

Deadly Honduras Counterdrugs Operation Raises New Questions Regarding U.S. Role

By [Center for Economic and Policy Research](#)

Global Research, May 31, 2013

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Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

A [new report](#) from the [Center for Economic and Policy Research](#) (CEPR) and [Rights Action](#) raises new questions regarding a May 11, 2012 DEA-related counternarcotics operation in which four Afro-indigenous civilians were killed and others were wounded in Honduras' Moskitia region.

The report, "[Still Waiting for Justice](#)," concludes that the Honduran Public Ministry's report - submitted to the U.S. State Department, and now [available online](#) - has "serious flaws," such as omissions of critical testimony of police agents that suggests that U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agents may be responsible for the fatalities and injuries that took place during the operation. The victims included two women (at least one of whom was pregnant), a man and a 14-year-old boy.

"The Honduran government's official investigation and report into the tragic and unnecessary killing of four villagers in Ahuas raises more questions than it answers," paper co-author and CEPR's Senior Associate for International Policy [Alexander Main](#) said. "The Public Ministry's report doesn't even attempt to establish who is ultimately responsible for the killings. Instead, it appears to be focused on absolving the DEA of all responsibility in the killings, through the omission of important testimony."

"The investigation of the killings in Ahuas was biased at best, or intentionally manipulated at worst," Rights Action Co-Director Annie Bird said. "In either case it is disturbing that the State Department and DEA stand behind the investigation, even as a U.S. police detective working for the U.S. Embassy participated in it must have had full knowledge of its flaws."

The [CEPR/Rights Action report](#) notes that several eyewitnesses, including shooting victims and DEA personnel have reported that at least one State Department-titled helicopter fired on the passenger boat carrying the shooting victims. But the report states, "the Public Ministry fails to mention any of these reports. Instead, the Ministry's report repeatedly seeks to validate the notion that all the shots that hit the victims and the boat occurred on the same horizontal plane, even though the forensic evidence that is cited suggests otherwise."

The [CEPR/Rights Action report](#) states:

"The Public Ministry is surely acutely aware that if one of the helicopters is in any way implicated in the shooting, then both the DEA - which reportedly determines when the helicopter guns may be used - and the State Department - which owns the helicopters and contracts its pilots - are implicated as well."

The State Department has maintained that the DEA only played a “supportive role” during the Ahuas operation, an assertion which is neither contradicted nor confirmed by the Public Ministry’s report on the incident, though this version of events is strongly implied in the report’s final observations.

The [CEPR/Rights Action report](#) also notes that the U.S. government did not allow Honduran investigators to question U.S. agents who participated in the May 11 operation, nor examine their firearms nor the helicopters’ mounted guns.

The [CEPR/Rights Action report](#) concludes that the Honduran Public Ministry’s findings do “not tell us much at all,” and don’t attempt to establish who killed the victims or whether the victims were “in any way involved in drug trafficking” as both Honduran and U.S. officials have alleged, nor what authority was actually in charge of the operation.

The authors call for the U.S. government to carry out its own investigation of the Ahuas incident, to better determine what occurred and to determine what responsibility, if any, DEA agents had in the killings. They also call on the U.S. government to cease to be an obstacle to an already flawed investigation by making DEA agents, weapons and documents – including an aerial surveillance video of the Ahuas operation in its entirety – available to investigators.

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