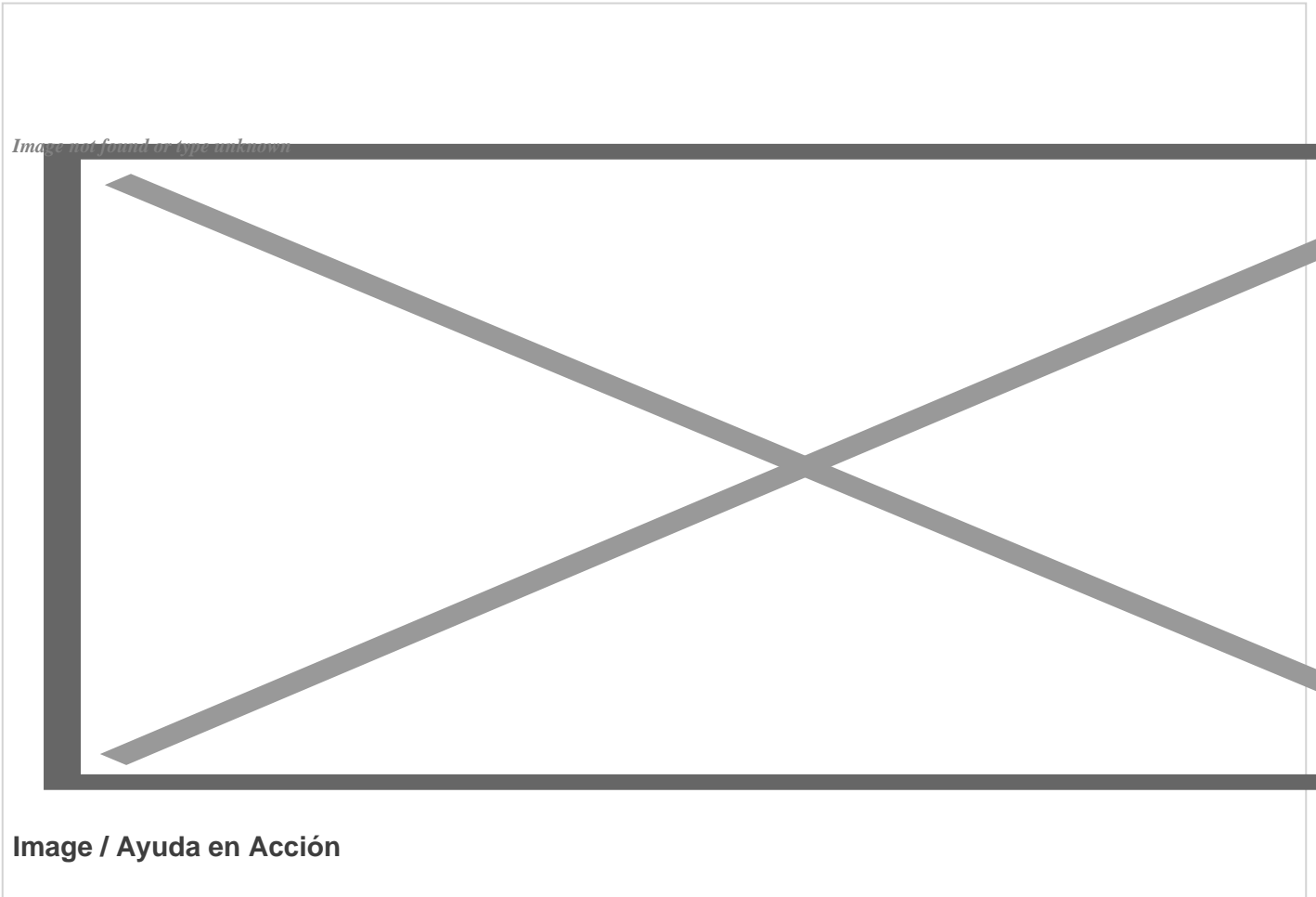


Honduran government promotes free energy project for the poor



By María Josefina Arce.

During the electoral campaign and in her inauguration speech on January 27th as president of Honduras, Xiomara Castro, has had very much in mind the citizens affected by poverty, a scourge that today covers 71% of the almost ten million inhabitants of the Central American country.

The need to help the most disadvantaged Hondurans to have free access to energy has been a topic that has been addressed several times. On this path, a few days after taking office, Xiomara Castro has sent to Congress a proposal so that more than one million 300 thousand poor citizens can have this service free of charge.

For this it is necessary to transform the General Law of the Electricity Industry, which does not allow subsidies for the disadvantaged. But the road will not be easy, with a legislative body with political disagreements and fragmented, which may slow down the actions of the new government to solve the existing serious problems, the result of 12 years of a neoliberal model.

Undoubtedly, Castro's agenda will face resistance from the private powers that have no interest in improving the living conditions of Hondurans, nor in combating corruption and impunity that benefits many politicians.

The situation inherited from the administration of Juan Orlando Hernández is very complex in several aspects. One of them is the huge debt of 80 billion lempiras, more than three billion dollars, of the state-owned Empresa Nacional de Energía Eléctrica.

A serious problem that threatens public finances and translates into higher electricity bills for the people, new taxes and the great limitation to dedicate funds to other important areas for citizen welfare such as health and education.

As experts point out, this situation is also a brake for national and foreign investment, due to the lack of a strong electric system.

The new authorities have denounced the existence of overpriced and rigged contracts to favor private interests, which have bled the state-owned company dry.

They specified that throughout these years, dozens of contracts for the generation of solar, thermal and hydroelectric energy have been granted at onerous prices which are detrimental to the national interest.

Although the new government is working on a plan to reduce the company's losses, the problem will not be easily solved, since it has been growing over the last 12 years.

Xiomara Castro, who came to the presidency with high popular acceptance, faces a difficult scenario. A country with a condition of poverty, insecurity and corruption, with a weakened institutional framework and the resistance of those who do not want to see their particular interests affected.

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