

Honduras 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Honduras during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; and serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including threats against media members by criminal elements.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses, but inadequate prosecutorial resources, a weak judicial system, political interference, and corruption were major obstacles to obtaining convictions.

Criminal groups, including local and transnational gangs and narcotics traffickers, were significant perpetrators of violent crimes and committed acts of homicide, torture, kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking, intimidation, and other threats and violence directed against human rights defenders, judicial authorities, lawyers, business community members, journalists, bloggers, women, union members, and other vulnerable populations. The government investigated and prosecuted some of these

crimes, but impunity was widespread.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. The quasi-governmental, semiautonomous National Human Rights Ombudsman (CONADEH) reported various security forces committed six arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. The Public Ministry reported three cases, involving at least five members of the Honduran National Police. No further information was publicly available regarding these incidents.

CONADEH reported two killings of human rights activists by unknown assailants as of October: Luis Alonso Teruel Vega, a reporter covering environmental actions, including deforestation, and Juan López, a well-known and respected environmental defender. Three arrests were made in the López case, and the investigation into additional conspirators continued as of November.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The law provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, with some restrictions, and the government generally respected this right. Although many press outlets were politically aligned, the press and prevailing democratic norms combined to promote freedom of expression, including for media members. Some media owners noted they were excluded from official events and blocked from receiving government advertising revenue as retribution for perceived antigovernment reporting.

Senior government representatives criticized civil society and members of the international community for comments perceived as critical of the government. Civil society groups reported these statements had a chilling effect on freedom of expression. CONADEH reported two cases of restrictions on the right of expression by security forces and another case related to threats or harassment against journalists and social communicators by government officials. The Special Prosecutor's Office for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators, and Justice Officials reported two cases of threats against journalists.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Journalists and other members of civil society reported they self-censored due to fear of criticism, harassment, and retribution by the government and its supporters. Others reported direct acts of intimidation or threats of violence from government officials or supporters for being critical of the government. Civil society organizations criticized the government's failure to investigate threats and incidents of violence adequately. CONADEH reported two cases of violent attacks and two cases of violence and slander on journalists and social communicators.

Social communicator Magaly Zelaya Ferman was assaulted by security forces while reporting on a road blockade during a protest in September.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

Media members and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) stated the press self-censored due to fear of retaliation from criminal groups or drug trafficking organizations, or criticism by government officials. Media also engaged in self-censorship to avoid losing lucrative advertising contracts with the government.

On March 13, the minister of security criticized a prominent NGO for its continued reporting on the state of the country and the impact of the

government's policy decisions, and announced the government had opened an investigation into the NGO and the validity of its status as an NGO.

Some journalists and other members of civil society reported threats from members of criminal groups. It was unclear how many of these threats were related to the victims' professions or activism. Several anonymous social media sites criticized journalists (as well as activists and civil society organizations) who were critical of the government or of opposition party policies.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The law granted workers the right to form and join unions of their choice, bargain collectively, and strike. It prohibited employer retribution against employees for engaging in trade union activities. The law placed restrictions on these rights, such as requiring that a recognized trade union represent at least 30 workers, prohibiting foreign nationals from holding union offices, and requiring that union officials work in the same substantive area of the business as the workers they represented. The law prohibited members of the armed forces and police, as well as certain other public employees, from forming labor unions. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security also required that union leaders be employed under permanent contracts, limiting the ability of seasonal agricultural workers to exercise their right to

freedom of association.

The law required an employer to begin collective bargaining once workers established a union, and it specified that if more than one union existed at a company, the employer had to negotiate with the largest.

The law placed numerous limits on the right to strike. It allowed only local unions to call strikes, prohibited labor federations and confederations from calling strikes, and required that a two-thirds majority of both union and nonunion employees at an enterprise approve a strike. The law prohibited workers from legally striking until direct negotiations and government-accompanied mediation and conciliation had failed. The Ministry of Labor had the power to declare a work stoppage illegal and grant employers the ability to discipline employees consistent with their internal regulations, including by firing strikers. In addition, the law limited strikes in sectors the government designated as essential services but did not necessarily meet the criteria for essential services. The law required workers in public health care, social security, staple food production, and public utilities (municipal sanitation, water, electricity, and telecommunications) to provide basic services during a strike. The law also required that public-sector workers involved in the refining, transportation, and distribution of petroleum products submit their grievances to the Ministry of Labor. The law permitted strikes by workers in export-processing zones and free zones for companies that provided services to industrial parks, but it required that

strikes not impede the operations of other factories in such parks.

The government did not effectively enforce the law regarding labor rights. No information was available on whether penalties for violations of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike were commensurate with those for analogous violations such as civil rights violations. Penalties were rarely applied against violators. Employers frequently refused to comply with Ministry of Labor orders that required them to reinstate workers who had been dismissed for participating in union activities. The Ministry of Labor could order a company to reinstate workers, but the ministry lacked the personnel and transportation resources to verify compliance. By law, the ministry could fine companies that violated the right to freedom of association. The law permitted fines, and the penalty was commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination. Penalties were sometimes applied against violators, but the failure of the government to collect fines facilitated continued violations.

Workers had difficulty exercising the right to form and join unions and to engage in collective bargaining. Various NGOs reported multiple cases of workers being dismissed for being union leaders and members. Solidarity Center reported several dozen union leaders fled the country for safety concerns due to fear. Public-sector trade unionists raised concerns regarding government interference in trade union activities, including its

ignoring or suspending collective agreements and its dismissals of union members and leaders. Solidarity Center reported police agents threatened three union leaders from different organizations.

Some employers either refused to engage in collective bargaining or made it very difficult to do so. Some companies also delayed appointing or failed to appoint representatives for required Ministry of Labor-led mediation, a practice that prolonged the mediation process and impeded the right to strike. Unions also raised concerns that employers used temporary contracts to prevent unionization and to avoid providing full benefits.

The government investigated violence and threats of violence against union leaders. Impunity for such crimes was high. In June, police used a water cannon against workers protesting suspension of work contracts by Delta Corporation. Minor injuries were reported.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The law provided for a minimum wage for most sectors. There were 45 categories of monthly minimum wage, based on the industry and the size of

a company's workforce; minimum wages were above the poverty income level. The minimum wage law did not cover domestic workers, most of whom were women.

The law prescribed a maximum eight-hour shift per day for most workers, a 44-hour workweek, and at least one 24-hour rest period for every six days of work. It also provided for paid national holidays and annual leave. The law required overtime pay, banned excessive compulsory overtime, limited overtime to four hours a day for a maximum workday of 12 hours, and prohibited the practice of requiring workers to complete work quotas before leaving their place of employment.

In some industries, including agriculture, domestic service, and security, employers did not respect maternity rights or pay minimum wage, overtime, or vacation. In these sectors, employers frequently paid workers for the standard 44-hour workweek irrespective of any additional hours they worked. In the security and domestic service sectors, workers were frequently forced to work more than 60 hours per week but were paid only for 44 hours. Employers frequently penalized agricultural workers for taking legally authorized days off. Employers paid the minimum wage inconsistently in other sectors. Civil society continued to raise problems with minimum wage violations, highlighting agricultural companies in the south as frequent violators.

Occupational Safety and Health

Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate for the main industries in the country, and OSH experts proactively identified unsafe conditions, in addition to responding to workers' OSH complaints. By law, workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardizing continued employment. Under the inspection law, the Ministry of Labor had the authority to temporarily shut down workplaces where there was an imminent danger of fatalities. Enforcement of OSH standards was particularly weak in the construction, garment assembly, and agricultural sectors, as well as in the informal economy.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing wage, hour, and OSH laws, but it did so inconsistently and ineffectively. Penalties for violations of OSH law were commensurate with penalties for similar crimes such as negligence but rarely applied against violators and rarely collected.

The law permitted fines for wage and hour violations; these were commensurate with the penalties for similar crimes, such as fraud. The government sometimes applied penalties against violators, but failure to collect fines facilitated wage and hour violations. The Ministry of Labor had an insufficient number of inspectors to enforce the wage, hour, and OSH

laws effectively. Inspectors had the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

While all formal workers were entitled to social security, there were reports both public- and private-sector employers failed to pay into the social security system. The Ministry of Labor could levy a fine against companies that failed to pay social security obligations, but the amount was not sufficient to deter violations.

According to a 2024 World Bank survey, 58 percent of workers were in the informal economy. The government did not enforce the labor laws in this sector since these workers were not protected by the labor code.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were seven official reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities, according to CONADEH.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

The law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements, but there were reports of arbitrary arrest and detention due to the state of exception.

Lengthy pretrial detention was a serious problem due to judicial inefficiency, insufficient resources, and other problems that delayed proceedings in the criminal justice system. The Ministry of Human Rights reported 8,945 individuals were in the prison population awaiting processing. For crimes with minimum sentences of six years' imprisonment, the law authorized pretrial detention of up to two years. The prosecution could request an additional six-month extension, but many detainees remained in pretrial detention much longer, including for more time than the maximum period of incarceration prescribed for their alleged crime. The law did not authorize pretrial detention for crimes with a maximum sentence of five years or less.

The law mandated that authorities release detainees whose cases had not yet come to trial and whose time in pretrial detention already had exceeded the maximum prison sentence for their alleged crime. Nonetheless, many prisoners remained in custody after completing their full sentences, and sometimes even after an acquittal, because officials failed to process their releases expeditiously. CONADEH reported 236 cases regarding access to justice and due process of law by security forces, and nine cases of violations of due process.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom*

Report at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Although the law prohibited such practices, there were credible reports of abuses by members of the security forces.

The Public Ministry reported 26 cases of alleged torture by security forces, while CONADEH reported 37 cases. CONADEH also reported two cases of rape by security forces, as well as four cases of sexual violence. The Public Ministry reported a total of 123 cases of cruel or inhuman treatment by security forces, and CONADEH reported 76 cases via the Ministry of Human Rights.

The Ministry of Human Rights reported 21 prisoners died while in custody, five of whom died because of violence. The causes of six other deaths were under investigation. CONADEH reported 14 cases of alleged torture and 21 cases of cruel and inhuman treatment of detainees and prisoners by security

forces within penitentiary institutions, and another case of rape or sexual abuse of a person while in detention.

Corruption, a lack of investigative resources, and judicial delays led to widespread impunity, including for members of security forces, although justice institutions prosecuted and sentenced security forces for human rights violations.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

Child Marriage

The minimum legal age of marriage was 18. The government did not enforce the law effectively. International NGOs reported 34 percent of girls and 12 percent of boys were married before age 18, with the practice more prevalent in rural areas. Most unions were informal rather than a formal marriage.

c. Protection to Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing

protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, and other persons of concern.

Provision of First Asylum

The law provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had a system for providing protection to refugees. Its operations to receive and process asylum applications relied on support from UNHCR. UNHCR's support focused on providing training to officers of the National Institute for Migration, supporting decisions and application of international refugee determination standards on submitted claims, and improving reception conditions for asylum seekers.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

The Jewish community numbered approximately 150 members. There were no reports of antisemitic incidents.