unions, teachers, students, campesino (rural farmworker) groups, and indigenous and Afro-descendant people. LGBT people took to the streets with the majority of the population, and have become increasingly integrated into this non-violent revolutionary movement.

In 2011, the FNRP voted to create a political party to participate in elections, and formed the LIBRE Party. The word LIBRE means "free" in Spanish, but also comes from the full party name of Libertad (Liberty) and Refundación (the Refounding of the country with a new constitution). LIBRE chose as its presidential candidate Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, the wife of overthrown president Manuel Zelaya. Zelaya was allowed to return to the country in May 2011 in exchange for the Organization of American States recognition of the president selected in November 2009, Pepe Lobo. LIBRE chose Claudia Spellman as the first trans woman and Erick Martinez Avila as the first gay man to run for the Honduran Congress. After Martinez Avila was murdered, Erick Vidal Martinez Salgado replaced him as a candidate. Both he and Spellman lost in the primaries.

Note: This report includes mention of two persons named Erick Martinez: Erick Vidal Martinez Salgado who is currently one of the leading LGBT activists in Honduras; and Erick Alexander Martinez Avila, who was killed in 2012 (see below.) Erick Vidal
Martinez replaced Erick Martinez Avila as a candidate after his assassination.

Besides meeting LGBT groups, our HED delegation joined the entire HSN delegation in denouncing the elections we observed as fraudulent, due to many reasons outlined in LIBRE’s official complaint and the HSN election observation report (see information below.) The reasons included the environment of repression and intimidation of LIBRE candidates and their supporters during the campaign, and the transmission of purposefully incorrect vote totals to the Supreme Election Tribunal (TSE) which did not match the tally sheets given to the party representatives at every polling center at the close of voting. LIBRE’s review of the tally sheets indicated Xiomara Castro won, but the official results announced the winner as Juan Orlando Hernandez, the leader of the ultra-conservative National Party. LIBRE did win 39 seats in the new Congress out of a total of 128. It’s important to note that LIBRE did not have a representative as part of the TSE, as did the other parties.

At least 18 LIBRE activists were killed during the campaign, which began in June 2012, and several since, including a mayoral candidate. In summer 2013, the Honduran Congress voted to fund the first 1000 members of a new Military Police force, ostensibly to fight gangs and the “war on drugs,” but the Hondurans we met believe its purpose is to repress the population and popular dissent.

Post election update: In a lame duck session of Congress in January 2014, the Deputies elevated the Military Police to make it a constitutionally authorized permanent force, which can only be disbanded by changing the constitution with a supermajority, then ratifying the vote in the following congress. This is just one example of how this lame duck session institutionalized reactionary policies prior to LIBRE entering the new Congress. Other examples include giving 87 new contracts to private companies; consolidating the entirety of the Honduran government into seven governmental agencies, which limits the balance of power; and severely limiting freedom of speech by making it illegal for journalists to blow whistles on corruption or abuse of power by Honduran officials.

**The Development of the LGBT Movement in Honduras**

LGBT activists who had taken to the streets in the aftermath of the coup formed the Movimiento de Diversidad en Resistencia (Movement for Diversity in the Resistance/MDR) after the murder of Walter Tróchez (see below.) Their goal was to have an organized political impact in the country and to advocate for an LGBT liberation agenda inside the FNRP. Prior to the coup the LGBT community was mostly invisible, other than HIV/AIDS work. Due to Honduras’ pervasive homophobia and transphobia and the elevated risk of violent retribution, MDR member Karla Paredes of San Pedro Sula (Honduras’ second largest city) explained
that lesbians historically have been limited to organizing private house parties to socialize. Gay men also held private parties, but were able to cruise in public places and find some tolerance in a limited number of heterosexual clubs and restaurants. Public displays of affection between members of the same sex continue to be risky. In contrast to gay men and lesbians, transgender women have much more visibility and are the most frequent targets of violence.

Honduras is the murder capital of the world – more people are killed per capita than in any country in the world not at war. More than 100 peasants protesting the expropriation of their land by palm oil biofuel companies, 33 journalists, and many teachers, union leaders, and grassroots organizers have been murdered since the coup, some with clear signs of death squad execution. Additionally, in 2013 more than 600 women were killed.

Within this deadly context the LGBT community has also paid a high price for their opposition to the coup-regime. Activists Erick Vidal Martinez and Jose "Pepe" Rodolfo Palacios Barahona explained that from 1990-2005 there were 25 reported murders of the LGBT community, but many more went unreported. In contrast, organizations like the Asociación para una Vida Mejor (Association for a Better Life/ APUMIVEH) which supports those affected by HIV and sexual and gender minorities, have documented 116 LGBT murders since 2008 - 9 lesbians, 53 gay men, and 54 trans women. Bodies have been found strangled, stabbed, and mutilated. (Alarmingly, APUMIVEH was forced to shut down as a result of death threats in December 2013 shortly after our delegation left Honduras.)

LIBRE Communications Director Gerardo Torres, Pepe Palacios, and Erick Vidal Martinez

Karla Paredes stated that murders of lesbians are significantly higher because the government often does not distinguish the deaths of lesbians among the deaths of women in general. Karla indicated that she personally knows of 30-40 lesbian killings.
From meetings with Erick Vidal Martinez and members of APUMIVEH, we derived a broader sense of the violence affecting LGBT peoples in Honduras. Of these murders only 35 have been investigated, only 6 have been charged, and none have gone to trial. A policeman known to have stabbed a trans woman, Nicola Morelia, 39 times in 2009 walks free in spite of a verdict and sentence against him. Morelia survived the attack and now lives in exile. The two most well known LGBT murders are of Walter Tróchez in 2009 and Erick Alexander Martinez Avila in 2012 (see below.)

In January 2013 police raided a gay bar in Tegucigalpa, detaining 84 people, and arrested 3, including Erick Vidal Martinez, and then ransacked the bar. Erick Vidal Martinez and other LGBT activists met with U.S. Ambassador Lisa Kubiske to protest the raid. This meeting, in conjunction with 2 1/2 years of organizing in Honduras and lobbying from U.S. activists, pressured the Honduran Congress to add LGBT people to Honduras' anti-discrimination law, Article 321, in April 2013.

There are signs of hope. LGBT participation in the political debates have integrated sexual diversity into the human rights discussion, albeit in a climate of increased violence against human rights advocates, both Honduran and international. Honduran sexual and gender minorities are making themselves visible and denouncing crimes against LGBT people. However, the increased visibility also puts them at a higher risk as they gain influence.

**Honduras’ Anti-Discrimination Law, Article 321 of the Criminal Code**

During the primary campaign of 2012 when LGBT candidates Erick Vidal Martinez and Claudia Spellman represented LIBRE, Evelio Reyes, an Evangelical preacher, began a vicious anti-gay campaign in the media. In this campaign, Reyes demanded that Hondurans abstain from voting for LGBT candidates, essentially forbidding voters from supporting LIBRE because they support LGBT rights. A coalition that included Erick Martinez filed suit for discrimination under article 321, asserting that under the national constitution, Honduras is a secular state, which prevents religious leaders from interfering in the elections.

In April, 2013, the Honduran Congress voted to include sexual orientation and gender identity in Article 321. The Honduran courts dropped the charges against Reyes in August, and Reyes now campaigns to overturn the inclusion of LGBT people in Article 321. In his speeches, Reyes claims that if the Honduran government allows LGBT candidates on the ballot, “you might as well include dogs and cats.” Seven LGBT people were murdered in the 3 months after his trial, including a young man who was stoned to death in a rural community. Assailants
also attacked a trans woman on her way home from being interviewed on a TV program and stripped her of all signs of female identification, including her shoes, as an act of humiliation. Many of the LGBT organizers we met attribute these incidents to Reyes’ incitement.

Reyes met with President Lobo and other government officials, demanding the inclusion of LGBT people under 321 be rescinded. Juan Orlando Hernandez, currently head of the Congress, is poised to overturn Article 321 now that he's been declared president. Hernandez's new position contrasts with his statement that "Hondurans must make progress" when he originally voted in favor of the article. LGBT people fear rescinding LGBT protections amounts to implicit government tolerance for discrimination, oppression and murder of LGBT people, with many forced to leave the country and organizations forced to close down. Referring to the prospect of these disturbing changes Erick Martinez observed, “religion justifies killing homosexuals.” Should Hernandez, once president, introduce the measure to rescind LGBT inclusion in 321 into the new Congress, activists worldwide should begin a campaign to insist it be withdrawn and that the U.S. State Department and other international governments and organizations oppose the change to the law.

**Justice Denied: The Murders of Walter Tróchez and Erick Martinez Avila**

On December 13, 2009, Walter Orlando Tróchez, 27, an internationally respected Honduran LGBT activist and HIV educator, was murdered in Tegucigalpa while working on an HIV prevention campaign with transgender women. Tróchez had recently begun publicly documenting the murders of LGBT Hondurans after the coup. He was also publicly critical of Cardinal Oscar Rodríquez, Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, for supporting the coup and his public hostility to state recognition of LGBT rights. An unidentified gunman shot Tróchez from a motorcycle, and within a few hours he died.
A week earlier, Tróchez had been kidnapped by men in black masks in a gray pickup without license plates, presumed to be from the DNIC (National Police Unit). They told him they knew him well and asked him about his FNRP involvement, interrogating him about FNRP leaders and names of leaders from other movements. Tróchez managed to escape with his life, but was forced to move. Immediately after the attack, still in his t-shirt bloodied from the beating and his face swollen and bruised (pictured above), Tróchez filed a formal complaint with national and international human rights groups.

Honduran investigators and prosecutors contend that Tróchez’ murder was a crime of passion carried out by a former lover, denying any connection to violence by security forces. Honduran LGBT leaders and journalist Wendy Funes maintain that the suspect in the case was not even in the country at the time.

On May 7, 2012, Erick Alexander Martínez Avila, 32, a radio journalist and key LGBT leader, was found tortured and strangled to death in a gully in Guasculile on the road leading to the department of Olancho after being abducted the previous day in Tegucigalpa. Martinez Avila was a founder of the Movement of Diversity in Resistance (MDR), and only two weeks earlier, LIBRE and MDR had selected him as the first gay candidate to run for Congress in Honduras.

Similar to the Tróchez case, investigators and prosecutors contend Martinez Avila’s murder was a crime of passion carried out by a drug-trafficking lover, Gustavo Adolfo Aguilar Sánchez. Aguilar is now in custody with Eduardo José López Gutiérrez, accused of being an accomplice and allegedly a gang member of Mara 18.

The U.S. FBI established a Special Victims Unit with the Honduran Public Prosecutors office (Public Ministry) and trained Honduran police and prosecution investigators in best practices for solving murders in the LGBT community. Their
involvement in the Tróchez and Martinez cases highlights the potential for the whitewashing of human rights abuses through foreign law enforcement aid.

The hands-on FBI role in both cases raises the question: Does the FBI agree with the findings of the Honduran police and prosecutors in the high profile cases? If so, why would the FBI be colluding with the Honduran Public Ministry prosecutors by keeping silent about the failure to investigate the police and Honduran elites who had demonstrated motives to kill both Tróchez and Martinez Avila? If not, why would the FBI and US Embassy, which supervised the project, agree with the case moving forward under false accusations and flimsy evidence?

Unless authorities suspend this legal process and undertake a new investigation, more likely suspects amongst the security forces and those who command them will never be considered. If the wrong people are condemned or even if the accused are found "not guilty", investigators will not pursue the matter further. The prosecution of innocent parties for these murders will reinforce the message that armed actors in Honduras can continue a policy of extrajudicial killing. As such, the murders will remain in impunity due to lack of political will and corruption by the Honduran police, Public Ministry prosecutors, and their FBI advisors to investigate and prosecute the real perpetrators of both murders. The net impact of the FBI role in the investigations will be to increase impunity rather than reduce it.

Furthermore, with the high visibility of FBI involvement in both cases, the credibility of both the U.S. Embassy and the State Department and the assertion that justice can be secured for LGBT Hondurans will continue to be undermined in Honduras. Should the final verdict convict these men, the FBI and U.S. Embassy will rightly be perceived as complicit with impunity. Such exposure will reinforce the view, common in Honduras, that both the U.S. and the Honduran governments are less interested in securing justice than in preserving their political and business interests.

**Trans Life and Activism**

Trans women are often among the most visible members of the LGBT community in Honduras and, as a result, have borne much of the brunt of the anti-LGBT violence and discrimination that has swept the country since the 2009 coup d'état. Trans women have, however, also been at the forefront of LGBT organizing both within and outside of the formal resistance movement. This section of the report will address four aspects of trans life and activism - violence, discrimination in employment and education, the movement for legal gender recognition, and the invisibility of trans men.
Claudia Spellman, transgender activist and Congressional candidate, testified that in 2001 in San Pedro Sula, trans women formed the Colectivo Unidad Color Rosa (Pink Color Unity Collective) because the government proposed relocating trans sex work outside of their usual venues. Spellman further explained that in 2005 they organized, and they got their first office. However, they had to move after the primary election of 2012, because of harassment and attacks on the building. They got their legal status as a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) in 2010.

Trans women have been severely impacted by anti-LGBT violence, particularly since 2009. Two trans women in San Pedro Sula were the first deaths of the resistance movement in that city, and overall more than 54 trans murders have taken place since the 2008. Beyond being complicit in this violence by failing to investigate these crimes, the police are also often the perpetrators. Although not every murder of trans women is the result of retribution for political involvement, the high incidence of trans killings demonstrates the interaction between the militarization of civil society and transphobia". 

Claudia Spellman

Trans women in the Colectivo Unidad Color Rosa office
Although article 321 now includes sexual orientation and gender identity as classes legally protected from discrimination, two problems remain. First, this law has not been put into practice in any meaningful way. Discrimination in employment, education, public accommodations, and general life quality systematically persists. This discrimination, as Spellman explained, pushes trans women into outdoor survival sex work for income. This resulting public visibility makes them vulnerable to violence from both the police and organized crime, although sex work is not illegal in Honduras. Second, risks will greatly increase if the Nationalist Party and Juan Orlando Hernandez succeed in repealing the LBGT protections in the law.

Outside of the more general demands of the FNRP, the primary legislative goal for the trans movement at present is passing a Gender Identity Law for legal gender recognition. Currently, it’s impossible to obtain accurate and updated identification. This barrier to transgender identification guarantees that even those who may be visually conforming enough to pass unnoticed in some areas of their lives, are still "outed" as trans when they present identification documents that show old pictures, birth names, and incorrect gender markers. This can be a trigger for violence as well as discrimination in hiring, school enrollment, and voting. Activists, like Spellman, have spent the last three years working together and collaborating with trans activists all around Latin America to develop proposed language based on the Argentine model - the current world standard legislation. The law will allow swift and simple gender recognition using a single administrative form and will not require any proof of transition-related healthcare or a court order. The community plans to introduce the bill in 2014 with support from the LIBRE party.

Finally, it’s crucial to note that the trans movement in Honduras is almost entirely composed of trans women. They told us they have known and supported trans men over the years, but an organized trans masculine movement has not yet emerged and trans men remain invisible to society. The goals of the movement, however, include supporting trans men and women equally and will hopefully create a space for emerging trans male leaders.

The trans movement in Honduras is strong and although the 2009 coup d’état brought a wave of violence against community members, it also created the foundation for unprecedented collaboration between trans activists and more mainstream leftist social movements. For example, despite failing to advance beyond the primaries, the congressional candidacy of Claudia Spellman sent a strong message to people all over the country that trans people exist and are politically motivated to fight for that existence. One trans activist, Alejandra Vega, summed up the community motivations: "If I don't defend my rights, who will defend me?"
The Struggle for Women’s Rights in Honduras

The women’s and feminist movement of Honduras is not only key to full equality and liberation of the Honduran people, but is very much in conjunction with the plight of the LGBTQ community. This section will examine the measure of economic, sexual and physical violence against women, and the role of female involvement and leadership seen in the sexual diversity movement and the Resistance in whole.

On November 26th, 2013, the Honduran Equality Delegation met with El Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (Center for Women's Rights/CDM) founded by Gilda Rivera in 1989 to promote and protect women’s rights in Honduras.

Gilda and four of her colleagues graciously discussed their past and present work as well as their relations to the LGBTQ community. “We are sister organizations,” Gilda spoke in reference to the LGBTQ organizations, “we have similar struggles.” Women and members of the LGBTQ community in Honduras face the same type of oppression. Both groups are economically, socially, and politically vulnerable to acts of discrimination, violence, rape, and death. They are both without a legal system to persecute those committing these crimes, as crimes against women have an impunity rate of 97%.

There were over 7,000 people killed in Honduras last year alone. Since the coup in 2009, there has been a sharp increase of femicide in Honduras as reported by many human rights groups and attested by the CDM. According to their statistics, one woman is killed every 14 hours. The increase that has been seen is attributed to the increase in militarization under the regime that overthrew President Zelaya in 2009 in concert with women’s visible roles in the Resistance.
There are many factors that contribute to the oppression of women which include but are not limited to pervasive misogynist attitudes and an exorbitant impunity rate, all riddled in a culture of machismo backed by an increase in militarization. Of the numerous murders of women committed in Honduras, only about one in every five is investigated, and 78% of those cases are never solved. This is due to the fact that authorities frequently miscategorize and dismiss cases of violence against women. For example, the police will frequently ascribe cases of femicide as merely crimes of passion which are then dismissed.

In this patriarchal society, women play a very traditional role in the community. They are normally financially dependent on their husbands; however, if there is not enough revenue in the household women are also expected to earn money in addition to taking care of the household duties. The common acceptance of these roles for women presents barriers to women both in pursuit of their education and when they seek opportunities in the workforce. However, because Honduras is the third poorest country in Latin America, women are having to seek employment more often. Typically, they do so in farming, sex work or the maquila (sweatshop) sector. Prevalent maquilas in Honduras include Haines clothing, Gildan clothing and Leer auto parts. Women are often subjected to economic and sexual exploitation while on the job. The jobs that are traditionally held by women are often those that are some of the most exploitative. Teachers often go months without pay. The wages held by women of the maquilas or female farmers are minimal. The workplace safety of women in these industries is very poor and many women are fully disabled after some ten years in the maquila.

One of the many issues taken up in the feminist in Resistance movement is to gain control over their own bodies and sexual education. Women have very little access to reproductive rights. Honduras has the highest rate of youth pregnancy in Latin America. Honduran law bans abortions of any kind, and women are jailed for attempted or completed abortions. Furthermore, access to emergency contraception, commonly known as “the morning after pill,” is extremely limited. The morning after pill became legalized under President Zelaya, but made illegal again after the coup. Over 8,000 women have been denied access to emergency contraception at the public hospital in Tegucigalpa, including in cases of rape.

Again, the overwhelming sexual, economic, political, and social discrimination that women face in Honduras has increased since the coup. However, many women have found place in leadership of the Resistance. Berta Cáceres, an indigenous woman of Rio Abajo, was one to stand up against corporatization and land exploitation. Cáceres co-founded Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous...
Organizations/COPINH), a prominent human rights organization in Northern Honduras. The government and military has targeted COPINH because of their support work in rural communities and involvement in the Resistance. Because of Berta’s role in leadership of this organization, authorities charged her with possession of an illegal weapon and damages to a hydroelectric dam company’s property. Cáceres continues to hold a visible and public presence.

Karla Paredes is another strong, female leader in the LGBT movement. Paredes is one of the few out lesbian activists living in Honduras. Recently, she was elected to the position of being the Departmental Secretary of Diversity in Cortes, for the LIBRE party, with the main goal of creating more inclusive spaces for oppressed communities. Paredes is especially working with trans women and indigenous populations to create better employment opportunities.
Other organizations that have been created include, but are not limited to: Coordinadora Sindicatos Bananeros y Agroindustrias de Honduras (Coordinator of Honduran Banana and Agro-Industrial Unions/COSIBAH), Comité de Familiares de Detenidos e Desaparecidos en Honduras (Committee of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras/COFADEH), Colectiva de Mujeres Hondureñas (Collective of Honduran Women/CODEMUH), Las Catrachas, and Movimiento de Diversidad en Resistencia (Movement of Diversity in Resistance/MDR), Colectivo Unidad Color Rosa (Pink Color Unity Collective, and Asociación Para Una Vida Mejor En Honduras (Association for a Better Life in Honduras/AMPUVIMEH). Many of these organizations have women directors, are founded by women or strive to include the voice, experiences, and struggle of women.

Despite the rampant discrimination and the heinous crimes against women in Honduras, the Resistance that rose directly after the coup has given women a place to amplify their voices. Karla Lara, a popular liberation musician with whom with we met, has been called the voice of the Resistance. We see stronger organizing efforts of women across the country, working in unity. The LIBRE nomination of Xiomara Castro would have elected the first female president of Honduras, if not for interference from fraudulent activities. There was massive support of Xiomara, which, despite the fraud, successfully broke the two party system for the first time in the history of Honduras.

While there is much that women must overcome, many women build power in the fight for human rights, labor rights, indigenous rights, sexual diversity rights, and thus make themselves targets for political repression, and yet, they continue every day.

**Coalition Politics and the Integration of LGBTs into LIBRE**

There are limitations to how coalition politics work between the emerging LGBT movement and other organizations, including the integration of aspects of the LGBT movement into the LIBRE party. Generally most groups find common ground with the LGBT movement in fighting the culture of impunity that affects the majority of Hondurans.

At the Centro de Derechos de Mujeres we learned about the fragility of coalition politics. Gilda Rivera, coordinator of the CDM, contended that feminists assume the importance of diversity, beyond mere celebration of difference, as a necessary component of struggle. They nevertheless recognized the limitations of these relationships, and suggested they sometimes have significant conflicts working with LGBT groups, particularly trans women. After acknowledging these conflicts, they
insisted that new openings exist to work with such groups, including the group Las Catrachas (a lesbian group that documents crimes against sexual and gender minorities). Further, they affirmed a common purpose with LGBT groups because feminists also value the right to sexuality. Both groups share common difficulties with Honduras’ religious culture as well, in its dual Catholic and evangelical traditions. Through their powerful influence on Honduras’ culture, Catholic and Evangelical leadership insist on restricting women’s rights, including the complete prohibition of abortion, and they oppose LGBT human rights and liberation.

When we met with Rafael Alegría, the chief coordinator of the Honduran branch of *Via Campesina*, an international farmworker coalition, he acknowledged the value of a coalition with LGBTs to his organization. However, when delegates questioned him about how Via Campesina addresses issues of discrimination and violence against queer people in the countryside, he acknowledged that they don’t have programs to address these issues, despite the fact they had parallel programs for the empowerment of women. He nevertheless described the LGBT community of Honduras, as “brothers and sisters in the struggle.”

Erick Martinez and Claudia Spellman both faced a great deal of pressure, including taunts and insults while running public campaigns. Spellman, in particular, was forced to use her masculine birth name on the ballot, instead of her current name as a trans woman. Although neither won, they both feel their campaigns were positive experiences that gave the LGBT movement visibility and raised public consciousness. As a result of much hard work, activists with the Movement for Diversity in Resistance (MDR) have gained a space and a voice in LIBRE, and there is now an LGBT secretariat in the party, held by Spellman.

In January 2014, the MDR concluded a successful national conference. Their agenda includes:

- Defense of the LGBT protections under Article 321.
- To include “hate crimes” into the penal code.
- A gender identity law that would allow trans persons to transition from one gender to another in all of their official documentation.
- Demilitarization of the country
- The promotion of a secular state.
- The reform of national education policy to include sex education.
- A national campaign against bullying in schools.
- The respect, promotion & commemoration of May 17th as “National Day Against Homophobia.”
The MDR acknowledges that LIBRE risked votes by supporting LGBT rights and running candidates, but this risk has helped to build mutual trust and cooperation among the two groups. In San Pedro Sula, the LIBRE leadership gave the MDR the task of coordinating logistics for the final campaign rally, and MDR activist Karla Paredes waved the Rainbow flag from the stage in the presence of presidential candidate Xiomara Castro de Zelaya. Also in Tegucigalpa, LIBRE party leaders asked that the rainbow flag be flown at the closing.

MDR has charted a new direction for the LGBT movement in Honduras, which has been dominated up to now by LGBT non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which MDR activists criticize as bureaucratic and for having little political impact. MDR members all work as volunteers and want to change this NGO mentality. Their goal is to build a political movement that can have an impact at a governmental level. They are asking the international LGBT movement for the following solidarity:

- International support to denounce the elections
- Lobby their own governments to pressure the Honduran government to protect LGBT people and human rights, including the retention of the LGBT provision in the anti-discrimination law, Article 321 (as in above)
- Lobby for a Honduran government ruled by law and not militarism and impunity.

Some day they would like to work for marriage equality, but see that happening much farther down the road. Their first priorities include finding access to jobs and reforms in the legal system, housing, personal security, and ending impunity.

**Honduran Equality Delegation’s Role as Election Observers**

Our delegation also served as international election observers, for which we received credentials from the Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones (Supreme Electoral Tribunal/TSE). This allowed us full access on Election Day to all areas at all voting centers, which were primarily located in public schools, each with multiple voting tables in separate classrooms. We viewed the pre-voting setup, operation of the voting during the day and tallying of the votes at the end of the day at numerous voting centers in Tegucigalpa and in 3 cities in the Department of Olancho out of a total of 5,437 voting centers with 16,094 voting tables.

This participation was essential to our mission. The results of this election are very relevant to LGBT people, due to the possible roll back of LGBT non-discrimination protections as threatened by Juan Orlando Hernandez, as well as the prospect of continuing anti-LGBT violence and increased militarization. Additionally, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to pass and implement a bill for legal gender recognition.
under the Hernandez regime. In general the injustice and impunity facing all Hondurans has a disproportionate impact on LGBT communities. In contrast, as detailed in this report, the LIBRE party has become a reliable ally on LGBT issues and provides real hope for important and historic advances.

Our HSN 2013 election report can be found on the HED Website - see contact info at end of this report.

What the Sexual Diversity Movement in Honduras Has to Teach Us

Although Honduras is a poor country, and the LGBT movement began much later than in the U.S. and Western Europe, there is much we in the "Global North" can learn from the Honduran LGBT’s community. In the US, the modern LGBT movement started as a liberation movement, linked to ending the Vietnam War and fighting for the liberation and equality of all peoples. Over time the movement became focused on an exclusively "gay rights" agenda, such as gays in the military, marriage equality, and violence against the LGBT community, with less focus on economic oppression, the exclusion of people of color, female and trans voices and issues. The struggle in Honduras follows in the steps of a liberation and class struggle, with LGBT forces joining with other movements to restructure the country based on a new constitution and to fight all forms of exploitation and inequality.

Before the 2009 coup, the movement in Honduras mimicked that of the United States – separate organizations of activists working on HIV and identity issues, with little intersection, let alone support for each other. This changed with the coup, what leading Honduran activist Pepe Palacios refers to as "our Stonewall," for its profound impact on the Honduran movement.

With activists in all sectors facing violence and other repression, a strong coalition has been established between the Movement for Diversity in Resistance (MDR) and the National Front for Popular Resistance (FNRP). This has given LGBT voices a power they previously lacked, and allowing them to insert LGBT rights and issues into a progressive movement, which previously had been dominated by machismo and the lack of non-heteronormative voices. It also helped reduce their political isolation and enlist powerful allies to push back against the influence of prejudicial Catholic and Evangelical institutions.

The result is that MDR is well positioned to influence the inclusion of pro-LGBT provisions in future legislation and a new constitution should the resistance movement come to power. These exciting possibilities compare to present-day South Africa, where the LGBT movement there surpassed much of the world by involving itself deeply in the movement against racist apartheid, with the result that
when apartheid was overthrown, South Africa became the first country in the world to enshrine full LGBT legal equality in its constitution.

**Why Should People in the U.S. and Other Countries Care about the LGBT Community in Honduras?**

Although the Honduran LGBT community is not facing the dire challenges of countries such as Russia and Uganda at this time, it is one of the most at risk populations in the world, with exceedingly high levels of discrimination, intimidation, and violence, including 116 officially recorded homicides since 2008. Some people may wonder why they should be concerned about Honduras and the LGBT community's challenges there, in the context of LGBT oppression around the globe, including in their own countries. Our delegation suggests the following, all of which have been addressed in this report.

Honduras is a beacon for LGBT legal protections in the developing world by having added LGBT people into the national non-discrimination law in 2013, now threatened with being rolled back to exclude LGBT people.

The MDR's inclusion in the FNRP and the LIBRE Party is a model, clearly worth supporting, of how an LGBT community can follow a liberation process to fight for a better future, without limiting their efforts strictly to "gay" rights. MDR and the LGBT community repeatedly show solidarity and take actions as partners in the national liberation struggle. This has led to a blossoming of enthusiasm, hope and activism, as the LGBT community has succeeded in gaining the respect and inclusion by other sectors of society also represented in the FNRP. Supporting this community at this time is not only the right thing to do, but it is also the right time to do it.

Efforts to impact U.S. policy toward Honduras have the potential for substantial change and improvements in Honduras, due to these factors:

(a) The U.S. is an accomplice in the violence occurring in Honduras. Through high levels funding to Honduran security forces, the US is a driving force in massive human rights violations. Support in training Honduran security forces directly results in increased violence and oppression of the Honduran people. These security forces are controlled by and work to protect the interests of the economic and power elite of this country.

(b) The U.S. has abandoned its stated role of supporting democracy in Honduras 3 times in the past 4 years: by accepting the June 2009 coup, then recognizing the results of the illegitimate Nov. 2009 presidential election and again for the
fraudulent 2013 presidential election - all to sidestep a U.S. legally-mandated cut-off of aid to countries victim to a coup, and to prevent ascendance of a social and political movement sure to be less friendly to U.S. interests.

**Recommendations for Future Action**

Our Honduran Equality Delegation has four broad categorical recommendations for foreign activists and organizations who want to support and seek solidarity with the LGBT community of Honduras: 1) publicize and distribute information about the current state of these communities widely so as to amplify their efforts and voice their demands; 2) lobby for their agendas and needs with members of the Honduran national government, the U.S. foreign policy infrastructure (including the embassy), and with international human rights monitoring organizations; 3) challenge the viewpoint that LGBT people are best represented by non-governmental organizations and instead affirm the role of social and political movements as representatives of a growing LGBT constituency; and 4) call for an end to all military and law enforcement aid, including training, to the Honduran government. This would include all funding directed to fighting narcotrafficking, since these same security forces have repeatedly been participants in actions repressing the Honduran people.

We ask activists and organizations interested in supporting Honduras’ LGBT community to broadcast their message as widely as possible. While informal venues of communication, like social media, are key for daily sharing of petitions and alerts, interested parties should also seek formal means to reach broader audiences including writing Op-Ed pieces for local and national news sources and organizing speaking tours of members of, for example, the MDR, in their home countries. We also suggest outreach to LGBT organizations in supporters’ countries in order to facilitate stronger support networks across borders.

The Honduran Equality Delegation is organizing a new delegation for the summer of 2014. See [http://honduranequalitydelegation.wordpress.com/](http://honduranequalitydelegation.wordpress.com/) or “Honduran Equality Delegation” on Facebook for details and please join us!

The potential for the rescinding of LGBT people's rights from article 321 in the Honduran constitution is an issue of particular urgency with the election of Juan Orlando Hernandez. Emergency networks to pressure the Honduran and U.S. governments surrounding this potential repeal might need to be set up on short notice. Activists and organizations must also appeal to international human rights organizations to lobby that these protected not be repealed.
Members of the U.S. Congress, the State Department, the FBI, and the U.S. Embassy must work with the Public Ministry in Honduras to redirect the current prosecution for the murders of Walter Tróchez and Erick Martinez Avila so that the Honduran military, police and those responsible for the June 2009 coup are investigated and prosecuted with the same diligence as have been the presently identified suspects, which the LGBT community and its allies in Honduras believe have nothing to do with either murder.

At the conceptual level, we ask parties interested in supporting and seeking justice for the LGBT communities of Honduras to not mistake non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the LGBT movement itself. In Western nations, it is customary to regard NGOs as crucial intermediaries between civil society and state institutions. Because of this function, international human rights organizations, administrators from foreign governments, and interested parties from North America and Europe regard NGOs as neutral parties. As our interview of MDR members attests, the influence of NGOs on the shape of Honduran civil life, politics, and the conduct of security forces is not altogether neutral.

While NGOs are critical for tracking violence and advocating for the needs of LGBT peoples and their communities, NGOs frequently dissociate their agendas from those of the political representatives of communities in struggle with the potential to work in opposition to one another. While our delegation does not dispute the important role for LGBT support by way of NGOs, internationals extending support to Honduras’ sexual and gender minorities must also do so in consultation with the grassroots movements as representatives of the growing LGBT constituency in Honduras. In doing so, foreign parties promote not only the well-being of sexual and gender minorities, but also their democratic right to self-determination.

** We have used “LGBT” in this report. In Honduras, they don’t have an equivalent Spanish word for “Queer.” They often use LGBTI, the I for “Intersex,” which isn’t commonly used in this country.
**Honduran Equality Delegation Itinerary**

Asociación Para Una Vida Mejor En Honduras (Association for a Better Life in Honduras/APUVIMEH): José Zambrano, Sandra Zambrano, Shantal Munguia, Jonatán Cruz, Javier Martínez, Margie Artola, Marixa Ordoñez

Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (Women’s Rights Center/CDM): Gilda Rivera (founder), Neesa Medina, Hogla Fernández, Helen Ocampo, Tokla Hernández, Duell Sonia Sobrino

Colectivo Unidad Color Rosa (Pink Color Unity Collective): Claudia Spellman Sosa (founder)

Comité de Familiares Detenidos y Desaparecidos en Honduras (Committee of Family Members of the Detained and Disappeared of Honduras/COFADEH): Berta Oliva (director), Ivania Carolina Velasquez (whose mother was killed by a tear gas canister at a post-coup demonstration), Adeline Lopez Rodríguez (whose son was disappeared in 1981), and LIBRE activists Edwin Espinal (who was forced to move from his home in Tegucigalpa), and Rolando Espinoza Avila (who was forced away from his home town in Olancho)

Consejo Civico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations/COPINH): Berta Caceres (co-founder)

Wendy Funes, Investigative Reporter for Comité por la Libre Expresión (C-Libre), investigates Tróchez and Martínez murders

La Via Campesina: Rafael Alegria (Honduras Coordinator)

Memorial site, Isis Obed Murillo – the first murder after the coup. Obed was a teenager, shot and killed by the Honduran military in July 2009 during a demonstration at the Tegucigalpa airport, in support of the return of Manuel Zelaya, whose plane was prevented from landing.

Movimiento de Diversidad en Resistencia (Movement for Diversity in the Resistance/MDR): Erick Vidal Martínez, Pepe Palacios, José Mendoza in Tegucigalpa, and Karla Paredes, Merlin Aguirre, Sindy Paola Romero Cerroto, Rosangela Vasquez Ramírez, and Sandra M. Fiallos Ruiz in San Pedro Sula

Partido LIBRE: In Tegucigalpa - Gerardo Torres Zelaya, Communications Coordinator for the LIBRE campaign and National Campaign Coordinator, LIBRE Youth. In San Pedro Sula - Ruben Cerna, candidate and mayoral advisor, Miriam
Paz, Allan Aplícano, lawyer, Samuel Madrid, lawyer, Coordinator of Lawyers in Resistance

Trans sex workers in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula

Tribunal Supremo Electoral (Supreme Election Tribunal/TSE) - election training

**Contact Information**
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   Eric Vázquez - 412-708-5433

**References**
Honduran Equality Delegation (HED):
   - Website: honduranequalitydelegation.wordpress.com
   - Facebook: facebook.com/HonduranEqualityDelegation

Honduras Solidarity Network (HSN):
   - Website: hondurassolidarity.org
   - Facebook: facebook.com/HondurasSolidarityNetwork

Alliance for Global Justice:
   - Website: afgj.org
   - Facebook: facebook.com/all4globaljust

Cross Border Network for Justice and Solidarity:
   - Website: crossbordernetwork.org
   - Facebook: facebook.com/crossbordernetwork