

OPEN LETTER

UNACCEPTABLE STATEMENTS OF WORLD BANK PRESIDENT JIM KIM ON BERTA CÁCERES' MURDER

- Jim Kim's words imply tacit justification of the murder of human rights defenders
- His concept of "development" contradicts UN human rights guidelines

Mesoamerica, May 9, 2016 - The 750 women human rights defenders from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua who make up the **Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders** hereby express our outrage and concern over recent statements made by World Bank President **Jim Kim** last April 6 at the Union Theological Seminary in New York (USA). He made the remarks in his keynote address on the Principle of Mercy, after being questioned over the murder of our comrade **Berta Cáceres**. His words, in our view, imply a tacit justification of this crime and, thus, of other attacks against defenders of territory and natural resources.¹

With regards to the murders of indigenous rights defenders, **Jim Kim** stated that *"You cannot do the kind of work we [at the World Bank] are trying to do and not have some of these incidents happen."* He then went on to make a series of arguments that imply the acceptance of a "development" concept that violates the basic rights of persons, peoples and communities.

According to this concept, some peoples, cosmovisions and ways of living on the planet may be sacrificed for the benefit of those who proffer and sustain the hegemonic development model in the so-called "developed countries." Moreover, such policies are often implemented without paying heed to mechanisms established by the UN, such as the ILO Convention 169. Instead of looking out for the interests of the communities, frequently corrupt local authorities act in favor of private companies, provoking social conflicts, repression, and attacks against individuals and organizations engaged in the defense of human rights.

The **World Bank** President, wedded to a vision that is absolutely uncritical of the economic development model determining unsustainable energy consumption levels now in use, championed the hydroelectric companies, arguing for the supposedly lesser environmental impact that these would have in comparison to other systems of energy production. This argument clearly reflects an attempt to delegitimize the righteous struggle of our comrade **Berta Cáceres**, for which she was killed. At the same time it grants legitimacy to the hegemonic development model, and thus, to the imposition of policies promoting the dispossession of common goods and environmental

¹ Video with excerpt of statements made by Jim Kim: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-Zwp78aCW3mV3BabnduOC1nRUU/view?usp=sharing>. Complete video of the event: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-Zwp78aCW3memdWbHBvQnYzXzQ/view?usp=sharing>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJWZ102R4LA>

destruction that endangers the existence of the affected communities and the sustainability and viability of the planet itself.

Furthermore, the imposition of this development model has an obvious impact on the lives of women. It is one of the factors that has most contributed to the phenomenon of the “feminization of poverty,” by altering the social fabric and generating the forced displacement of populations, heightened insecurity, violence and the disintegration of families, and by attacking food sovereignty and generating scarcity and precariousness in the availability of basic necessities. As if that weren’t enough, these processes often go hand in hand with the militarization of the territories, which generates more violence against women, including sexual violence.

It is no accident, therefore, that as stated in our [2012-2014 Assessment Report on Attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders in Mesoamerica](#), the women defenders most likely to come under attack in the region are those involved locally in defending territory and natural resources. Their main aggressors are state agents at all levels (in 66% of the cases) and employees of private businesses (22%).

The statements made by **Jim Kim** are especially serious, given that he is a high-ranking official in a multilateral, intergovernmental development body charged with bringing about an end to global poverty—in his own words, “...by means of an inclusive, sustainable process of globalization”.

At a time when a number of Funds have decided to, or are planning to withdraw their investments from countries like Honduras, as a sign of rejection of the criminal acts related to the imposition of megaprojects like **Agua Zarca**, constructed by **Desarrollos Energéticos (DESA)**, Jim Kim’s statements seem to have the intention of sending a message to the contrary. He seems to be inviting these funds to reconsider their decision and urging them to continue funding such projects.

Moreover, the tacit justification of the murder of **Berta Cáceres**, which is reduced to an “incident” in the sense of a collateral damage regarding necessary and unwavering processes, is not only a moral aberration and, we suppose, an inadmissible grievance for the family, the work of her organization—the **Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH)**—and the environs of the slain defender. It also involves an imminent risk for thousands of people on the planet and in the región who are defending their lands, their communities and their natural resources. From the mouth of a high-level official of an international body, we hear that attacking, intimidating or even killing a human rights defender is not such a serious issue if, according to the hegemonic model, the greater good is at stake. This is not only intolerable; it is abominable and criminal.

For all of the above, **IM-Defensoras** demands:

- An immediate rectification from **Jim Kim**, along with a public apology to the family of **Berta Cáceres** and the express, unreserved condemnation of her murder.



INICIATIVA MESOAMERICANA de Mujeres Defensoras DE DERECHOS HUMANOS

- The definitive withdrawal of funds for the construction of the **Agua Zarca** hydroelectric project.
- An end to statements by high-level officials that delegitimize the work of defending human rights.
- Respect for the right of peoples to free, prior and informed consultations from multilateral development banks, which should only make investments if and when they do not endanger the customs and livelihoods of local populations.



Nicaraguan Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders