



**INTERNATIONAL  
DAY** for the  
**ERADICATION  
of POVERTY**  
17 OCTOBER



Commemorative Event to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2022

**“Dignity for all in practice: the commitments we make together for social justice, peace and the planet”**

Monday, 17th of October 2022

## **Statement by CARLOS HERNANDEZ**

Good Morning

I want to tell you my story... A story about dignity...

My name is Carlos Hernandez,

I left Honduras fleeing extreme poverty and violence at the age of 15, I am a survivor.

Soy un catracho. I come from a people who keep strong and protect happiness despite years of struggle.

I grew up in San Pedro Sula in an environment where gangs ruled; "La Mara MS X13", "LA MARA 18", "LA MAO MAO"

I am an immigrant. I am Latino. I am a person of color.

For me, living in Dignity means having access. Having access to education, to food, to shelter.

When I was a child, I had limited access to these things. Often, my mother didn't have money to feed us. She was a single mother and we were six kids. She was the person who protected me, who inspired me, who taught me the value of education. A strong woman with a big heart. My mother's story represents that

of the majority of mothers in my country: taking care of their families, finding solutions to the problems in schools and within the community. They are empowered mothers; they don't have a choice but to protect their children.

When my father left us, money became impossible. We no longer had a place to live. Many times we didn't have food and I was hungry. Hunger hurts when you are little, no kid should suffer from hunger around the world with the resources we have.

This meant that everyone in the family had to work, no matter if we were children. I've worked since I remember with my brothers and sisters. When you don't have access to anything, your only focus is survival. Being able to eat, to protect your family, even when it means doing something you feel is not right.

It's hard to escape the violence. I immigrated after gang members killed my older brother Will. They wanted to kill me too even though I was a child.

To escape, I had to leave Honduras. I crossed Central America by foot and bus, through Mexico on the roof of La Bestia, a dangerous train, until finally reaching the United States border. I then went to immigration detention in Texas and Washington State, where I met a lot of kids who were members of gangs. But first of all, they were artists, they were good painters, they drew very well, they were smart, and they were great magicians. Often, In Latin America, kids' and youth's lives are wasted because simply surviving poverty and violence takes up all of the energy. Many of them do not have a choice but to join gangs or to immigrate. My brother was very talented, he was a singer and even acted in a Honduran movie, he organized shows in his school with very few resources. I am convinced that if the Honduras of our childhood had more access to education, and had been a more advantaged environment, he would still be alive and doing great things today.

Leaving my country gave me the opportunity to have access to education, the power of books made a difference in my life and opened my mind. The first time I had access to a book was in Mexico, when I was crossing undocumented, someone gave me the story of Galileo Galilei and I was so amazed to learn about the universe, his works and his impact on the world. I continued

discovering books at the immigration detention center. However, the administration denied me access to education because I didn't have documents. They didn't allow me to receive a High School Equivalency Diploma. I was denied something that could dignify me.

Dignity is not only about having access to economic resources; this is also about how society looks at you because of the color of your skin or because of your gender, and how this gives you more or fewer privileges. This is racism.

Despite everything that happened, when I got released from the detention center, I graduated from High School and College, all while working three different jobs and supporting my family. Like many immigrants, I send remittances to Honduras. I contribute not only to help my family, but to support my country. This is the way people outside the country contribute not to leave our people behind.

In my everyday life in New York, I try to find ways to help people have a dignified life. To help people get connected with education, have access to food, do their paperwork. The community is a space where you learn and share those tools, where you find support. If it is not changing the world, I want to at least make a small change in the life of one person and this is important. It is like planting a seed, *una semilla*.

Being an immigrant is most of the time, not a choice. It is a consequence of poverty. In Honduras today our only choice is to fight, even though we have a lot of resources. I believe we should make big changes, without outsiders imposing their perception of what is the best for Honduras. We need all governments to protect activists trying to build a better future. We don't need anymore martyrs, we need people alive to make changes. We Hondurans have two powerful strengths on our side: our capacity to fight against injustice and poverty; and the capacity to be happy and share happiness, give the best of ourselves despite our struggles. Political changes are the ones that last and can change people's lives. Living with dignity is possible if policymakers make the choice to believe in everyone's capacity and intelligence, and to ensure access to human rights no matter who you are and where you are from.

Thank you so much.