

# May I Speak Freely?

media for social change

---

20 Greenleaf Avenue • Medford, MA 02155 • (781) 393-0906 • [www.mayispeakfreely.org](http://www.mayispeakfreely.org)

December 21, 2005

Dear MISF readers, friends and colleagues,

On Dec. 15, President Bush announced he would accept a Congressional ban on the torture of prisoners in U.S. custody anywhere in the world. After years of daily news reports about American military operations on foreign soil, abusive interrogation and detention practices, and disregard for international human rights standards, the shift in administration policy represents a step in the right direction, but change must not stop there.

**If we as a nation are to understand America's role in the global community and have an informed debate about how best to shape foreign policy in the future, we must examine the effect our government's policies have had on other countries.**

Since 2001, May I Speak Freely Media (MISF) has considered the lessons to be learned from the history of U.S. involvement abroad and resulting human rights abuses. To date, MISF has addressed the issue by examining events in Honduras in the 1980s.

During this era, Central America was Washington's Cold War battleground, and Honduras served as its base of operations. While the United States worked to stamp out the perceived communist threat in surrounding countries, it also trained the Honduran military to counter "internal threats." The result was the torture, murder and disappearance of at least 200 civilians.

Twenty years later, the legacy of human rights abuses in Honduras remains. Hondurans who committed these crimes live with impunity, and U.S. officials who were involved in or knew about abuses have not been held accountable for their role. One such official is John D. Negroponte, the current director of national intelligence, who served as the U.S. ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985.

In examining history while considering current events and the future, MISF aims to raise public awareness of human rights issues, advocate for justice and prevent the repetition of past mistakes. MISF emphasizes the *human* impact of U.S. policy around the world and at home.

The past year has been an exciting one for MISF. Despite limited resources, we've accomplished a lot:

- Launched the May I Speak Freely Web site in fall 2004. The site features original journalism on human rights issues in Honduras, including case studies of activists who survived torture or were disappeared in the '80s and '90s, analysis of similarities between Honduras in the 1980s and Iraq today, and current efforts to fight impunity for human rights abusers. Well researched and concisely written, the articles are a valuable resource to a diverse readership, from students to human rights professionals, activists to academics. Many articles are available in both English and Spanish.
- Developed the Honduras News in Review, a bimonthly recap of news and events—most reported only in the Spanish-language media—that typically pass under the radar of the mainstream international press. The HNR provides capsule news summaries with links to the original sources, and is available via our Web site and email subscription. Since the launch in June, our subscriber list has grown to include members of Congress, journalists, human rights groups and university professors from around the world. .

- Briefed members of the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee before the confirmation hearing of John Negroponte in April 2005. MISF provided committee members with a briefing memo to outline the facts of Negroponte's tenure in Honduras and compare his previous testimony with intelligence documents, interviews with torture survivors, and statements from government officials. The memo is available on our Web site.
- Served as a resource for educators and journalists covering the Negroponte nomination. Most notably, I was a guest on the national radio program "Democracy Now!" where I discussed Negroponte's past in Honduras, inconsistencies in his public statements and evidence of his complicity in human rights abuses.
- Campaigned against Negroponte's confirmation by encouraging MISF readers to call their senators and write to their local newspapers to demand a national intelligence director with an honest record.
- Advocated against violence and intimidation of human rights defenders in Honduras by encouraging the Honduran government to investigate crimes against activists and by raising public awareness of these events via our Web site.

In the coming months we will add new features to our Web site, including streaming video from our film *Lost Decade*. Footage will include never-before-seen interviews with survivors of torture, prominent human rights activists, political analysts, government officials and others. We hope to complete production of *Lost Decade* by the end of 2006.

At public dialogues and education events next year we will screen portions of *Lost Decade* and host expert panel discussions about the legacy of U.S. involvement in Central America. I'm looking forward to seeing how audiences respond to what we're producing.

It's been wonderful to see our work grow from piles of photocopies, notes and videotapes to a collaborative project that has built strong relationships among activists, journalists and human rights organizations, both in the United States and Honduras. I am honored that so many people have been willing to share such personal stories with me and gratified that these stories are reaching people around the world.

We're doing lots of good work, but we need help from you to keep going.

**Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to May I Speak Freely Media. Now you can donate online through our secure site!**

I thank you for your interest in May I Speak Freely and I look forward to keeping you informed of our work.

**And please visit us online at [www.mayispeakfreely.org](http://www.mayispeakfreely.org)!**

Sincerely,



Roz Dzelzitis  
Executive Director/Producer

Dear readers,

Working as associate producer of *Lost Decade* has been an emotionally difficult experience for me. I see this as a reflection of national trauma in my home country Honduras and my generation's fear of opening old wounds. I'm well aware of the history of U.S. involvement and human rights abuse in Honduras in the '80s. I grew up with it. The characters who speak in the film are people with whom I lived as a child in Tegucigalpa. I have known their stories for a long time, and it's perhaps for that reason that I recognize how painful it is for Hondurans to talk about this lost decade.

But a wound can only be healed when it is cleansed, and the wounds of Honduras will only heal with truth and justice. To talk openly about Honduras in the '80s, about the military and the death squads, about the Contras and the role of the United States, is to demand truth and justice. This film has rescued from national and international amnesia the names of those men and women who didn't survive the U.S. and Honduran policies of terror. *May I Speak Freely* has taken on the responsibility to speak for those who cannot speak, to tell that which hasn't been told. There are many who support the telling of this truth, and I am among them.

**I hope you will support *May I Speak Freely* Media in whatever way you can.**

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Oscar Estrada', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Oscar Estrada  
Associate Producer, *Lost Decade*