

# Honduras This Week Online

YOUR CENTRAL AMERICAN WEEKLY REVIEW



## NATIONAL NEWS

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## Porfirio Lobo practices social outreach

**The President of the National Congress of Honduras, Porfirio Lobo Sosa, with a group of school children on a tour of the legislative palace.**

By CLARE HARRISON

TEGUCIGALPA — The president of the national congress, Porfirio Lobo took a break from pressing political engagements on Monday, in order to allow a class of young school children into the main congressional chamber. The children, who were seemingly unaware of all the attention they were generating, were from the bilingual Elvel School, in Tegucigalpa. After a brief explanatory tour the children sat around the debating table and were all assigned a microphone in order to further probe Mr. Lobo about various aspects of congress.

Lobo introduced himself to each of the children and then gave a brief lesson on congress; the various government departments, how many

## Energizing the democratic process in Honduras

By CLARE HARRISON

TEGUCIGALPA — The second installment of the Political Parties Institutionalization Program was on Tuesday. The ongoing program is a coalition of several organizations including the Forum for the Fortification of Democracy and the National Congress, and is also in conjunction with the United Nations Development Project - a primary sponsor of the event.

Senior Honduran political figures including representatives from the five main parties again gathered to discuss more reforms to the political system. The conference involved discussions on how to address the monumental task of energizing the democratic process in Honduras. In addition to this importance was

there were and the role they played. The trip was a real treat for pupils as well as staff and gave a class of budding politicians a valuable insight into the day-to-day running of Congress.

## Crime and violence in Honduras continues to affect children and young people

By CLARE HARRISON

TEGUCIGALPA — According to a press release from the children's charity Casa Alianza, the number of unprecedented murders of young adults and children in Honduras remains alarmingly high. In addition to the sheer number of deaths Casa Alianza has also observed the lack of priority given to solving the cases by Honduran authorities.

According to the most up-to-date information published in the press release, the legal support program of Casa Alianza in Honduras counted 59 violent deaths of people under 23 during the month of January this year. Of the young persons killed the overwhelming majority (92 percent) were male. Of those young males the highest fatality rate occurred in the 18 and 23-year old age group, 54 percent of those killed were of that age. Just over a third of those killed were 16 years old or younger. The number of girls and boys killed under the age of 11 accounted for the smallest percentage (5 percent) of the total fatalities.

Perhaps, unsurprisingly the highly urbanized areas have the highest proportion of the total killings. Of those killed the largest proportion (27 percent) took place in Tegucigalpa followed by 16 percent in San Pedro Sula.

Casa Alianza established that guns were used in 80 percent of the

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## NGOs petition for the First Lady's assistance

**The First Lady with one of the children who have benefited from the help of HHH**

By LUCY CRISFIELD

DANLI — Representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) met in Danli last Friday with the intention of uniting their forces with the people of Honduras in order to petition the first lady about the obstacles they are currently facing.

The majority of the organizations present were concerned with improving the access to, and knowledge of medicines for the people of Honduras. Organizations included Promesa, who focus on providing the education needed to create a self-reliant health system for the people of the Yeguaré region. Others included Healthy Families, an AIDS project based in Roatan working to diminish the vertical transmission of HIV between mother and child, and Helping Hands for Honduras (HHH), an organization dedicated to helping children receive life saving operations in the United States.

It was partly with the aim of giving these groups a forum in which they could meet for the first time, discuss relevant issues and ultimately to help each other, that the American born Kathy Rubio organized the event. However, she was perhaps compelled to do so by an event that particularly affected her life last October. A large number of health clinics on the north coast were shut down and with nowhere else to go, 100 babies with congenital heart conditions were sent to Kathy's clinic. Kathy knew nothing about the work HHH were doing, and when her own clinic was forced to close down a month later, 84 of these babies died. This was just one of the examples where a closer network of communication between the organizations would have saved lives.

The NGOs are also trying to create a more successful integration between the Honduran civil society and the people from the United States who are founding these projects. Unfortunately the present employment laws in Honduras are making it virtually impossible for this to happen. The current law on severance pay states that after 59 days of work, the employer must put aside a certain proportion of their employees salary every month which can then be claimed if they are fired. This makes it very difficult to dismiss a worker without crippling a non-profit organization. Many have also had recurring problems with people leaving and then claiming that they were fired; it was this difficulty that forced not only Kathy's clinic, but many clinics all over

## Phase three of street children project wrapped up

TEGUCIGALPA — On February 10, Casa Alianza Honduras and the Honduran Investment Social Fund (FHIS) terminated the third phase of the innovative "Attention to Street or at Social Risk Children" pilot project.

The project was executed by Casa Alianza and the FHIS, and financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The project's main objective was to contribute to the social integration of street children through the promotion and protection of their fundamental rights. By doing this, they will be able to reinsert the children into their homes and consequently increase the country's productive process.

In the third phase more than 40 children from the Residential Program and the Family Reintegration Program have improved their life conditions by the insertion into the formal education system and have learned a trade that will allow them to generate resources and the opportunity of earning a living honorably.

At the same time, the program has been successfully able to change the children's attitude towards life. Their mothers also received training towards improving their level of human development and increasing their incomes, factors that will allow them to spend more time with their children.

The FHIS Minister Leony Yu Way and the National Director of Casa Alianza, Jose Manuel Capellin, headed up the event, along with the children, who offered testimonials and demonstrated their new skills.

Honduras to close down.

It is also very difficult to find out exactly what the laws are regarding employment and the setting up of charitable organizations. This tends to actively discourage people from taking the risk involved when employing Hondurans, instead encouraging them to look for volunteers. However, employees are also facing problems encouraging volunteers to dedicate a significant amount of their time in Honduras due to a substantial increase in the price for visas. Volunteers from the United States now have to spend 300 lempiras for every 30 days that they wish to remain in the country, a marked increase from the 30 lempiras that they had to pay in June.

The laws involving tax on exports and imports also contain many loopholes and inconsistencies, which seem to be hampering the running of these autonomous groups. Although NGOs are supposed to be exempt from such tax's, many have not been able to receive essential equipment from abroad because they are either waiting the decisions of officials, or have been asked to pay large sums of money. All of these issues were presented to the First Lady who assured that she would "investigate the matter, and discuss the possibility of changes with the appropriate members of congress."

Another clear advantage of uniting forces is that it creates a wider variety of expertise, and therefore a greater chance of receiving the funds that are presently available. One month ago, President Bush sent a letter to all of the NGOs in Central America stating his pledge to give five million dollars of funds to the aid and health projects in this area, of which a sizable proportion will be received by Honduras. In an effort to ensure that the money is used for the purpose that it is intended, the money will not pass through any government officials' hands.

Perhaps the most encouraging result of the meeting was the energy and hope with which these people talked about making a lasting difference for the people of Honduras: nearly all of the schemes are hoping that the projects will eventually be self sustainable. However, this will not be possible without the help and encouragement of the government, and without a clearer integration between the inhabitants of Honduras, and the Americans who are initiating many of the programs.

## Reforms needed on the laws regarding NGOs

By CLARE HARRISON

Concerns are being voiced regarding the arbitrary constraints currently being placed upon workers in the country. The concerns are centered around the provisions made to small-scale non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in particular.

## Murder of U.S. citizen in Roatan's East End

By CLARE HARRISON

Residents on the largest Honduran bay island of Roatan are in shock this week after the brutal murder of an American resident on the island. American-born Richard Michael Bougerie was killed instantly by a single shot wound to the head on Monday afternoon. Bany Umanzor the investigating officer on the case said that Mr. Bougerie left his home on

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The work of non-governmental organizations accounts for much of the work done in Honduras. NGOs are commonly used as a channel of communication between locals and international financial donors. Although some NGOs work in conjunction with the government, many work independently and it is these parties some say that have encountered the greatest problems.

The government is facing a series of issues surrounding the subject, a number of the NGOs in Honduras are pressing for reforms to minimize the current confusion over points of Honduran law.

At present the laws are not readily accessible to expatriates and seeking advice in order to determine the rights and wrongs of employment legislation can be a long and convoluted process.

Small-scale charity organizations are often reluctant to seek legal advice because of the relatively high cost. In the long term however, the cost of not fully understanding the law can work out to be significantly higher, as many have found. Some of the NGOs feel they are the victims of stifling Honduran legislation that is badly in need of reform.

However, although the majority of NGOs are founded with the best of intentions, there are not many safeguards in place to guard against corrupt or badly run NGOs. NGOs are eligible for tax exemption; consequently setting up an NGO can be a relatively easy way for opportunist businesspeople to avoid paying tax. All are in agreement that the government has a duty to defend its people from bad practice and unfair tax evasion, but equally it must strike a balance in order to allow those who want to help the chance to do so relatively unhindered.

The government needs to address the matter imminently, as the potential benefits that the country can reap from NGOs are limitless. Alongside doing this many are calling for the government to put in place measures to ensure that only legitimate NGOs are allowed to work in Honduras.

The British Ambassador Kay Coombes who is currently president of G15 said that although it is “very easy” to set up a non-governmental organization, there is “a lot of bureaucracy” associated with them. She stated that the Honduran government “recognizes NGOs as one of the many loopholes to tax evasion”. She emphasized the need for expatriates to work in conjunction with their respective embassies in order to obtain sound guidance on the subject.

When it comes to lack of transparency and corruption NGOs can be as guilty as governments. NGOs can be held even less accountable than politicians can and there is no obligation at present to disclose details of all work undertaken by the organizations. NGOs are by no means compelled to document their spending, and if completely unchecked they can conceivably pose an additional threat to a democracy.

suspects, but are continuing to question the remaining three. The investigations of the local police are being followed up by the FBI who arrived on the island on Wednesday to make further inquiries.

The murder raises obvious concerns over safety on the island and locals hope that the police will resolve the matter as soon as possible in order to send a strong message to criminals in the area that justice will be done. Many tourist operators on the island are fearful that Bougerie’s tragic murder could have very negative repercussions on the number of visitors to Roatan. Residents are keen to iterate that the murder was totally unprecedented and a genuine one off. The livelihoods of so many on the island are totally dependent on tourism. Questions over safety on the island could be potentially very damaging to the local economy.



## Legal Services:

NGOs do account for a large portion of the work undertaken abroad and the work is undoubtedly invaluable in many cases. Non-governmental organizations often receive international backing, and they can operate as a crucial facet of a multi-lateral project. So given the amount of potential influence they wield, time would be well spent ensuring that projects are able to work continuously and harmoniously in Honduras.

## Week in Review

### The “Devil” falls

Maria Isabel Martinez, otherwise known as “the Devil”, was captured on Tuesday morning in Colonia San Isidro de Comayagüela. The minister of security, Oscar Alvarez orchestrated the vast operation

[Redacted text block]



it will have much affect on tourism revenue in what is already considered the "Party Capital" of Honduras.

No one interviewed about the project, including Deputy Tourism Minister Eva Gonzalez, were able to offer evidence of the construction leading to increased visits to the area, though there was nothing but enthusiasm for the project itself.

"Proyecto Malecon will complement the sewage works being built in the town," said Carlos Flores, the civil engineer appointed to defend the interests of the city. Expected to cost over ten times as much as the sewage works (US\$20 million compared to US\$1.75 million) both are being supported by USAID. Proyecto Malecon, however, sees the American organization only paying for preliminary designs. The actual work, expected to start in two to three years, will be paid for by a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank, who wants the Municipality of La Ceiba to submit the application but for the government of Honduras to act as guarantor. This clash has caused problems in the corridors of power, and probably tense moments for Mayor Gonzalez too. Re-elected because of the towns' overwhelmingly Liberal composition, despite being considered to be ineffective during his first term in office, Gonzalez knows that his job may be on the line should he not be perceived to be working hard enough for the town. Traditional party ties have long been disintegrating and people no longer automatically vote for the same party their grandparents supported 100 years ago. Accordingly, should the National Party field a strong candidate, the mayorship of the town may change hands. As the next such election is in 2004, around the time that contracts will be tendered out for Proyecto Malecon, Gonzalez's position may yet be secured.

## The hand that feeds them

**Caption A, Yaairah at her home in Tamarindo, Choluteca. She has survived two visits to hospital, an example of cases of child malnutrition in the Honduran countryside.**

By JONATHAN MARCIANO

CHOLUTECA — The dirt track leading into Tamarindo, Choluteca is impassable. The rocky terrain defeats the four-wheel drive, and the World Food Program team, guiding a representative from a multinational donor, are forced to climb the dust-heap hills in the Honduran oven in the south, leading to a series of poor countryside shanty towns and the most

Monday that the Honduran army would be ready to participate in the possible war against Iraq at any time. Honduras will be the third country in Central America after Guatemala and El Salvador to prepare their troops for such an armed conflict. Travieso declared that "for us and for our soldiers, it will be a real experience to participate in this type of international mission, like we have done in the past." However, the minister of external relations, Guillermo Augusto Perez-Cadalso Arias, was more prudent when referring to the subject. He suggested that Honduras should not be hasty, and should support any decision made by the United Nations. — La Tribuna

### Revision of the Penal Process Code

It was decided in a meeting on Wednesday between the authorities of the National Congress, the minister of security and the police, that the areas of the penal process code that present obstacles in the fight against crime should be revised. The new legislation was introduced only a year ago, however in practice various aspects do not work. Revisions will be implemented in the organization of the police, the purchasing of police intelligence equipment, and the anonymity of judges will also be introduced. — El Heraldo

### United States pressure Nicaragua to disarm

After the recent scandal in Nicaragua regarding the trafficking of arms to the guerilla forces in Columbia, the OEA (Organization of American States) have

serious child malnutrition cases in the country.

Yaairah is home. 22 months old, she is spread on a mat surface, her frail body slowly and incredulously re-discovering the agility long denied through crippling lack of food. She has been in and out of the hospital twice, returning recently back to these small, cramped dwellings. The program officials, Hyung-Joon Lim and Miguel Angel Bonilla Caraccioli are overjoyed. "Last time, she was just a bag of bones," says Hyung, as the infant wraps her still-tiny palm around his finger. Since the team last visited, Yaairah's family has grown, now eight in total. Yaairah has a newborn baby sister. She competes for already scarce food in the house, and is alarmingly still in her cloth cot. Her older infant sister is blind, the pure white eyes looking on aimlessly at the world. The father, typical of many in this region is out of work, taking chances begging on the nearby roadsides.

Their neighborhood is dry and desolate. Many are talking about the possibility of famine. The land has not seen rain for two years. The mango trees are parched. The World Food Program (WFP), operating in Honduras is targeting the desperate food shortages afflicting Honduran children. The latest, pragmatic path of battle is taking place in Honduran schools under the Global School Feeding program. Only a tiny percentage of Honduran school children have access to meals at school. They often face a two-hour walk to school, coupled with a loss of earning power. The WFP scheme is designed to provide school meals for 400,000 kids from first grade through to sixth grade. Tackling the situation in the poorest areas, the project provides children with at least one healthy meal a day. In these locations, WFP aims to reduce school dropout rates by 10 percent, reduce absenteeism by 15 percent and support the local organizations to build community infrastructure, and keep children in school. The idea behind it is to ensure a platform where schoolchildren not only learn to read and write, but have ready access to health care, education and vaccines.

"There are not that many cases of acute malnutrition in Honduras, that is classified as five percent of population facing severe lack of nutrition", explains Claudia von Roehl, Director of WFP in Honduras.

"There is though a serious problem with chronic malnutrition. Babies are not developing according to their age. A child of six years is supposed to be a certain height. It means they have had a lot of deprivations in life. It is a long story of deprivations" adds Roehl.

The Honduran government has put US\$900,000 dollars into the scheme since last year. "There is a general lack of education," explains Roehl. "Mothers think that their child looks healthy when in reality they are severely unhealthy."

Honduras has outlined a 'millennium goal' to end the problem of child poverty, and food shortage.

The WFP for its part sponsors community health monitors, whose volunteers are seen on the same day in the Choluteca area weighing

demanding that the country destroy their missiles. However, the inspector general of the Nicaraguan army, Manuel Salvatierra, has declared that it will not take any action until Honduras reduces its weapons of war. – El Heraldo

babies, administering vaccines and providing support and education on nutrition. Babies' names are marked with a blue for stable, and a red circle, signifying danger.

In Orocuina, medics Dr. Guifarro, a project director within the Ministry of Health, and Gloria Elber, project co-coordinator oversea the baking of papilla, supplied cheaply to the undernourished. They teach the mothers to cook the one part, vegetable oil, sugar, soy, and water ingredients at home, to be administered as a drip cure to the skeletal children. They also point at the wall diagrams, showing the correct position to breast-feed, and hold the infant.

The WFP interpret Honduran schools as the vehicle for a fast track initiative. "School feeding has acted as a wake-up call to people that do not usually know what happens in the countryside," says Roehl.

To send a donation or sponsor a child for \$18 a year per schoolchild, please contact [www.wfp.org](http://www.wfp.org).

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## President Maduro speaks to the nation

By ROBERT SPAIN

President Ricardo Maduro announced that all government salaries will be frozen this year, in a national radio and television broadcast. The Presidential address, which was carried by all stations, laid out Maduro's plans for the final three years of his term in office. His program also includes reforms in the areas of trade, infrastructure, law and order and tourism.

The move to cut public expenditure is in accordance with the demands made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its recent negotiations with Honduras. Stressing the importance of such aid, the President stated "we have to seek an agreement that will not raise any taxes," instead seeking to comply with IMF regulations by cutting down on tax exemptions and evasions, and limiting government expenditure. This is significant given other promises made in Maduro's speech. The bidding process to build the road linking Puerto Cortes and the Guatemalan border will be opened in March, and work will start of widening the north coast road from three lanes to four.

Although Maduro's cabinet has been more sympathetic than its predecessor to opponents of the hydroelectric power plant proposed for the Cangrejal River, the President announced plans to initiate at least one of three such plants near the Sula valley. "They are important because they have multiple benefits: electricity, flood control, irrigation and potable water" he explained, while highlighting that not one kilowatt hour of hydroelectric power has been created in Honduras since 1985.

## Casa Alianza opens shelter for street girls

By ROBERT SPAIN

TEGUCIGALPA — The street children's charity Casa Alianza recently opened a shelter exclusively for girls.

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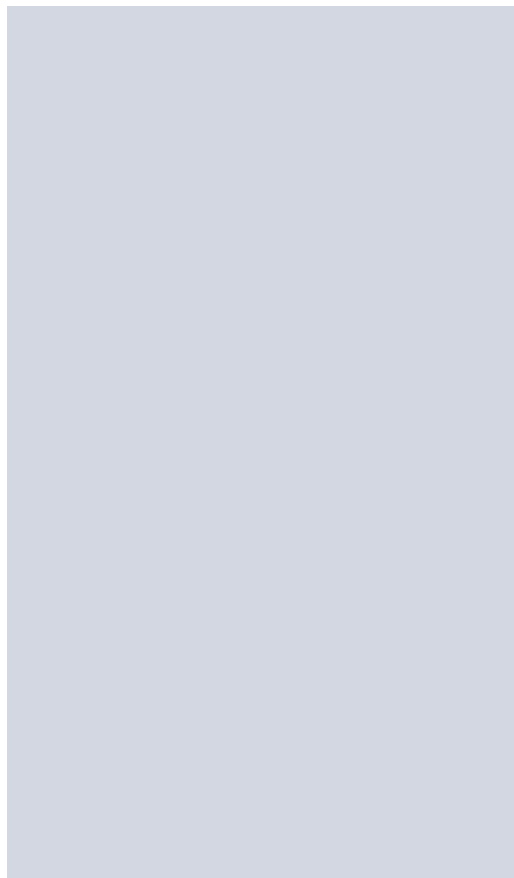
Dealing with other economic questions, plans to give land to poor farmers - with a particular focus on ethnic groups and women - were unveiled, along with the intention to create 10,000 jobs a year.





engineers scout out other possible projects.

Congress reviews decree creating Garifuna



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