

Reflections on Honduras

Mike Poulin; Institute Justice Team

The author spent five days in Honduras as part of a solidarity delegation cosponsored by the Share Foundation and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

Everywhere I went in Honduras, there was a sense of welcome for this North American traveler who can speak only the most basic phrases in Spanish.

Upon arrival, I was met at the airport by a group of fellow delegates who had already been in the country for several days. They greeted me like an old friend. I had offered to make my own way to our meeting place, to save them from the trip to the airport, but they wouldn't hear of it. We loaded luggage into a van and trekked across town to a public hot spring where we relaxed in warm water under the shade of trees. Afterwards, we stopped at a local take-out place for Honduran fried chicken, unique but very good, then proceeded on to our home away from home: a house on the property of the School Sisters of Notre Dame where [Sister Rosa Maria Trochez](#) and her assistants would see to our every need for the duration of our stay. All these things made the first hours of my trip feel almost like an all-inclusive vacation.



Sister Rosa Maria, Mandy and Victoria

We spent our nights in the comfort of the big house, behind the security of locked gates and a watchman. Each morning, we were greeted by the beautiful expanse of property that surrounded our accommodations, complete with flowers, palm trees and roaming iguanas. When we left the grounds each day, we did so by packing into the van owned by Alvin, another one of our hosts, who transported us from door to door for every stop on our trip.

I'm sure that during the preparation for this trip I heard someone say that San Pedro Sula is among the most dangerous cities in the world. I'm also sure that it didn't cause me concern. Because I have friends and colleagues who live there, some crime statistics wouldn't keep me from going to visit them to learn more about their country and their work. This idea of San Pedro Sula, and Honduras in general, being dangerous has come to the forefront more as I reflect on my experience than it did while I was there.

As I reflect, it is evident to me that our hosts and travel planners put more thought into our security than I did. While the things I described above felt like, and were, thoughtful hospitality – the airport pick up, a gated property, door to door private transportation, - these were also meaningful steps to keep us safe. And they did in fact keep us safe. We did not experience, or even witness, any crime while we were in the country. But that does not mean that Honduras is a safe place. There is danger there, probably more so for its citizens and residents than for its visitors. However, even as I point out this danger, it is not my intent to discourage others from visiting this beautiful place. In fact, I want just the opposite, because I believe that the presence of delegations like this can help fan the sparks of nonviolent resistance that we witnessed during our time there.



Nelly del Cid talks about Mercy Dream Weavers

One of our visits was with my friend, [Nelly del Cid](#), a Mercy Associate who works with [Mercy Dream Weavers](#), an organization that trains and supports women in defense of their human rights. Dream Weavers focuses on justice and nonviolence to address the misogyny, oppression and femicide that occur regularly in Honduras. Femicide is committed as domestic violence, gang violence and assassination. The murder of internationally recognized human rights defender [Berta Cáceres](#) is one

example of assassination. Berta was murdered because of her environmental activism to stop a hydro-electric dam that would have been devastating to the Lenca people living along the Gualcarque River.

Dream Weavers is a member of the [Foro de Mujeres por la Vida](#) – the Women’s Forum for Life – a consortium of sixteen organizations that support women and women’s issues in Honduras. Members of the Women’s Forum for Life seek to empower Honduran women so they can improve their lives and their communities. We visited Women’s Forum leaders at their current office space, which is inadequate for carrying out the work they want to do. Fortunately, they are making plans to



Prayer at Foro de Mujeres por la Vida

move into their own building as the result of fundraising work undertaken in collaboration with [Mercy Associates in the United States](#) and the SHARE Foundation, a long-time Mercy partner.

Escaping violence is one of the reasons that women emigrate from Honduras. Individuals who experience or anticipate violence, in a community that cannot or will not protect them, often view fleeing their home as the only realistic option. The work of Dream Weavers and the Women's Forum for Life is to establish safer places for women in Honduras, giving them the option to remain in their home country.

For those who do leave, emigration presents its own dangers. It is an endeavor filled with uncertainty and risk. Most emigrants leave behind family members who worry and wait for news. Some who leave Honduras are not heard from again. [COFAMIPRO](#) helps Hondurans discover what has happened to loved ones who have emigrated but not been in contact. Investigations are challenging and lengthy, only sometimes resulting in contact or closure.

All three of these ministries – Dream Weavers, the Women's Forum for Life and COFAMIPRO – are involved with [Radio Progreso](#). Radio Progreso is a local radio station known for its focus on human rights and politics in Honduras. In its efforts to report on social justice issues and politics, Radio Progreso features the work of these organizations, and many others, along with news and commentary. Even this work encounters danger. When we toured the radio station it was pointed out to us that some of the building's windows are made with bulletproof glass, a response to the death threats that employees have received because of their work for justice.



The Radio Progreso studio

Like my colleagues in Honduras, I have been involved in various types of social justice work for many years. Unlike my Honduran colleagues, I have not had to do this work under the specter of violence. While we all advocate for nonviolent solutions to conflict and support or provide humanitarian responses to injustice, our local realities do not

pose the same challenges. As my awareness of their situation grows, so does my concern for them and the people they serve.

Apart from some clinic supplies that I was able to bring for one of the ministries, my presence in Honduras provided little in the way of direct assistance. Visiting as a delegation was an act of solidarity. Letting our friends know that we support them in their work, promising to share stories of their efforts, widening the circle of concerned individuals, these are the ways we can help.

There is more to know about Honduras. Current-day stories of situations there are incomplete without historical context, history that includes U.S. corporate, political and military interference. Critics of immigrants are often ignorant of local situations, or just in denial about how U.S. interventions are among the root causes creating realities that people find no choice but to flee. I will leave those details to other sources for now.