

# ***Ex-President Of Honduras Is Detained In Drug Case***

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TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras — Honduran authorities detained former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández on Tuesday to potentially face extradition and drug charges in the United States, capping a spectacular downfall for one of Central America's most powerful men.

Mr. Hernández, who led the country for eight years and stepped down less than a month ago, was escorted by security officers from his home, wearing a bulletproof vest and shackles that bound him hand and foot.

"It's not an easy moment, I don't wish it on anybody," Mr. Hernández said in an audio message posted on his Twitter profile at 5 a.m. on Tuesday.

"I'm ready to present myself voluntarily and defend myself in accordance with the law," he said in a separate message on Facebook, shortly after.

Fireworks exploded around the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa almost immediately after Mr. Hernández was led away from his home, and about a hundred protesters gathered around his residence to celebrate his detention. The former president is deeply unpopular, accused of allowing organized crime and corruption to penetrate the highest echelons of power, keeping Honduras one of the poorest and most violent countries in Latin America.

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## ***An arrest quickly follows an extradition request from the U.S.***

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"Justice has been served for Honduras," said Ana María Torres, a university student who came to revel in Mr. Hernández's arrest. "He left the country in ruins and now the gringos are going to take him so that he pays the price of being a narco."

Police trucks and black sports utility vehicles with tinted windows surrounded his home in an upmarket gated community on Monday night, just minutes after the country's Foreign Ministry revealed that it had received an extradition request from the United States for a politician. On Tuesday morning, he opened his door to the authorities, who took him away.

The extradition request, presented to Honduras's Supreme Court and seen by The New York Times, claims Mr. Hernández participated in a "violent drug-trafficking conspiracy" that since 2004 has transported 500 tons of cocaine from Venezuela and Colombia to the United States via Honduras. The document claims that Mr. Hernández received millions of dollars in bribes for facilitating the shipments and shielding traffickers from prosecution.

The former president's brother, Juan Antonio Hernández, is serving a life sentence in the United States for cocaine trafficking. Another convicted cocaine trafficker who implicated the former president, Geovanny Fuentes, received the same sentence last week.

Mr. Hernández is expected to be presented in court on Wednesday. In the past, he has repeatedly denied all drug-related accusations, claiming that unspecified voice recordings made by the Drug Enforcement Administration show his innocence.

It is not clear if, or when, Mr. Hernández may be extradited to the United States and whether he will be accused of crimes at home. Honduras's Supreme Court is expected to rule on whether to grant the extradition request.

A Supreme Court judge who was named on Tuesday to hear Mr. Hernández's case is affiliated with the former president's party and has a history of absolving suspects in corruption cases, said Gabriela Castellanos, the head of National Anti-Corruption Council, an independent body created by congress.

Honduras, which relies heavily on American aid, has never denied a U.S. extradition request, said Marlon Duarte, a Tegucigalpa-based lawyer who has participated in five extradition cases. But a case against a recent president has no precedent, and Mr. Hernández retains support in the judicial system, he said.

Honduras's new president, Xiomara Castro, has accused Mr. Hernández of turning the country into a "narco-dictatorship." She was elected in November after promising to overhaul the system of corruption and impunity that flourished under Mr. Hernández, contributing to a mass exodus of its citizens to the United States.

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*Joan Suazo reported from Tegucigalpa, and Anatoly Kurmanaev from Oaxaca, Mexico. Oscar Lopez contributed reporting from Mexico City.*