

PEOPLES' PERMANENT TRIBUNAL

INTERVIEWS

1. Dr. Juan Almeyda

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Diana Taylor (DT): Dr. Juan Almeyda, thank you very much for being with us today, speaking with the Hemispheric Institute.

Juan Almeyda (JA): It is an honor to be at the Hemispheric Institute, we hope that the horizon of the Institute reaches Honduras. I am a medical doctor, graduated in Honduras and I also studied at the graduate level in the U.S. at the University of California, the University of Pennsylvania. I am also a physiologist, researcher in the field of health and also in environmental science, I'm an ecologist, and I have worked much on the relationship between, the impact on health from mining exploitation in our countries. I also direct the Center for the Prevention of Torture (CPPRT). In reality this center has operated for more than a decade in Honduras and treats one of the most terrible issues, which is torture, a crime against humanity. I want to tell you that unfortunately, Honduras is famous for military coups; it is a famous country because it has the highest homicide rate of the world, but the greatest concern is that it has a rate of impunity that reaches almost 100%. Despite the fact that because of violence, which in my opinion is not so much about Honduras being a violent country, but that the system of structural, social, and political violence has taken this country as a model to create the most hideous forms of violence. And in which it is mostly aimed at indigenous peoples, peasants, the indigenous, the Garifuna peoples, and most of all, children, youth and women. In this sense we have a country that is militarily occupied by the U.S., we have three military bases, possibly more, because the technological concept of bases has changed. Almost in all aspects, for example, one of the poorest countries in Latin America is spending enormous amounts of money on arms. And the arms that his country buys, one cannot buy any arm without the authorization of the policies the Pentagon. **That means that it is a country armed to the teeth and despite all this political-military structure that acts with much impunity, violence continues. No one knows who kills whom. In that sense there is a great responsibility of the State for the deaths.** Deaths increase, murders, forms of crime; they can be no doubt related to drug trafficking, but in the name of drug trafficking, they have justified an arms race, and violation of human rights, the creation of military intelligence groups. The soldiers go around wearing masks, without identity, and violating all kinds of human rights. In that sense the situation of Honduras is a concern for the world. And also there is another thing for which Honduras is famous, perhaps after Mexico—it is one of the countries that has the most migrants of Central America. **That means that there is a war in the country that I call the War Against the People,** which I would say is based on what Carl Schmitt, a Nazi theorist, called total war. It is a total war in which there is not only the military, but also the media, theology, because there are very dogmatic sectors, very fundamentalist, that are puppets of this policy. On the other hand, we have important sectors of all the country's political structures. It would seem that there would be a hegemonic level where power is basically realized in the military issue, but of course with a fundamentalist ideology that is against the poor, against the discriminated, it is a

structural, social, historical, even cultural violence. In that sense, I think the coup exacerbated that problem. Then they say that Honduras is a democratic country, and there is something interesting, there are many people threatened, families, for their lives, but—I tell you as someone who works on defending human rights—one cannot obtain asylum because it is a democratic country. There is no support from any embassy because it is a democratic country. **And it is a false democracy, it is a democracy where social inequality prevails, there is no economic democracy and where authoritarianism, verticalism, patriarchy prevails and everything is done from top to bottom; there is no real citizen participation.** This environment in Honduras, as we who work in an institution that deals with torture have realized, **of ten persons who are detained by police or the army, seven are tortured or receive cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment. And that is important because it is a country-prison, where the fundamental idea is to imprison people, and mass killings have occurred there.** I am referring to Comayagua, of almost 400 persons who were practically incinerated. There is no indication of who the culprit is, it appears as a tragedy, but we are talking about a person who saw 108 people in sacks, practically electrocuted, burned. In another prison in San Pedro Sula there were 69 people. So the murders have been massacres and who is affected? Young people, and in the seemingly name of gangs, of *maras* and that whole issue that has been quite distorted. We also have the greatest number of journalists murdered, after Mexico I think. We have an excessive number of lawyers, the quantity of femicides. Young people are the largest part of the population affected. **Now, you can imagine and say, well, where is democracy? Where is humanity? We can see that almost all the projects are projects of death, projects of death accompanied by corruption.** We have a serious health problem, a crisis in which there is only corruption, for example, but at the same time, the policies of mining companies, which destroy the territory, cause damages that are unrecoverable, costing billions of dollars. But there is no compensation for victims, no recovery for the environment. **We have the policies of dams; we are building a number of dams, what for? To provide energy for the mining companies, and there is no energy for the people.** Then we have the policies of creating plantations, for what we call agro-fuels--others call them biofuels. That is planting sugar cane for energy. These plantations are pollutants; we have many patients requiring kidney dialysis. And then we have oil palm plantations to also produce biofuels. If one analyzes the relationship of biodiversity with the emergence of disease, one realizes that dengue, dengue hemorrhagic fever, acute dengue from malaria increases. Why? Because the mosquitos have no animals to bite, so they bite humans, peasants. So we have an increase of fatal dengue, we have an increase of malaria, we have an increase of Chagas disease. Those are serious health problems. **So the diseases are caused by environmental conditions, by conditions of injustice. And there is something, I would say there are more bullets than medicine in the hospitals.** There is no medicine in the hospitals. So, as a consequence, people have to migrate. Where? To the U.S., Europe, or internal migration. And what is happening? People are being displaced from their territories, people want to work, and they come here to the U.S. or to Mexico where they are humiliated, outraged, wounded in their dignity. **And the last thing that's happened is the migration of children, and what happened, that in the country of supposedly greatest democracy, children are treated as criminals; they are shackled, humiliated, and we truly feel deep pain.** Because the people of the U.S. are not like that, there are organizations here that struggle for justice, I would say that at least I have great gratitude towards the people of the U.S. because I was condemned by death squads in my country and my life was saved thanks to a campaign in the U.S. and Europe. **So there are humane people here, but there is dehumanizing policy, in the way they treat migrants, discriminatory, racist.** So in sum, we see what is called the plan of charter cities, the idea coming from U.S. neoliberal economists. Well, “charter” is a cheap flight,

what can really be done cheaply. And the cheapest is taking away peoples' land, of the Garifunas, who have been lately displaced in a massive way; "model cities" they say there. But now they have called them "special development zones." What does that mean? They are practically installing new maquiladoras, I would call them, because the maquiladoras have some control under the law, but no, these would be autonomous centers where a mining company can exploit what it wants. They have their own private guards, who in many cases become murderers of people; they have their own legal system. So they are displacing people from those territories in the sense that money comes into the country, and who does that money go to, not to the people, it's going to a very backward oligarchy that really only feeds itself and the people suffer hunger. So really the most macabre project that we have is the special development zones, model cities, or charter cities. That also contributes to migration, because what are people to a mining company? They are absolutely not interested in life. I as a doctor, and it is a criticism of us doctors, we specialize in being diseasologists, but not in being doctors of life, because the most important thing is life. How are mining companies going to produce sustainable development? Impossible. In reality we see that all of these policies: megaprojects, mining, tourism, all those great projects are, I would say, to distract the apparent happiness of the rich countries. And we, our people have to migrate. We don't have access to the beaches, don't have access to culture, it does not produce land, and then what is there? A powerful army that is like the bodyguards of transnational interests, they are really serving the Pentagon's interests. I would say it is a racist policy, unequal, colonialist. So we applaud your work that also aims to articulate that, with art and the liberation of human conscience. Because there's something important, our people express themselves. In these meetings for sharing we have had, I've been able to appreciate the talent and heart of migrants. There is great generosity in their souls, there is great knowledge; and as the priest Alejandro said, learning comes from suffering and we have really learned from all those brave women that are denouncing what it means to be shackled; it is a terrible form of control, dehumanizing. Only a mind that is capable of torture, because that is certain, there is also creativity in evil, to create torture, it can justify the use of shackles. In my country I have opposed shackles in the prisons because it is a form of torture, psychological torture, physical torture; it is humiliating in front of sons and daughters, the family. Then, what are we doing? Where is this capitalism going? Towards the creation of life, the creation of disease? Or to the creation of death? We have to unite with the organizations in the U.S. I am happy that the academic world opens its heart, its spirit, towards new horizons. And in art, poetry, film, video, essays, the word, the power of the word, will help us reach the conscience of the world. To neutralize, and it is possible to create new forms of relations. **Because I have noticed the migrant doesn't have hate. He is seeking justice, seeking work.** There is also a very important thing—they have forced, they have violated all our rights: the right to sovereignty, the right to food sovereignty, the fact of junk food itself. Our people have better ways, more knowledge of nutrition, but they have imposed the hamburger, the hot dog; they have imposed a series of things that are not acceptable from the cultural point of view. So we need a more human movement, more solidarity, and it seems to me that the essence of this movement would be love, brotherhood, and human solidarity. And these people, in the U.S., in Europe, there are people with conscience. We have to create a movement of solidary conscience, human. For what? To really create new values, not the values of a capitalist society, that exploits humanity.

DT: And what would the role of education in all this? Education both in Honduras, the possibility for education for migrants; education for Mexicans, the Mexican people, U.S., Canadian people. Let's say, education in the broadest sense.

JA: Correct. It seems to me that education is fundamental. But it has to be an education to transform reality, it can't be an education separated from reality. For example, if we really want to guarantee; imagine, I have Canadian friends that struggle against the mining exploitation that Canada supports in our countries; it does not compensate, they do not use the same criteria and their same laws, on the contrary. Or for example, all these ideas about maquiladoras, which have been terrible, especially for women, that they don't let them go to the bathroom, or do their physical necessities—all that class differentiation in work relations, that great social inequality. So we need to create transformational social awareness that will bring us closer to people. I know that in these countries, in Canada, the U.S., in Europe itself, there are people of conscience; there are organizations that are doing something. Because the third world is not only in us, it is also in the U.S. and Canada. The situation of the indigenous in Canada with the uranium mines, for example, or the situation in the U.S. with mining exploitation. Imagine, we continue open pit explosion using cyanide, which is highly contaminating. And then there's waste of energy. There is an education for life, where we have to transform ourselves. For example, I am among those who always think that people should have access to those forms of new knowledge. In medicine, you have the great power of multinational pharmaceutical companies when sometimes we solve health problems with the wisdom of the people. There is no woman healer in the science books, and they have made extraordinary contributions. Why not take care of biodiversity, the forest; recover ancestral knowledge, such as combining new technologies with old ways of thinking—how to recover oral tradition, human relations, now everything is only virtual and that harms us. So we need to combine that new technology with new ways of life, and essentially we have to take care of the planet. How is it progress if the most developed countries are the ones that are destroying the planet? What is called climate change or global warming, actually the great responsibility lies with the big industrialized countries; where the accumulation of capital is the most fundamental task, and not life. **So where is science, we are talking about an academy of science with conscience, but not an academy without conscience, without people; that is not good in universities. Because universities are reproducers of all the forms of human exploitation when there is no conscience. But they also become centers of critical thinking that can approach, can contribute and work with the people. So we are talking about a different education, an education for life, for the transformation of this unjust reality. What is the role of universities in the issue of migrants? We see silence in our universities. What role could the university play?** And you, who also combine subjective expression, that is so important. Art as a form of awareness, as a creative way to see things, is essential. And we want to recognize the role of women in feminist movements in Honduras, of art movements, they have been extraordinary in film, poetry, essays, of men and women; they have struggled and many have been murdered.

DT: We are going to imagine for a moment that migrants would have access to some words from different persons while they are travelling that long journey. What would you say to them in five minutes, that they could hear on their phones, or in any way, to help them on that road?

JA: First, I would tell them that there is great love, and great generosity in them. Because even if they leave our countries to seek a new life, to better their lives, they don't do it in a selfish way. Imagine the tragedy that in our countries 20 to 30% of income from the U.S. is in remittances from migrants, that reflects that they have great love for life and their families, and they make that sacrifice. Second, what I have been able to realize is that there is great wisdom in the migrant. One especially learns through pain and suffering, and above all by love; because there

is a great liberating message in them. Maybe they are developing a liberating message of the people--not only of our people, but to the situation of the people of the third world living in the U.S. Of class oppressions, discrimination of women, all those things, they are proposing something new. The need is unity. And I would even say, they are posing a challenge to all workers' organizations in the world, because they are raising the need for unity. Because migrants, whether internal or external, are populations affected by mining, and by climate change. Can you imagine what a storm means in Honduras, a country with hurricanes? Who suffers more? The poor, plastic houses are destroyed, hunger, poverty, health problems. So you have to create that movement. We must strengthen the struggle of migrants for their rights. Not only in the U.S. Because look, migrants returning to Honduras are stigmatized, they are subject to violence, put in jail, considered human scum. But no, they should believe that they are really extraordinary beings. They should not feel humiliated, as they feel in the U.S., in Europe, for racist treatment; no, they are human beings with dignity. And in that sense, I think that at this meeting I have much learned how to valorize, to say for example, **listen to those women, especially the women from my people, those Garifuna women with incredible knowledge, and with moral force. They are teachers. I want to also say with this young Mexican girl, who is very young, but has profound philosophy. I said, these women are philosophers, because philosophy comes from deep reflection on life. What happens is that we have believed that only the West produces philosophy. No, philosophy is inherent in life itself, in transformative struggle.** So I would say to them, I don't know, I thank them for being here and I take away a great strength to struggle against those shackles, against all those forms of suffering. And I also see a condition. We have had people here from the church, the Episcopal Church, the Catholic Church, extraordinary characters from Mexico, which have also motivated me. Because I don't have a religious issue, but as a defender of life it definitely inspires me when churches are not fundamentalist, are not of the theology of power, of oppression, of capitalism, as we were objects of during the military coup. We have churches there, so there is religiosity of the people, those with their beliefs, their affirmation, and they are telling us that this is the path. There is not much that I can say to them, as they have showed me that there is a path, the path of unity, of respect, of tolerance, it is not hate. Racism is based on hate, based on colonization and neo-colonization. We are in favor of liberation, of liberation of the spirit. I don't have prejudices, not with whites, not with yellow, nor red. Perhaps what I have is a spirit of struggle against very colonialist, neo-colonialist, imperialist positions. Because it must be said clearly--I don't have hatred, not even for the military, but I am against militarism, against an arms race. So it seems to me that we have to struggle, as a colleague said here, that I liked very much, against that patriarchy; all our patriarchal actions, authoritarian, they are reflected in all these policies. So in reality what is democracy? And there, one asks oneself, democracy can only be constructed based on love, on respect for life, for dignity. So we don't have that possibility. These philosophers of the migration movement are teaching us much. They have learned since they were children, that young girl that spoke to us left me totally dumbfounded; that woman that crossed a river with her daughter in her arms, they are extraordinarily brave. So to them I say we should get closer, learn from them and struggle with them to transform reality. That is the true transformative human education of love and solidarity.

DT: Thank you.

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Interviewer: Dear Juan, you have fought your entire life, you have struggled for the defense of your country. We would like that you tell us a bit about your trajectory, your experience. You are a doctor...

Juan Almdares (JA): I am a doctor, and I am also a physiologist and I have also dedicated myself to the field of ecology, to the defense of human rights and I'm also fighting against torture. I am also a victim of torture in my country: I was condemned by death squads in Honduras. I have had a whole history of struggle but above all, a great commitment with the struggle of the people, the peasant struggle, indigenous, Garifuna, the defense also of intellectual cadres; and above all a struggle for the unity of the peoples of Latin America.

Interviewer: But let's slow down. You studied medicine and graduated here in the U.S.

JA: No, I studied in Honduras but did my graduate studies here in the U.S. at the University of California and the University of Pennsylvania. I would say that I became more aware in the U.S. because it had another vision. I felt very inspired by the movement against the Vietnam War and the students of Berkeley.

Interviewer: What year were you here?

JA: I was here in the 1970s, no 1966 to 70.

Interviewer: Ah, you were here in '68 in the Berkeley movement.

JA: Sure, and I was... well I was very inspired by Mario Salvo, Angela Davis, the whole opposition movement against the war and in defense of the rights of Blacks, Hispanics. Also very influenced by Martin Luther King at that time, also by Malcolm X, for all these groups that really raised their voices for civil and political rights, and especially against the war. The governor was Mr. Reagan.

Interviewer: And how was it that your work as a doctor developed? You returned to Honduras?

JA: I returned to Honduras, returned first with an idea that was a somewhat academic, to publish scientific papers in the medical field, perhaps with borrowed ideas. But there was an incident that really moved me very much, it was the murder of two priests, one from the U.S. and another from Colombia, and a young Honduran student, they were put in a deep well where they were blown up by dynamite, their bodies were fragmented. I was dean of the faculty of medicine and that made me cry, to deeply reflect on my role in Honduras and then I joined with popular struggle.

Interviewer: What year was that attack?

JA: Around 1970 something, when the process of U.S. occupation began, it was very close. I think it was a little before, because the process of military occupation of Honduras came after. When Honduras is converted, you know Honduras has historically been a kind of aircraft carrier for the Pentagon; where we serve for punishment, with arms to overthrow (inaudible) in Guatemala. Then all the militarization begins; that is, the U. S. Congress decides to establish the military base in Palmerola, now called Soto Cano. First the U.S. Congress decides. So we actually

have the great militarization of Honduras with one of the largest bases and one of the largest airports in Central America. Then we also have human rights violations by U.S. troops. I begin to speak out against violations of children, rape of women. The aggression of Vietnam occurs and AIDS appears, and I am the first to denounce the role of soldiers in the transmission of AIDS. I'm not saying they do so voluntarily, but at the time it was said that AIDS was caused by homosexuals, a thesis that we did not agree with. And we noted that given the health conditions of poverty, tuberculosis, malaria, and all these diseases, AIDS was a serious issue. So at this moment we really did become a focus, especially for the Honduran military. I was unable to establish myself at a clinic for practically four years, I only had work at the university, because they considered me enemy number one of the army. So I was condemned by the death squads, I had quite a difficult life, many aggressions, shooting at my family, at my house. The AAA, the Anticommunist Alliance of Argentina and various actions, condemned me. So I was left completely isolated and so I joined the peoples' organizations, I was national coordinating secretary of all the popular organizations in the country. I was rector of the University.

Interviewer: How did you get to be rector of the university?

JA: Well look, it was interesting because I came from below. And I mean to be rector you normally have to have some economic or political power. What happened was that I had much sympathy among the youth, the young professors, so it was a movement from below in the university. We had a university with student parity and the university was co-governed. So I came to the university, I was there three years, and I was re-elected. And I remember that when I was rector, the new U.S. ambassador was John Dimitri Negroponte, who was a real character and he decided to invite some of the country's personalities. I had much hesitation in accepting this invitation because I was definitely very critical of U.S. policy. Then when I got to the embassy I was very calm, the embassy's political advisor was very friendly. But when I got to Negroponte's office he had a much higher desk, I was in a low seat. He didn't speak for about ten, fifteen minutes, without giving me his hand, just looking at me as if almost a torturer. Only the political adviser spoke. Then suddenly he spoke to me and told me: "Doctor Almendares, when will you be reelected in the university?" And I asked, "When will U.S. troops leave to Honduras?" So he told me, "When you are reelected." I got his message and actually, definitely when we won the election, the court intervenes us, and when a lawyer from the court dies, I filed a complaint. The lawyer says, look we met with John Dimitri Negroponte, the President and General Alvarez, trained in Argentina, most of the military was trained at the School of the Americas. They then pressured the entire court and told us that I was an enemy against State security. So we had to annul it, we made that error, that mistake. When he dies I denounced him publicly, I did it through the U.S. press. Some journalists asked me if my grounds were true and I told them, the truth is that none of the members of the court have denied what I said. And I also had the father of one of my students testify, who was a conservative magistrate of the court, who told me that they had honestly done that. After this we had an outright fight, we founded the Center for the Prevention of Torture, the first center that really accused the military of torture. And I was later involved in other activities without leaving academics behind. I established a medical clinic to serve the poor, I don't believe in capitalist medicine. Then I dedicated myself to serve in my practice. I have studied much about the problem of health and mining, I have somewhat dedicated myself to ecology and human rights. What I want to say is that lately one of the strangest things in Honduras is that we have become a place that Southern Command frequently visits. And the Southern Command brought us defenders of human rights together to explain the role of Southern Command in the defense of human rights. So General

Joe Kelly arrived and we had a meeting where he said: “the *sine qua non* condition for the military is to respect human rights, and what do you think?” I was there and I said: “I think that you are contributors to the violation of human rights, because we are militarily occupied by the U.S., and I struggle against military bases.” So that man got up abruptly and said: “We don’t have military bases in Honduras, what we have missions of good will, medical, humanitarian missions. And so I said, “Because I disagree with this position,” and I explained more. But after, this man tells me, “So you agree that the U.S. military mission in Honduras should leave.” And actually, yes, I say, that's what I want, for it to leave. I have no rejection to solidarity humanitarian organizations in the U.S.; to the contrary, I have very good friends in the academic, religious fields, I do not hate the U.S., but I do reject the U.S. military presence because you are involved with School of the Americas trainers. So we have been in that situation. **And Honduras currently, I would say is the geopolitical epicenter of Latin America. And that is very important, because if we had migration of Marines to Honduras, now we have migration of Honduran infants, children, to the U. S. That is, the Marines invade us, but here children are considered invaders. And the Marines in Honduras have received very privileged treatment there, which in no way compares to the treatment children receive here.** One of the strange things is the training of one hundred thousand children by the Honduran military, and these are called the Guardians of the Homeland. It is a program in Honduras that was initiated with the support of the churches, the military and other sectors. So in reality we believe that the military is not in a condition to educate children, they are not in the business of education. So we have really had a process of militarization, then we have new policies and growth of military intelligence in the country. It has the same name as the national directorate of U.S. intelligence. Then we also have the *Tigres*, which is a military police supported by the IDB, for 60 million dollars. That means we have a situation of increasing policing. The Honduran military police generally uses masks and wear no identification; it is the mechanism to intimidate people. Then you can imagine that both the Puebla Panama plan, as the Merida Plan, all these plans, have materialized in Honduras. What we have is war, and I consider it like the idea of the Nazi Carl Schmitt, when he spoke of total war. It is not only a military, it is a media war, a psychological war, even a theological war because fundamentalist groups have joined this war. It is a war of the oligarchies against the people. And there we have an experiment that is reflected in some areas, especially in the area of Huan, the area of Mosquita, precisely the areas where the Garifunas are. Why? Because there is an area of the Caribbean that has oil deposits that the English are going to exploit. And there is an infantry battalion there, a naval battalion, the DEA is there, some elements of the Colombian police; the Mexican police was advising on the use of the polygraph. There are also hit men, and there are 80,000 private guards in the country.

Interviewer: Has Israel sent in troops?

JA: Well, yes, trainings have been held here for a long time, private trainings. **Honduras is an armed country, but those who have arms are groups of power.** So what has happened in this zone, there are very strong peasants groups so they say that the peasant movement is a guerilla, but there are no guerillas. So what do they want, to exterminate the peasants because they are an obstacle for the monoculture model, of biofuels, or to convert them into a sub-proletariat. Then, we have an extremely serious situation in terms of human rights. And then plans such as the charter cities, that is an idea of a neoliberal U.S. economist. There in Mexico they are calling them rural cities, here they changed the name from Model Cities to Special Development Zones. These are territories that are practically ceded to multinationals or governments, which will have its own self-government, their own, no labor laws, it's worse than the *maquila*, there is no

control because they are industrial parks where they will have their private soldiers, they will have their own laws. It is really a way to contribute to migration. So migration is no more than the result of the capitalist model, it is all an imperialistic process of essentially human segregation, a racist policy. People are evicted from territories by mining companies, the plantations. Why, because those who protect the multinationals are the Honduran soldiers themselves. That is, there is money, and the whole Honduras plan is militarization, everything is in military bases and in the name of security. That is key, security is the most important thing. **So we are an insecure country that increases military spending everyday.** Eighty percent of military spending comes from the project of health, maybe more. **The growth of the military budget exceeds that of increases in education and health. So what happens is that those that have all the privilege, even of killing, are the military. It isn't that the military rules, it is the economic model that imposes the norms of security.** Now, who controls military spending? Who controls the arms race? Who controls the multinationals? The U.S. controls them. Because we actually have a war against the people, because there have been thousands of people murdered, the homicide rate is the highest in the world and the rate of impunity is 95%.

Interviewer: Have you estimated the number of murdered persons?

JA: Look, it's very difficult. Well, they are definitely known, some assessments of some cases have been done. But the problem is the following, it's not known exactly. I don't dare say how many are dead, but what I can say is that in the last five or six years, at least 40,000 people of a small population have died; we are 8 million people. Then why, why is there no reliability in the data? The security wants to control the country's data. There are other institutions, including the university, that have control; there are discrepancies in the data. But at the end of the accounting, it is the army, the police, security, who give the data. What we do have are massacres, we have an imprisoned country. And you know that they first said that it was a war against the Maras, against gangs. First they calculated that 5% of violence was caused by the Maras, at first, that was even UNICEF's data. But lately it is thought that young people cause the greatest violence. But in reality the greatest violence is on the part of armed groups, the police, army and drug trafficking. And then there is collusion, corruption. Then they created the prison policy, to imprison youth. The second policy was to burn youth and electrocute them, we had the death of 108 persons in one prison, 69 in another, and the latest reached almost 400 persons, one of humanity's greatest tragedies, I believe the second or third in the world. So in reality you have a scenario that first, you don't know where it's headed, second, that it is a democracy. In my experience as a defender of human rights, we sometimes cannot help a family leave the country, because Honduras is a democratic country, no one will grant them asylum because it is a democracy. But it is really terrible because people feel insecure. For example, the case of the Garifunas that was presented here, they come from the Vallecito area, others from Tela, what is happening there? Vallecito is a beautiful place, surrounded by armed groups, people are terrorized, they have great fear that they will be displaced from their beaches, they cannot fish. And their leaders are persecuted, threatened with death. So this population migrates, goes through Mexico, not just them but other Hondurans as well. But the human rights violations in Mexico, and most of all at reaching the U.S., is very horrible. Shackles, children humiliated, also put in shackles, with what we call *chachas*. It is a horrible way, worst humiliation of a country that prides itself on being a democracy, and of being a defender of human rights. So we believe this is racism, we are not saying that of all the U.S. On the contrary, there are very good people here, very brave, that struggle alongside us, but you have to

condemn the system. It is a system that forces us to buy arms, planes, to arm the people even when they know that there's corruption, it forces us to do that.

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