

Honduras post-election killings: families wait in vain for justice

Wednesday 12 September 2018, by [AVILA Jennifer](#), [CALDERON Catty](#), [ERNST Jeff](#) (Date first published: 17 August 2018).

UN confirms at least 16 people were killed by security forces, but six months on not a single indictment has been filed



Soldiers and police launch teargas at demonstrators in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in January.
Photograph: Eduardo Verdugo/AP

More than six months after [security forces in Honduras killed numerous protesters](#) during a violent post-election crackdown, not a single indictment has been filed against the perpetrators of what the UN high commission for human rights has described as extrajudicial executions.

Meanwhile victims' families have been targeted with death threats and harassment, and hold out little hope for justice.

The government of Juan Orlando Hernández – the incumbent president who extended his rule in December's disputed vote – said that a multi-disciplinary group began investigating the deaths as soon as they happened.

But the group is overseen by the public prosecutor's office, which activists say has dragged its feet in the investigation.

"How are they going to deliver justice if it's the same government?" asked the father of Kimberly Dayana Fonseca, 19, who [witnesses said was shot dead by members of the military police](#). Fonseca's father requested that his name not be used out of fear of reprisal.

The violence broke out days after the 26 November election when the crash of an electoral server three days into the count was followed by a marked shift in voting trends that overturned what had appeared an insurmountable lead for opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla.

Tensions that had been building since a 2009 coup ousted then-president Manuel Zelaya erupted in demonstrations and road blockades across the country.



Relatives of Kimberly Fonseca who was shot during a protest mourn next to her coffin. Photograph: Edgard Garrido/Reuters

Security forces repressed protesters, in several cases firing live rounds into crowds and hitting innocent bystanders.

Local human rights groups maintain that more than 30 people died during the post-electoral crisis. The UN confirmed that at least 16 of the victims were killed by security forces.

Fonseca, a student, was among the first to die. In the evening of 1 December, she left her home to tell her brother, who was participating in a nearby protest, that a military curfew had just been announced.

Soon after, military police arrived at the scene, she was shot in the head, and died instantly.

But the terror didn't end there for her family. Within days men dressed in civilian clothes turned up, asking about bullet shells that had been left by the military. Months later, a man on a motorcycle arrived in Fonseca's neighbourhood on three separate occasions and threatened to kill the family.

Evidence suggests that the majority of the deaths attributable to security forces involved the Military Police for Public Order (PMOP), a unit of soldiers with little training in policing, who were originally deployed to combat the country's high murder rates.

Mariela Hernández says she and her husband saw a soldier shoot and kill her brother Cristian outside the factory where he worked in San Pedro Sula. Yet prosecutors have claimed the shooter was a private security guard, not the military.

"My husband confronted the soldier," said Hernandez. "We saw his face."

Human rights activists say the lack of results is symptomatic of a justice system that protects those involved in cases that are damaging to the government while applying the full force of the law to others.

Protesters accused of vandalism have been jailed for over six months and [denied their due process rights](#).

Human rights groups have called for an independent investigation. Carolina Jiménez, deputy director of research in the [Americas](#) for Amnesty International, suggested that a special truth commission could be beneficial.

Although such a commission might not be able to deliver justice, she said, it could at least "guarantee some access to truth".

For Fonseca's father, the truth would be better than nothing.

"I just want to know who it was," he said. "Even if nothing is done."

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