



[Home](#) > [Research](#) > [Responses to Information Requests](#)

RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIR's](#) | [Help](#)

17 March 2003

HND41066.E

Honduras: Whether there is a law in Honduras that criminalizes the wearing of tattoos; reports of state agents arresting, detaining, mistreating or murdering people with tattoos that do not belong to gangs (2001 to March 2003)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The following information was provided by the Regional Coordinator of the Juvenile Justice and Gangs Programme of Save the Children-UK Office for Central America and the Caribbean in 11 March 2003 correspondence.

According to the Regional Coordinator, the Honduran Penal Code criminalizes membership in "pernicious gangs" with sentences of three to six years' imprisonment, so police law allows for the detention of gang members. Considering that most gang members have tattoos, it is police policy to detain persons with tattoos, though "not [with] any kind of tattoo...but [just with] characteristic gang tattoo[s]." In theory, police officers should be able to recognize gang tattoos from non-gang tattoos, but, in practice, police officers often detain young people with any kind of "suspicious" tattoo, especially in the poorer areas of Honduras. These laws and policies are controversial because they allow state authorities to detain any "supposed criminals" who allegedly belongs to a gang or bears non-gang related tattoos. As a result of the police discretion in detaining people with tattoos, "many judges do not use tattoos as evidence" during hearings (ibid.).

Several *Tiempo* articles reported the killing of young people with tattoos who were allegedly not members of gangs (13 Aug. 2002; 4 Nov. 2001; 20 Sept. 2001). The 13 August 2002 *Tiempo* report states that Edin Joel Velásquez Romero was killed by four alleged gang members, while the 4 November 2001 *Tiempo* report states that two young people were killed by [translation] "the same people who have taken it upon themselves to eliminate gang members." The 20 September 2001 *Tiempo* report states that an alleged social cleansing death squad killed two people with tattoos. One of the victims was Modesto Morales Hernández who had belonged to the Mara 18 gang while living in the United States but who, on his return to Honduras two years ago, had left the gang (*Tiempo* 20 Sept. 2001). At the time of his death, however, Morales still displayed the tattoos of his former gang on his abdomen (ibid.).

On the issue of tattoos, a 2002 report on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions in Honduras, which was submitted to the Commission on Human Rights, states that "every child with a tattoo and street child is stigmatised as a criminal who is creating an unfriendly climate for investment and tourism in the country" (UN 14 June 2002, 11). The report further states that every young person with a tattoo, "whether or not he or she belongs to a gang, is hunted down, by the security forces or other unknown persons" (ibid., 14). Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that some of the 700 young people killed in the last five years in Honduras were murdered by police who were "bent on wiping out suspected gang members" (25 Nov. 2002).

Please consult HND41103.E of 10 March 2003 for additional information on gangs in Honduras, including those gang members killed by state agents.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Los Angeles Times. 25 November 2002. T. Christian Miller. "Dying Young in Honduras; Gangs with Roots in L.A. Are Largely to Blame for the Increasing Violence. But Another Group Has Blood on Its Hands as well: The Police." (NEXIS)

Save the Children-UK Office for Central America and the Caribbean, Tegucigalpa. 11 March 2003. Correspondence from the Regional Coordinator of the Juvenile Justice and Gangs Programme.

Tiempo [San Pedro Sula]. 13 August 2002. "En taxi andaban mareros que anoche mataron a un trabajador de llanteras." <<http://www.tiempo.hn/EDICANTE/2002/agosto/agosto13/sucesos/suceso13.htm>> [Accessed 13 Mar. 2003]

_____. 4 November 2001. "Acribillan a dos jóvenes en Medina." <<http://www.tiempo.hn/EDICANTE/2001/noviembre/nov4/sucesos/suceso5.htm>> [Accessed 13 Mar. 2003]

_____. 20 September 2001. "Eliminan a dos supuestos mareros." <<http://www.tiempo.hn/EDICANTE/2001/septiembre/9%20septiembre/sucesos/suceso3.htm>> [Accessed 13 Mar. 2003]

United Nations (UN). 14 June 2002. Commission on Human Rights, Economic and Social Council. "Civil and Political Rights, including the Question of Disappearances and Summary Executions: Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions: Report of the Special Rapporteur, Ms. Asma Jahangir, submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/36." (E/CN.4/2003/3/Add.2) <http://www.casa-alianza.org/ES/human-rights/violations/ejecuciones_hond_en.pdf> [Accessed 12 Mar. 2003]

Additional Sources Consulted

IRB Databases

LEXIS/NEXIS

World News Connection (WNC)

Internet sites including:

Amnesty International

Casa Alianza

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2001. 2002

Human Rights Watch

La Prensa [San Pedro Sula]. Search engine. 2001-2002

La Tribuna [Tegucigalpa]. Search engine. 2001-2002

United Nations

Search engines:

Alltheweb.com

Google

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.