

# 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 13, 2006

Dear MISF readers, friends and colleagues,

As we report on the abuse of detainees that took place in Honduras a generation ago, I can't help but be reminded of current events in the war on terror. Just as the fight against communism blinded our government to human rights abuses in the 1980s, today we have done away with many basic human rights protections in the interest of battling terrorism.

Last December I wrote in our newsletter about an anticipated ban on the torture of prisoners in U.S. custody and the Bush administration's apparent support for such legislation. The Detainee Treatment Act of 2005 prohibited inhumane treatment of prisoners and defined acceptable techniques as those outlined in the U.S. Army Field Manual on Interrogation. At the time it appeared that policy was being enacted to protect the human rights of detainees held by our government.

But one year later, the Military Commissions Act, passed by Congress and signed by President Bush in October, has done away with many legal protections for detainees and exempts the U.S. government from adherence to certain international human rights norms. It fails to provide protection against abusive interrogation and even gives immunity to U.S. officials who authorized or committed acts of abuse against detainees.

Furthermore, there is little information available to the public or the press about how detainees are actually handled, shrouding the facts in secrecy. This lack of accountability, transparency and oversight—together with excessive executive privilege—goes against our democratic system and ultimately puts everyone's rights in jeopardy.

**Now, as our nation faces a debate about detainee rights, we can look to history to learn important lessons and help us understand what effect the policies and the actions of our government have had.**

During the 1980s, as the United States executed a strategy to combat the perceived communist threat in Central America, Honduras served as its base of operations. While the United States worked against threats in neighboring countries, the Honduran military was trained to counter "internal threats" by detaining and interrogating suspected subversives. Legal and human rights were not safeguarded—neither by the Honduran government nor by the United States, which provided the military training and funding—and the result was the torture, murder and disappearance of hundreds of civilians.

Twenty five years later, the legacy of human rights abuses in Honduras remains. In many cases family members of the disappeared have little or no information about what happened to their loved ones. Survivors of torture live with painful memories, emotional and sometimes physical scars. Hondurans who committed these crimes enjoy impunity and U.S. officials who were involved in or knew about abuses have not been held accountable for their role.

This year MISF Media looks back on events in Honduras 25 years ago, honoring the memory of those who did not survive, and honoring and the efforts of those who continue to seek justice today.

Since 2001, May I Speak Freely Media has highlighted the human impact of what Hondurans call the “Lost Decade” of their history, and we have worked to raise public awareness, advocate justice and prevent the repetition of past mistakes.

Our accomplishments in 2006 were numerous:

- We continued to produce the *Honduras News in Review*, a biweekly 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 original sources and is available via our Web site and e-mail subscription. Since the launch in June 2005, our subscriber list has grown to include members of Congress, journalists, students, human rights groups and university professors from around the world.
- We developed the *Human-Rights–War on Terror News Update*, a biweekly review of events related to the U.S.-led war on terror and its impact on human rights around the world. Issues covered include the investigation and prosecution of torture cases, detention policies, renditions, national and international court cases, and U.S. laws enacted as “antiterror” measures.
- We added a resource page to our Web site with a news archive related to human rights in the war on terror dating back to the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in April 2004. Topics include torture and abuse, government policies and legislation, court cases, and rendition.
- We launched a new Web site feature, *Remembering 25 Years Ago: A Look Back at a National Trauma*, which offers a monthly chronology of all known cases of disappearance, torture and execution, along with other related events.
- We continued to work with Honduran human rights groups, torture survivors, families whose loved ones disappeared, and international NGOs to research and document stories of the detained and disappeared, ongoing threats against human rights defenders, government investigations into human rights abuses, court cases and other issues.

In 2007, we plan to revamp our Web site and add the following new features:

- New streaming videos of never-before-seen interviews with torture survivors, family members of the disappeared, prominent human rights activists, political analysts, government officials and others. Footage features Nora Miselem, who was detained in 1982 and suffered severe physical and psychological torture by members of the Honduran military; Ana Suyapa Rivera Sierra, a student illegally detained in 1982; Father Joseph Mulligan, a Jesuit priest and friend of the Reverend James Carney, an American who was disappeared in Honduras in 1983; and several family members of those who were disappeared and never heard from again.
- Summaries of key declassified U.S. documents related to U.S. involvement and to the detained and disappeared in Honduras. The summary will include PDF images of original documents.

- New and expanded case histories of those who were detained and disappeared in Honduras in the 1980s.
- Original Honduran press reports from the 1980s about the patterns of disappearance and lack of recourse available to family members as they searched for loved ones.
- Additional segments of streaming video, including interviews with survivors of torture, those who advocate for justice and accountability in Honduras, and experts on declassified U.S. documents that reveal information about events in Honduras in the 1980s.
- A complete Spanish-language version of our Web site.

Also, after many years in the making and several delays due to funding shortfalls, we will finally release a 30-minute version of *Lost Decade*, a documentary film that explores the legacy of U.S. involvement and resulting human rights abuses in Honduras in the 1980s. The film takes a hard look at the human impact of conflict in Honduras and the policies and people responsible for abuses.

Together with COFADEH, the organization of family members of the disappeared in Honduras, we will premiere *Lost Decade* to a Honduran audience.

In the United States we will partner with human rights groups and universities to show *Lost Decade* and facilitate public dialogue about this history in Honduras. Some events will feature a panel discussion with historians, survivors of torture and others featured in *Lost Decade*.

We hope that this year you will support our work. **Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to May I Speak Freely Media.** Every dollar helps. And **now you can donate online** through our secure site!

Thank you for your interest in our work. I look forward to keeping you informed of our progress in 2007.

All of us at MISF Media wish you happy holidays and blessings in the new year!

Sincerely,



Roz Dzelzitis  
Executive Director/Producer