Purging and Transformation of the Honduran National Police Force

Context, Progress, and a Vision for the Future

November 2016
I. Distrust in the Honduran National Police

Civilian trust in the Honduran National Police has plummeted over the past few decades as rates of crime and corruption have soared. In 2010, Honduras’s homicide rate reached a record high of 86.5 homicides per 100,000 people. Between 2010 and 2014, Honduras topped the list of the world’s most dangerous peacetime nations. This violence, seemingly unchecked by government intervention, has led to low trust in government institutions, particularly in public security. As the graph below demonstrates, National Police are among the least trusted of government institutions, with a trust rate of only 37%.

Mistrust in the police stems in part from perceptions of the National Police as a weak institution. Honduras has the lowest ratio of police to population size in Central America, at just half the international standard set by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC. The Honduran National Police has not had sufficient resources to outfit its officers with equipment such as patrol cars and weapons. The weakness of the institution left it vulnerable to corruption, which infiltrated the National Police at every level from the highest-ranking directors to low-ranking patrol officers. As police reports in 2016 confirmed, low-ranking officers accepted bribes to ignore crimes ranging from traffic violations to murder. Officers hijacked cars from citizens, dealt drugs for gangs, and lent out their services as hitmen.

Several emblematic cases of police corruption demonstrate the criminal activity and impunity that historically flourished in the National Police. In 2011, university students Carlos David Pineda and Rafael Alejandro Vargas Castellanos, son of the Chancellor of the National Autonomous University of Honduras, Julieta Castellanos, were murdered by patrol officers when the officers attempted to hijack their car. High-ranking officials of the National Police have been involved in international drug trafficking and have planned and executed high-profile murders, which were sometimes carried out by other police working as hitmen. Their crimes included the assassination of prosecuting attorneys Orlan Chávez in 2013, and Marlene Banegas and Olga Patricia Eufragio in 2014. In 2009, police officers ambushed anti-drug czar Aristides González on his morning commute just months after he had arrested twelve officers for their involvement in a cocaine deal. Hitman attacked and killed organized crime expert Landaverde on the same street in 2014.

The National Police not only failed to respond to the security needs of its citizens, it was itself a danger to society. To make matters worse, the orchestrators and perpetrators of crimes committed by the police were well known to the public. No one led any significant effort to investigate or prosecute the widespread corruption within the police force. With the protectors of society acting as perpetrators, the nation desperately required a radical transformation of its police force.

II. Historical Context: Three Attempts at Police Reform

Since 2000, the Honduran government has made three major attempts to respond to the pressing issue of police corruption and ineffectiveness by reforming the National Police. Former Secretary of Security Gautama Fonseca carried out the first attempt to eradicate police corruption. He removed 2,090 police. However, Fonseca did not conduct the reform within the legal framework of Honduras’s labor law. Some of the officers who had been removed successfully sued the State for a lack of due process, and more than three hundred police were reinstated into the police force. The State was forced to pay L.480 million ($20,772,027 USD) for lost wages.

In 2012, the National Congress created the Commission to Reform Public Security (Comisión de Reforma de la Seguridad Pública - CRSP) to revise both the security and justice systems. The Commission proposed reforms, including seven major legal proposals, to various public ministries including the National Police, the Public Prosecutor’s Office, and the Supreme Court of Justice. It was unable, however, to translate the proposals into action. The State spent a total of 41 million lempiras (USD $1,784,936) on the efforts of the commission. Nonetheless, the program closed in 2014 without having removed a single police officer and without acquiring approval for any of its legal reforms.

From 2012 to 2015, the Department of Investigation and Evaluation of the Police Force (Dirección de Investigación y Evaluación de la Carrera Policial - DIECP) set out toward the same goal of reforming the police under the direction of Eduardo Villanueva and in 2016 under the direction of Óscar Vásquez Tercer. In four years, the DIECP evaluated 8,546 police. However, the evaluation process resulted in the removal of only 227 police, all of whom were low-ranking officers. Their efforts cost the State a total of L. 180.9 million (USD $7,875,489). Furthermore, as the majority of the police removed were low ranking, the orchestrators of major crimes and corruption in the police force remained untouched.

III. The Scandal that Broke the Camel’s Back

In April 2016, the New York Times published an article on a Honduran police scandal that broke open the deep corruption of the National Police before an international audience. The reports, which included investigations and evidence from the previous seven years, implicated two active generals and 25 active police officers in the 2009 murder of antidrug czar Julián Arístides González, among other crimes. Transcripts from interviews as well as footage from a surveillance video showed blatant evidence that the Director of the Police Jose Ramírez del Cid and the head of Police Analysis José Rigoberto Hernández Lanza casually planned out the

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2 “CRSP cierra sus puertas”, http://www.latribuna.hn/2014/03/21/crsp-cierra-sus-puertas/

heinous crime with the participation of 25 uniformed police officers in the office of Del Cid. Drug trafficker Winter Blanco hired the police to kill Arístides Gonzáles at the price of just L. 400,000 ($20,000 USD).

Investigations confirmed the connection of high-level police to a number of other high-profile murders that had remained in impunity for up to five years. Among them were the assassinations of attorneys Orlan Chávez, Marlene Banegas and Olga Patricia Eufragio. Reports also confirmed that police were responsible for the murder of Carlos David Pineda and Rafael Alejandro Vargas Castellanos.

Police were responsible for a number of other crimes including massacres, murders, kidnappings, extortion, arbitrary arrest, armed robbery, carjacking and attacks on the media. Investigations connected at least 38 high-ranking police and 43 patrol officers with the MS13 gang, 18 of who were involved in the murders of Aristídes González and Gustavo Alfredo Landaverde. Members of the National Police were also responsible for crimes of public corruption. For example, police patrol car driver Ramón Edgardo Luque was lending money to other police far beyond the capacity he should have had as a driver. In 2015, a court sentenced Luque to five years in prison for the illicit enrichment of L. 10.3 million ($443,700 USD).

IV. The Special Commission for Police Reform

The international scandal pushed the administration of President Juan Orlando Hernandez to respond to the flagrant corruption. The administration proposed to Congress the creation of special commission for the purging and reform of the National Police. Congress passed the legislation and gave the Special Commission for Police Reform one year to evaluate the police force and make recommendations for change.

The first major decision of the Commission was to begin investigation at the very top with the highest-ranking police officers and work their way down to the bottom. In doing so, they would avoid the mistakes of previous attempts at reform that failed to assess high-ranking officers and of corruption. Throughout the process, the Commission has been careful to follow the legal framework of the labor code. The charts below, which map the Commission’s course of action for both the removal of police and the restructuring of the police force, demonstrate their attention to the legal framework.
The Commission began the process at the top by reviewing nine generals. They removed six. Over the next two months, they reviewed 418 police in the next four highest ranks of the National Police, and removed 155 high-ranking officials. By November 2016, just six months after the process began, the Commission had evaluated a total of 2,273 police and 1,521 (64%) were removed from the police force. Three hundred and sixty-four (61%) of those removed from their position were high-ranking officers. The Commission reincorporated 736 police into the restructured police force. The only cost for this thorough process has been severance pay for removed police, which has totaled L.158 million (USD 6,756,200).

**Number Removed, by Rank**

Besides removing two-thirds of evaluated officers in the force, the Special Commission for Police Reform also removed police who were involved in high profile crimes including those who had planned and carried out the murders of Arístides González, Vargas Castellanos, Marlene Banegas and Olga Patricia Eufragio. Thus far, seventeen officials and seven patrol
officers have also been removed from the police force for their involvement with the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang.

**V. More Work to Be Done**

Though reform efforts are addressing major sources of corruption in the National Police force, the Honduran government has yet to achieve a National Police that can operate effectively, reliably and transparently for the protection of its people. Due in great part to weak and ineffective leadership, the National Police has failed to develop a professional, effective, and organized system in four key areas of management.

**A. Human Resource**

**B.**

The National Police has demonstrated a lack of management in its Human Resource Department. In 2013 it was discovered that the National Police did not keep an accurate record of its personnel. Former Secretary of Security Arturo Corrales conducted a census and discovered that out of 12,800 police on record only 9,350 officers were found at their post. In addition, a 2015 study carried out by the Association for a More Just Society/Transparency International (AJS/T) found that 80% of employee files in the Ministry of Security were missing important documentation such as appointment letters and documentation confirming that individuals had passed police training. ASJ/TI audited HR documentation and found that the Ministry of Security demonstrated only 29% compliance with HR procedures. Furthermore, the Commission recently discovered that the National Police manages its payroll of 12,000 employees in one Excel spreadsheet from a laptop, demonstrating significant technological weakness and vulnerability to manipulation.

**C. Logistics**

The National Police has additionally displayed poor administration of its logistical resources. The institution owns only 2,031 patrol vehicles, one for every six police, limiting their

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4 “Honduras: La policía comunitaria controlada con sistema GPS”

investigations and patrolling ability. Moreover, the Commission found that 167 vehicles were missing. In general, vehicles were assigned to high-ranking officials without following formal protocol, and only 61% were properly equipped with a GPS system. The National Police also failed to manage registries and distribution of weapons. It did not keep an inventory of the weapons registered or the officers to whom they were assigned.

D. Legal Department

The National Police has shown irregularities in its administration of legal issues. The Commission found that lawyers working for the Ministry of Security accepted bribes from former police who had been removed from the force, promising to reinstate them for a payment of L. 20,000 ($890 USD). When the Commission investigated top officers, they discovered that entire employee files were missing and others had been scrubbed clean of any negative information. The Commission believes that certain records were intentionally removed from legal files before they could be reviewed, including that of the former director of the National Police Juan Carlos Bonilla Valla. The Commission also found that the National police only maintain employee records as well as other important documentation, such as arrest warrants, in paper format. A national database does not exist. Police therefore cannot share records between police stations in different cities or departments.

E. Finances

The National Police has demonstrated mismanagement of its budget. An audit of a purchase of armored vehicles by the Ministry of Security, for example, revealed that the department planned to purchase 14 vehicles even though it had only been authorized to purchase five. By the end of the procedure, the department purchased a total thirteen vehicles. However, it did not at any point develop or sign a contract with the provider of the vehicles. These irregularities demonstrate a lack of attention to budget and a failure to follow protocol.

F. Department of Police Investigation

The National Police’s Department of Police Investigation (DPI) has also failed to manage its employees and resources well. The director of DPI Deputy Commissioner Lázaro Lagos was removed from his position for refusing to obey orders given to him by his superiors. With removal of many other investigators, DPI does not have a sufficient number of laboratory technicians trained to run its investigative laboratories. Throughout their administration and in these five areas in particular, the National Police and the DPI have lacked adequate personnel, resources, and leadership to successfully manage the current police force. This suggests that the institutions will not be capable of managing a fully reformed police force without significant restructuring and reform.

VI. Goals for 2021

In response to the corruption and institutional weaknesses described above, over the next five years, the Special Commission for Police Reform aims to develop a transparent, reliable and internationally certified police force that can guarantee civil and human rights to Honduran
citizens. With the most crucial problems identified, the Special Commission for Police Reform has developed a plan to address and strengthen the weaknesses of the National Police in order to ensure the success of the police reform.

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<th>Anticipated Results of the Police Reform in 2021</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lower the homicide rate</strong> to 28 per 100,000 people</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Complete Investigations of 50%</strong> of homicide cases</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reduce by 50%</strong> extortion, kidnapping, and drug trafficking</td>
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### A. Police Transformation

A central goal for the Commission in the next five years is that the National Police hire and thoroughly train 26,000 new police. In doing so, the rate of police in Honduras will move from 153 police for every 100,000 people to the international standard of 300 police for every 100,000 people as set by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The Commission aims to see that by 2021, all police will have passed through an intensive training and certification process that is competitive with international standards. The training process will cultivate a **new police culture** that emphasizes the role of the police in serving society and respecting human rights. To encourage the growth of the new police culture, the National Police will promote officers based on merit and their reflection of the new values of the National Police. Rigorous training for police leadership must also take place in order to prepare officials to successfully oversee the thousands of new recruits, the increase in resources and technology and the many reforms that will be put into place. Society will hold the police accountable with a new **system of reporting** through which civilians will be able to report any corruption and crime that they observe in the police force.

### B. Logistics

The National Police requires sufficient resources to allow patrol officers, investigators, administrators and other police personnel to perform their jobs effectively and efficiently in the new police force. By 2021, the National Police will procure 500 additional patrol vehicles. All of the vehicles will be equipped with a GPS system, and the police will distribute patrol vehicles and armored vehicles to members of the police force according to protocol. The institution will also insure that each member of the police is equipped with a registered firearm.

### C. Department of Police Investigations

In addition, it is imperative that the National Police develops the Department of Police Investigations (DPI) into a highly specialized unit in scientific criminal investigation with up-to-date technology so that the National Police has the resources to thoroughly and successfully investigate crimes. The institution has built High-tech laboratories for police investigations. However, the DPI does not currently have enough well-trained lab technicians to operate them. With fully furnished and officially certified investigative team, the National Police will be equipped to tackle the many cases that remain in impunity today.

### VII. How Do We Get There?
A. 50 New Champions

1. Selection of Champions

The first and most important task of the reform in the next five years is to select new Champions of the Transformation of the National Police. The Champions will be charged with the duty of not only removing the corruption, crime and mismanagement that exist in the police force, but they will also be responsible for preparing themselves to complete the goals of the new police structure. The Champions will manage 26,000 new police recruits as well as the establishment of a specialized unit of scientific investigation and the development of transparent and reliable legal, financial and logistical systems. The selection of Champions is therefore imperative to the success of the five year plan and the entire reform of the National Police.

The selection of these champions will involve an in-depth process of vetting conducted with the supervision and participation of the Commissions’ collaborators including the United Nations, the Colombian government, the Panamanian government, Transparency International, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The selection will include the following steps:

- Revision and approval of regulations for the selection of new leadership
- Revision and refining of the new Organization Chart of the police force and the development of profiles, to be filled out by the champions.
- Preparation of the list of candidates.
- Submission of the required documents. Hiring documents should be submitted digitally and in a uniform format. Each officer will provide his/her background information, curriculum vitae and other relevant information online. They will also digitally upload supporting documents.
- First revision to assess compliance with the basic requirements
- Inspection of the Candidates. The Inspection of the Candidates will involve six reports.
  - Review of the candidates’ previous work history and job performance, conducted by investigators of the Special Commission for Police Reform.
  - Polygraph test conducted by the United States Embassy
  - Doping test conducted by Forensic Specialists with the supervision of the embassy
  - Psychometric test conducted by PWC
  - Review of the candidate’s background information including their financial and socio-economic status by investigators of the Commission
  - Medical examination
- Preparation of the Records. The Records will include the 6 reports presented by a representative of each report under the supervision of Transparency International, IDB, and Kauris. The collaborators involved in the selection will all give the Records their seal of approval.
- Revision of the Record by the Special Commission for Police Reform

After the selection process is completed, the Commission will offer their recommendations for the champions who will be placed into key leadership positions. The final decision will then be presented to the President of Honduras and to the National Congress. The timeline of the project will be from November 2016 to January 2017.
2. **International Coaches**

To guide the champions through the many tasks and changes of the reform, the Special Commission for Police Reform will bring in fifty highly experienced police from other countries to assist in the transformation of the management of the National Police and to act as personal coaches to each champion. The coaching team should consist of individuals with decades of experience and expertise in policing in other countries that have had success in law enforcement. Each champion will be assigned a police expert for one to two years to work alongside them and train them in effective and honest policing practices. The timeline for the project will be November 2016 to 2018.

3. **Officer School and the Police University**

Another important step to fully transforming the National Police is to revolutionize the education that the police receive. The educational system of the National Officers School and the Police University should be revamped to provide the new champions with intensive classes in key areas of police education. The curriculum will be designed by internationally certified, expert instructors who will specifically tailor the program to the new National Police. The instructors will also be in charge of personally training the new recruits, as was previously accomplished in the Technological Institute for Police (Instituto Tecnologico Policial - ITP). The timeline for the transformation of the Educational System of the Police will be November 2016 – 2018.

B. **International Certification of the ALL of the new National Police**

The Special Commission for Police Reform is recommending that the Congress disband DIECP (the Department of Investigation and Evaluation of the Police Force) and, in its place, create a new institution called DIADAPOL. DIADAPOL will continue the process of vetting the police with the supervision of both the collaborators of the Commission and civil society.

The structure and methodology of DIADAPOL should be designed after the successful methodology used by the Special Commission for Police Reform. The methodology should include thorough and regular reviews of the members of the police force. For example, high level officials will have to pass through a vetting process every 12 months. Patrol officers will be reviewed semiannually or when suspicious behavior arises. DIADPOL will also provide public reports on the monitoring of the National Police. Civil society, along with the collaborators, will be involved in the process of defining the structure and methodology of DIADAPOL. The timeline the certification of the police force will be November 2016 – 2018.

C. **Transformation of Patrol Officers**

The transformation of the police force requires a specific focus on the training and quality of patrol officers. The goal of the Special Commission for Police Reform is that a new, internationally competitive curriculum for patrol officer training will be developed in the next year. In the next five years, the new police force of 26,000 recruits will be internationally certified. The Commission will refine the final selection of patrol office candidates and will
present its selection to the Technological Institute for Police (Instituto Tecnologico Policjal – ITP).

Current patrol officers should also pass through a certified intensive training program to instill in them the new expectations and protocols for the National Police. The program will also train current patrol officers in the use of new technology used by the police force. A new system of monitoring and supervision will be put in to place to hold the patrol officers accountable to excellent and trustworthy policing. The timeframe for the transformation of the patrol officer will be November 2016 – 2018.

D. A New Legal Framework

In order to ensure a lasting reform of the National Police, the Commission and the Minister of Security should review the Organic Law of the Police and the Police Career Law and seek approval from the National Congress by January 2017.

The Commission will outline eighteen regulations for the legal structure of the police. After gaining approval for the outline, it will then define, prioritize, and write out the regulations so that the Ministry of Security and the Commission’s collaborators can revise them. The Commission will then seek approval for the 18 regulations from Congress. The timeline for the transformation of the legal structure of the National Police will be from November 2016 to 2018.

E. Transformation of the Administration

The process to successfully transform the National Police must include wide-ranging improvements in the management of the police force, particularly in the areas of Human Resources logistics, legal matters, and finances. The different administrations will be reengineered in the following key areas:

- **Human Resources**: The software system SAP will be implemented into Human Resources to improve the organization of the police payroll.
- **Logistics**: Police resources will be increased, specifically patrol cars and fire arms. Regulations will be put in to place to manage the use and inventory of resources.
- **Legal**: A new legal department will be created with a system of supervision and regulation to ensure that legal cases are handled with integrity and transparency.
- **Purchasing and Finances**: The National Police will develop transparent and reliable systems for the management of the institution’s budget as well as for purchasing procedures.

The Commission will contract a group of two or three consultants to conduct a preliminary diagnosis, and later an in-depth diagnosis, of each area. Based on the findings of the diagnosis, the Commission will identify major changes that need to be implemented. The timeline for this process will be from November 2015 to 2018.

F. Modern Police Equipment

The National Police must be equipped with the necessary modern tools and resources to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. In five years, the National Police will have 26,000 new police. By then the police force should have an addition of 500 patrol vehicles equipped with GPS systems, tablets, and a radio system. The National Police should also provide
their officers with registered firearms and non-deadly weapons. Up-to-date information technology including digital investigation files and digital arrest warrants are also required for the police in all regions of the nation to be able to communicate and work together as one entity.

In five years, the Commission aims to carry out three procedures for the transformation the area of police logistics. First, it will conduct an inventory and diagnosis of the current situation of police equipment. Second, it will develop a four-year acquisition plan in conjunction with the Tasa de Seguridad and the Commission’s international collaborators. Third, it will implement the acquisitions plan by coordinating national and international efforts to purchase the necessary equipment. The timeline for the project will be from November 2016 to 2018.

G. **New Police Culture**

The success of a new National Police greatly depends on its ability to cultivate an entirely new police culture that is effective in preventing and investigating crimes, transparent and trustworthy in its operations, and that demonstrates respect for human rights of its citizens. In order to encourage members of the police to strive for excellence in their work and their character, the National Police will promote police officers’ based on their performance and results as well as their reflection of respect for human rights and integrity in their policing. New recruits, patrol officers, and police officials will all receive a formal education that includes instruction on how to respect human rights as a member of the National Police. Both the international coaches and members of society will supervise the implementation of police training. The timeframe for the project will be from November 2016 to 2018.

H. **Accompaniment by Civil Society**

A Civil Society Commission will be developed to oversee the implementation of the five-year plan for the transformation of the National Police. The commission will provide quarterly reports to society on the progress of the five year plan and the police reform. In addition, the coaches and international collaborators will provide semiannual reports on their advances. After XX months, the Civil Society Commission will transition into a Commission of Accompaniment that will work alongside DIADAPOL to support and monitor its work in regularly reviewing the National Police. The timeline for the project will be from November 2016 to 2018.

VIII. **Additional Tasks Monitored by the Commission**

The Special Commission for Police Reform will continue to monitor tasks that are invaluable to the transformation of the National Police but that are not directly under the Commission’s supervision.

A. **Criminal Investigations**

First, the State must investigate and prosecute the officers that the Commission removed from the National Police. The Commission will work to motivate a Criminal Investigation of the most pressing cases and will meet with the Public Prosecutor’s office regularly to share information in support of the investigations and prosecution.

B. **Monitoring Process**
Second, a **monitoring process** must be developed to observe the behavior of individuals who were removed from the police. Top priority should be given to those who are at a higher risk of committing crimes. The Commission will meet regularly with those responsible for the structure that will be put into place to carry out the monitoring process.

C. **System of Reporting**

Third, a complete transformation requires a functioning and reliable **system of reporting** that will allow citizens to report poor police behavior or crimes committed by police. The system of reporting should be put into place so that the government can respond to reports by citizens, thoroughly investigate the police in question, and hold the National Police accountable for its actions. The Commission will meet regularly with the directors of Honduras Reporting (Honduras Denuncias), the reporting system created by the Commission, to follow up on the system of reporting. The timeline of the project will be from November 2016 to 2018.

D. **The Special Commission for Police Reform’s Relationship with Society**

In a nation where citizens have little trust in their police, an effective new system of policing will require constant communication with society to keep people well informed and involved in decisions that with inevitably affect their safety. The Special Commission for Police Reform will continue to work to improve its relationship with civil society through various media outlets. They will release official statements through public platforms and hold regular press conferences, public programs, and interviews to inform society on the progress of the five-year plan. The Commission will also communicate regularly with its collaborators, including G-16 and the Mission of Support Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (Misión de Apoyo contra la Corrupción y Impunidad en Honduras - MACCIH). Various other sectors of society will also be kept up-to-date on the progress of the plan, particularly NGOs, businesses and religious organizations such as the Alliance for Peace and Justice (APJ), the National Commission for Human Rights (CONADEH), the Honduran Council for Private Enterprises (COHEP), and churches in Honduras. The Commission will continue to improve its relationship with the people of Honduras by communicating with them via social media including Facebook and Twitter. Commission members will also be conducting onsite visits to different regions in the country to keep the nation informed. A public relations coordinator along with a social media coordinator and press relations coordinator will supervise the progress of the improved public relations. The timeline of the project will be from November 2016 to 2018.

E. **Commission Administration**

The Special Commission for Police Reform will contract individuals to work for the Commission in various capacities over the next five years. Three or four personnel for administrative support including administrative assistants, a receptionist and an accountant are required for the Commission to be able to operate at its highest capacity. It will also contract one or two employees in the area of Information Technology, two employees in the area of security and one employee for project management.

IX. **Support for the Washington Plan**

Though the Commission has already removed many of the sources of police corruption, the National Police continues to lack the resources, personnel and training it needs to operate effectively and to secure itself against any potential corruption in the future. The Honduran
government has a lot of work ahead of it to reach the international standard for the size of its police force and to equip that police force with the necessary tools to prevent, respond to and investigate crime. The Commission seeks your support to move forward in this national transformation. With the five-year plan, the National Police can earn back the trust of its citizens by developing a thoroughly trained police force that is efficient, effective, and transparent with police officers who respect human rights. Please, consider giving your support to achieve a trustworthy Honduran National Police.