

widespread sentiment that criminals will not be brought to justice, has been a catalyst for violent crime, the proliferation of private security and, an alleged recourse to privately-financed death squads involving current or former military personnel.

The Congress plans to consider a new **Criminal Procedure Code** in 1999 to expedite cases and provide greater rights to the accused. In reality however, the lack of resources is an almost insuperable hurdle and the long tradition of corruption and incompetence in the police and judiciary would make any improvements difficult to achieve.

Honduran poverty levels and birth rates are similar to those of Sub-Saharan Africa. Widespread poverty and a burgeoning population contribute to general problems of health and unemployment. **Child poverty and exploitation** are critical problems in Honduras, which has a large population of street children. Hurricane Mitch further compounded the situation and left a significant number of new orphans in its wake.

The struggle of indigenous peoples in Honduras continues, particularly the Garifunas on the Atlantic Coast. The Garifunas are currently protesting the recent Government-promoted Constitutional Amendment that allow foreigners to purchase beachfront property, lands traditionally inhabited and claimed by the Garifunas.

Freedom of the press is not a major problem in Honduras, although the President, who is the owner of one of the nation's largest newspapers, is said to influence the press through the use of gifts and other benefits.

### **CANADIAN POSITION**

Officials of the Canadian Embassy have met with the Minister of Defence, the Human Rights Commissioner, and officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Honduras to discuss human rights issues, civilian policing, public security and judicial and military reforms in Honduras. Embassy officials maintain regular contact with human rights NGOs in Honduras -- particularly CODEH, COFADEH and Casa Alianza -- and have provided financial support for human rights-related activities.

Canadian officials monitor human rights cases, including the violent deaths of Gerson Noel Delgado, Mario Escalante Espinal, William Fredy Perez and the defamation case which was launched against human rights lawyer, Ramon Custodio, by the former Commander of the Armed Forces. Canadian officials are also following the cases being investigated by the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights such as that of Carlos Enrique Jaco.

Canada has funded a number of **peace-building and democratic development projects** in Honduras. In 1997-1998, Canada, through the Embassy's Canada Fund, supported projects promoting the welfare and rights of children, the indigenous, and women.