



NGO: EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR LAW AND JUSTICE (ECLJ)

**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW
50TH SESSION**

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF HONDURAS
FOR THE 50TH SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Honduras (Honduras) for the 50th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Honduras is a country located in Central America and has a population of approximately 9.8 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Christian, with approximately 46% of the population identifying as Roman Catholic, 41% as Protestant, and 9% belonging to no religion.²

3. Honduras's last review was held on November 5, 2020.³ As a result of the review, Honduras received 224 recommendations, 203 of which it supported.⁴ In our last UPR for Honduras, we expressed concern over the country's human trafficking problem. However, since that time we have become concerned about the religious persecution of Christians in the country. While no recommendations were made regarding religious freedom, Open Doors ranked Honduras as the 65th worst country for Christians to live in.⁵ In Honduras, Christians often face persecution from criminal groups who extort, beat, and kill Christians.⁶ This is because Christians are seen as a threat to their criminal activity.⁷

Legal Framework

4. Article 77 of the Constitution of Honduras states that “[t]he free exercise of all religions and cults is guaranteed without preference to one, provided they do not violate the law and public order.”⁸

¹ Honduras, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Honduras> (last visited Mar. 27, 2025).

² Honduras Religions, INDEX MUNDI, <https://www.indexmundi.com/honduras/religions.html#:~:text=Religions%3A%20Roman%20Catholic%2046%25%2C,the%20percent%20of%20total%20population> (last visited Mar. 27, 2025).

³ Universal Periodic Review – Honduras, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/hn-index> (last visited Mar. 27, 2025).

⁴ Honduras – Infographic, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session28/HN/infographic-HONDURAS.pdf> (last visited Mar. 27, 2025).

⁵ Honduras: Persecution Dynamics, OPEN DOORS 4 (2025), <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/country-dossiers/WWL-2025-Honduras-Persecution-Dynamics>.

⁶ *Id.* at 7.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ CONSTITUTION OF HONDURAS 1982 (rev. 2013) art. 77, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Honduras_2013.

5. Honduras is also a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).⁹ Under Article 18 of the ICCPR:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.¹⁰

Religious Persecution

6. Even though Christians make up the vast majority of the population in Honduras, Christians are still at risk of being attacked and killed.¹¹ This is because criminal gangs operating in Honduras view Christianity as a threat to their illicit activities.¹² This problem has been exacerbated as gang members from El Salvador have begun entering Honduras as a result of the 2022 State of Emergency in El Salvador.¹³ These gangs use everyday citizens to monitor religious leaders and provide the gangs with information on Christian leaders who pose a threat to the gang's interests.¹⁴ Christian leaders who are identified as posing a threat to these criminal gangs are subjected to violent reprisals.¹⁵

7. Efforts by the government and police to combat violence by these illicit groups has proven to be ineffective.¹⁶ This is because corruption is pervasive throughout Honduras and has been found within its armed forces, police, and public administration.¹⁷ This has enabled perpetrators to act with high levels of impunity and, in some cases, senior state officials have been linked to prominent criminal organizations.¹⁸

8. Below we have highlighted just a few of the most recent examples of Christians being brutally targeted and killed.

9. On September 14, 2024, a pastoral worker and founder of the Pastoral Care for Integral Ecology in Honduras was shot and killed.¹⁹ He was shot in his car after he had attended a

⁹ *Ratification Status for Honduras*, OHCHR,

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/treaty.aspx (last visited Mar. 27, 2025).

¹⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

¹¹ *Honduras: Full Country Dossier*, OPEN DOORS 6 (2024), <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/country-dossiers/WWL-2024-Honduras-Full-Country-Dossier.pdf>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* at 14.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Honduras: Full Country Dossier*, OPEN DOORS 6 (2022), <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/Honduras-Full-Country-Dossier-March-2022.pdf> [*hereinafter Honduras 2022*].

¹⁶ *Honduras: Persecution Dynamics*, *supra* note 5, at 7.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 10.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Laura Gomez Ruiz, *America/Honduras – One Month After the Murder of Pastoral Worker Juan Antonio López: Three Suspects Arrested in Honduras*, AGENZIA FIDES (Oct. 14, 2024), <https://www.fides.org/en/news/75527->

Christian celebration in the municipality of Toccoa.²⁰ Witnesses reported that he was approached by armed men on motorcycles before he was killed.²¹ The attack occurred hours after a press conference where he and other community leaders denounced corruption and organized crime.²²

10. In May 2023, a thirty-five-year-old pastor was shot and killed as he was leaving church service at the Church of San Carlos Colony in Catacamas, Olancho.²³

11. In February 2023, a Christian leader was shot and killed in front of the Church of God of the Prophecy of the Ulloa neighborhood.²⁴ The Christian was well known for working with youth in the community.²⁵

12. In August 2022, two armed men shot and killed the son of the evangelical pastor of the Filadelfia Pentecostes Assembly Church.²⁶

13. In July 2022, gang members looted schools and churches in the Department of Lempira.²⁷ The police deputy confirmed that the gang had stolen several religious items.²⁸

14. On March 2, 2022, a priest was shot and killed hours after it was reported that he had disappeared.²⁹

15. In January 2022, a Christian pastoral worker was shot in the back of the head and killed on his way to church.³⁰ He was well known for his faith and environmental work.³¹

16. In June 2021, one person was killed and five others were injured when gunmen attacked a bus carrying fifteen Christians who belonged to Noah's Ark Church.³² The one individual who was killed had previously received death threats.³³

AMERICA_HONDURAS_One_month_after_the_murder_of_pastoral_worker_Juan_Antonio_Lopez_Three_suspects_arrested_in_Honduras.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Nicaraguan Pastor is Murdered When Leaving a Cult in Honduras*, NICARAGUA ACTUAL (May 6, 2023), <https://nicaraguaactual.tv/sucesos/77890-pastor-nicaraguense-asesinado-culto-honduras/>.

²⁴ *Loving Father and Exemplary: This Was the Young Shepherd Murdered in Comayagüela*, LA PRENSA (Feb. 19, 2023), <https://www.laprensa.hn/fotogalerias/honduras/honduras-matan-joven-pastor-asesinado-comayaguela-AD12227799#image-1>.

²⁵ *Honduras: Persecution Dynamics*, *supra* note 5, at 6.

²⁶ *Honduras: Full Country Dossier*, OPEN DOORS 6 (2023), <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Honduras-Full-Country-Dossier-February-2023.pdf> [hereinafter *Honduras 2023*].

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Blanca Ruiz, *They Regret the Murder of the Diocesan Director of Pontifical Mission Societies in Honduras*, ACI PRENSA (Mar. 4, 2022), <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/92601/lamentan-asesinato-de-director-diocesano-de-obras-misionales-pontificias-en-honduras>.

³⁰ Linda Bordoni, *Honduras: Church Calls for Investigations into Murder of Indigenous Leader*, VATICAN NEWS (Jan. 14, 2022), <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2022-01/honduras-murder-indigenous-activist-environment-church-condemati.html>.

³¹ *Id.*

³² *One Dead and Five Injured in Attack on Church Members*, PROCESO DIGITAL (June 29, 2021), <https://proceso.hn/un-muerto-y-varios-heridos-deja-ataque-a-bus-en-una-colonia-capitalina/>.

³³ *Id.*

17. In February 2021, an evangelical pastor and his wife were shot and killed in the municipality of El Paraíso.³⁴

18. In January 2021, an evangelical pastor was killed along the main street of the village of El Edén in the municipality of Esparta, Atlántida.³⁵ The attackers used machetes to kill him.³⁶

Recommendations:

19. Even though Honduras received no recommendations during its last UPR regarding Christians being targeted and killed, the sampling of examples we have highlighted above show that Christians are in real danger, as they are specifically targeted for living out their faith and holding Biblical values. Honduras must take meaningful action to get rid of corruption that has allowed criminal gangs to operate with impunity and target Christians. Further the government must take proactive steps to aggressively target criminal gangs and bring them to justice. This must be done to protect Christians from the horrific violence being perpetrated against them. It is imperative that Honduras ensures that everyone can practice his religion freely and safely.

³⁴ *Evangelical Pastor and His Wife Are Murdered in El Paraíso*, EL HERALDO (Feb. 9, 2021), <https://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/asesinan-pastor-esposa-paraiso-sucesos-AVEH1441634>.

³⁵ *Evangelical Pastor Killed with Machetes in the Municipality of Esparta, Atlántida*, EL HERALDO (Jan. 3, 2021), <https://www.elheraldo.hn/sucesos/a-machetazos-matan-a-pastor-evangelico-esparta-HBEH1433150>.

³⁶ *Id.*