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Honduras, Population

Honduras: Reforms needed to bring Hondurans back to their home

The vast majority of the population of Honduras dream of a better life in a better place. Honduras is one of the countries in Central America which is most affected by the emigration of its citizens. This is due to economic issues, violence, and lack of government social support. Many attempts have been made domestically and internationally to improve the vast amount of issues this country continues to endure with little success to motivate its citizens to stay.

According to the statistics retrieved from the Central Intelligence Agency, Honduras is one of seven countries in Central America. It is bordered by Guatemala to the northwest, El Salvador to the southwest, Nicaragua to the southeast and the Caribbean Sea to the north. The capital of Honduras is Tegucigalpa; the official language is Spanish, and its currency is Honduran Lempira. The type of government that Honduras holds is representative democracy with its president being Juan Orlando Hernandez. The climate in Honduras is subtropical in low lands and temperate in the mountains. The current population of Honduras is 9,038,741 with 55.32% living in urban areas and 44.68% living in rural area. A typical family household consist of both parents and an average of 3 children. Those living in the urban areas build their houses with industrial materials, while people who live in rural areas use mostly local resources. The nation's economy primarily relies on agriculture. Approximately 28% percent of the land is used for agricultural purposes due to its mountainous terrain, and the major exports are bananas, coffee, and citruses. The poverty level in this country is 64.5% with average wage of 22.44 lempiras per hour equivalent to 0.95 U.S. dollars. ("Honduras." The World Factbook)

The poverty rates in Honduras is one of the biggest challenges the country faces. Honduras impoverishment level is among one of the highest in Central America with a 64.5% poverty rate (Gao). Most of this poverty in Honduras is localized in rural areas. According to the World Bank approximately one out of every five Hondurans live in extreme poverty. These people live on less than \$1.90 US dollars per day ("Overview"). That's a yearly salary of \$693.50 in American currency. To put that into perspective a typical household in America would spend an average of \$600.25 on food per month ("CONSUMER EXPENDITURES--2016."). The obvious cause of the elevated level of poverty in this country, especially in rural Honduras, is the lack of employment opportunities. "With 28% of the country being agriculture land, 39 % of the populations is employed by the agricultural sector" (Garrett). The productivity of this land is gradually decreasing as it is highly susceptible to erosion. Since the farm land is decreasing, the amount of jobs for the public is on a decline. Although the Honduran government has made some economic advancements for the country, natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods ravage the country destroying most of the progress made and consequently setting back Honduras economic development (Garrett). These poor economic conditions impact health care, food security, and education system since it is limited to those who can afford its exorbitant cost.

In Honduras only about 88.3% of the population receives health care (“Healthcare Access and Conditions”). According to a recent study from Michigan State University “Health conditions in Honduras are among the worst in the Western Hemisphere. There are an estimated 83 physicians, 25 nurses, and 1 dentist per 100,000 people” (Koglin). Most of these medical professionals are located in the most developed cities. Therefore, not easily accessible to 44.68% of the population that live in the rural parts of Honduras (“Honduras.” The World Factbook). This percentage of the population usually seek care from traditional healers such as folk healers or Curanderos. “Curanderismo exists throughout Latin America and practitioners treat a wide range of ailments including illnesses recognized in modern medicine as well as folk illness specific to the local populations” (“Healthcare Access and Conditions”). The Archives of Medicine contributed the following information: In Honduras health investments per person is only \$101.00 in American currency (Milian et al. 2). This is only about a quarter of the average health investments spent in Latin America which invests about \$392.00 per person (Milian et al. 2). Even the country of Honduras does not invest enough money in the health sector as a whole. Only about 11.5% of Honduras National budget disbursements go towards the Health Sector (Milian et al. 3). This expenditure has declined by about 3.7% on the last 5 years due to budget transfers to other sector (Milian et al. 3). The main source of health financing in Honduras is 54.7% government, 34.4% out of pocket expenses and 8.2% external cooperation (Milian et al. 3). These statistics clearly illustrate the reasons why 9 out of 10 people in Honduras are not covered by health insurance and explains the poor conditions of the medical facilities’ Infrastructure (Milian et al. 2). Low investments and poor maintenance of hospitals and medical facilities have made buildings structurally unstable, therefore they are not suitable to effectively deliver a safe environment for medical services to be administered.

Poor economic conditions and the recurrent natural disasters in Honduras affects the food security and nutrition of the most vulnerable population. A predicted 1.5 million people in Honduras deal with hunger and food insecurity (“Honduras | Food Security Portal.”). Honduras is situated, geographically, in an area that is prone to adverse natural events. From June to the end of November the Caribbean coast of Honduras is susceptible to hurricanes, strong storms and floods, while in the south Honduras suffers from constant and severe droughts (“Honduras: Food Assistance Fact Sheet”). These natural disasters cause economic shocks due to the fact that they destroy staple crops therefore inflation of resources such as food and fuel are bound to occur. The epidemic poverty rate makes it difficult for families to accommodate to the rising food prices, thus making hunger more prevalent. The malnutrition rates, among the poor, can reach a surprising 48.5% in rural areas (“Honduras | Food Security Portal.”). According to the Relief Web, one out of every four children in Honduras suffer from chronic malnutrition (“Honduras: Food Assistance Fact Sheet”). All these natural catastrophes bring a chain reaction of problems to poor Hondurans since chronic malnutrition lead to more serious illnesses and eventually to death. All this bring us back to the previous issue, availability of health care and affordable medical treatments.

Honduras’ educational system is faulty and needs to be addressed immediately. Honduras education system is free up to 6th grade with only 87% of the school age children having access to it (Schaefer). People who live in rural area, which is the other 13%, do not have schools in the proximity of their homes. Although families in Honduras don’t have to pay for their children to receive an education from pre-k to 6th grade, approximately 100,000 children are forced to drop out of school during this period (Schaefer). This is due to the fact the family does not have the resources to pay for the child’s uniforms,

school supplies, and transportation. (“A Study of Education”) Many of these households are barely making ends meet and cannot afford these expenses. In many cases the minors have to drop out to start working to support their family’s economy (Schaefer). Those kids whose families can afford to pay for their educational necessities, do not receive the education necessary to prepare them for a college career. Forty percent of the teachers in Honduras receive only the basic training and are given minimal resources to teach (Schaefer). The lack of teaching resources such as books, supplies, and curriculum, makes it very difficult for teachers to perform their basic duties (“A Study of Education”). For this reason, “over 30 % of students don’t finish primary school without repeating grades.” (Schaefer). In Honduras, it takes an average of about 9.4 years for a child to finish first through sixth grade due to poor educational conditions and limited educational resources (“A Study of Education”). From those who are able to complete up to 6th grade, only 30% can attend high school (Schaefer). The percentage is even lower for those who attend college because the quality of education they receive does not prepare them for the challenges that a higher education brings.

Along with poverty comes violence. According to the National Autonomous University of Honduras, “Honduras continues to have one of the highest homicide rates in the world with 43.6 murders per 100,000 inhabitants in 2017.” (“Overview”). In Honduras the homicide rates went up significantly from 2000 to 2004 when the United States deported 20,000 people, mainly gang members, to Central America (“Honduras Country Profile”). Gang culture expanded in Honduras along with extreme poverty, which made people desperate for money to support themselves and their family. These conditions were the perfect combination to create an explosive mixture that fueled the existing violence and crime in the area. At the present time, it is estimated that there are approximately 7000 street gang members in Honduras (“Honduras 2017 Crime”). “Gangs are not reluctant to use violence and specialize in murder-for-hire, carjacking, extortion, and other violent street crime. They are also known to control some of the taxi services. Violent transnational criminal organizations also conduct narcotics trafficking and other illicit commerce.” (“Honduras 2017 Crime”). The increase in violence has resulted in the killing of politicians and human rights advocates, labor activists, and journalists who work to help improve the lives of Honduras. Femicide in Honduras, the killing of women, is reported to be very high as well, with a woman being killed every 16 hours (Chang et al.). The rates are “five times higher than the homicide rates in the majority of Northern Western, and Southern European countries” (Chang et al.). It is believed that this phenomenon is caused by machismo. This is the cultural belief that men are the alpha and women are disempowered (Chang et al.).

The lack of government support is a real problem for Hondurans. A continuous struggle that Honduras has to face is the heavy militarized government. It has its roots from the 1963 coup d’état, when 10 days before the presidential election Colonel Oswaldo Lopez Arellano overthrew the liberal party of Ramon Villeda Morales and initiated two decades of military rule. (Solo). This period of military rule prevented democratic change from happening in the country. It ended in 1980 when the first transitional democratic government was voted into office in open elections (Salomon). In 1982 the national assembly of Honduras approved the new Honduran constitution. From 1982 to 2009 “Honduras was a weak but strengthening democracy” (Salomon). Even when the military was not in charge of the government, there was a strong military presence and for the “first time in country history an active military officer, General Julian Pacheco was appointed head of the security ministry which oversees both the armed forces and police” (Kinosian). This made it easy for a second coup d’état to take place in 2009 against leftist leader Manuel Zelaya (Salomon). This coup d’état stopped all the progress and even brought regression to

the country's democracy. The military is now in charge of most aspects of public security. They created the PMOP, Policia Militar del Orden Publico, which stands for the military police of public order (Kinosian). The PMOP has been replacing the national police. The PMOP has better equipment, higher salaries, and more benefits than civilian police (Kinosian). All these resources and support does not make them better at their duties, since they use violence and abuse against the public. This poor ethical behavior makes the public reluctant to follow the officers demands and consequently resulting in conflict from both parties.

These economic and social situation forces residents of Honduras to emigrate in search of better opportunities. According to the CIA the emigration rates topped to its highest in 1995 with 15,600 people leaving the country ("Honduras. The World Factbook"). Most of these people migrated to the United States because of the abundance of prospects for a better life away from violence, economic instability, corrupt government, and better educational opportunities. These hardships have become more difficult to handle over the past few years, explaining why the number of immigrants in the United States from Central America rose by 25% from 2007 to 2015 (Cohn et al.). Traveling from Honduras to the U.S. border is neither easy nor cheap. Many parents sacrifice their land and positions to gather money for their children to travel so that they can escape poverty and violence at home. This is the reason why more unaccompanied minors are making the journey to the USA each year. In 2014 52,000 unaccompanied children arrived at the United States border with Mexico (Cabrera). Most of these children were from Central America, which includes Honduras. The journey to the United States can be very dangerous. It is usually done by bus most of the way, but occasionally people must ride illegally on top of the wagon of freight trains or get alternate transportation, to prevent being detained and deported. Once at the border, people are smuggled into the country in dangerous ways. According to the Migration Policy Institute, migrants have become vital to the economy in Honduras. Money that is sent to Honduras from people who have emigrated makes up about 17% of the national gross domestic product (Reichmen). These remittances have allowed the family member who are still in the country to become financially stable. This money is mainly used for children education, food, housing, etc. The Trump administration announced in May of this year the end of a special immigration status of 57,000 Hondurans ("Trump Administration"). This special immigration status protected Hondurans who were affected by natural disasters and violence in their home land. By taking this protection status away, Hondurans will have to leave the United States and go back to a country to struggle with economic instability, violence, and lack of government support. The massive migration of these people plus their American children will only worsen the already vulnerable country of Honduras.

The attempts to restore the Honduran economic and social issue have made little to no impact. The United States has offered to help alleviate Honduras's hardships to prevent migration. While Ronald Reagan was in power, he attempted to restore the economy in Honduras. He worked on improving economic reforms within the country. He also pushed to nationalize the coffee trade, a big export item, which improved Honduras global market (Nevins). Regan's attempts to help Honduras failed due to the corrupt militarized government that up to today oppresses Honduras. The Latin America Working Group examined the role that the U.S. assistance has played, and can play, in the predicament of the Honduran people. Over thirty years later, the Obama administration attempted to relieve Honduras' economic and social situation once more by proposing a billion dollar aid package for Central America. In 2006 Manuel Zelaya, a member of the Liberal Party, came to power. He tried to reform the economy by improving the

minimum wage (Nevins). He also tried to change the country's corrupt militarized constitution, but was overthrown in 2009 by the Honduran military government (Nevins).

The root of the problem in Honduras is the corrupt government. Honduras government needs people in power like Zelaya that are willing to improve the country to benefit its people. The government would have to strengthen itself with constitutional reforms that would in turn weaken the military. Also, the reforms should include minimizing the allocation of large amounts of tax money to the Military Police of Public Order. This money should be assigned to implement the much needed social programs. These social programs should include health reforms to improve public health and to make it more affordable. They should include school feeding programs which will allow the students to focus on learning rather than being hungry. Healthy meals at school will in turn help improve the chronic malnutrition rates. In the educational area reforms should include better training for professionals and allocating more resources to improve the quality and infrastructure of schools. The government should implement mandatory free and appropriate education for students in grades K-12 with resources available to help parents with school supplies and transportation. Improving educational reforms would create well trained professional that will help improve the country and its economy. Also, labor reforms should be created to improve the working conditions and benefits of workers to incentivize them to stay and make the country a better place for everyone. Lastly creating educational programs for local farmers and facilitating the acquisition of quality raw material and equipment to improve the agricultural production would assure the food supply at a lower cost for the public. The United States is a perfect example of a successful country because it has all these social programs in place to assist the people who need it the most.

The involvement and pressure of global organizations such as United Nation and UNICEF would make these social, economic and educational reform possible. It would also hold the Honduran government more accountable and guarantee a higher possibility of the reforms taking place and being successful. How can the world outside of Honduras help? Concern citizens could begin campaigns and publicizing the problems that makes Honduras such a very difficult place to live to the public world wide. This information may get to global organizations that could otherwise not have been reached. We can use the technological advances we have today, and the power of social media platforms to help an entire country in need. Currently the public knows that there is a lot of migrations from the Central American, but what they don't know is why thousands of people are making the journey to the United States every year.

Everyone in this world deserves to be happy and feel secure. The conditions that Hondurans live in makes it impossible to live happy and safe. Everyone is leaving in hopes of finding a better place to live and to many the USA is that place. We, the world, have the moral responsibility to help them restore their economy, end the corruption and make this country free of violence. The story needs to be told!

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