

Mesoamerica, October 12, 2016

**Sr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein
High Commissioner for Human Rights
OHCHR**

The **Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders** (IM-Defensoras) and member organizations, networks and groupings express our absolute repudiation of the reported robbery of the original case files on the murder of Berta Cáceres, indigenous leader and Coordinator of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (*Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras*, COPINH). This occurred last week when a magistrate, María Luisa Ramos, a Judge of the Court of Criminal Appeals of the Supreme Court of Justice of Honduras took them out of the office, in itself a highly irregular act.

This aggression follows the burglary of the office of the *Broad Movement for Justice and Dignity* (*Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y la Justicia*, MADJ) in San Pedro Sula, in the early morning hours of July 13, 2016, by an unidentified individual who stole hard discs, computers and cameras containing key information and evidence related to emblematic cases of corruption and human rights violations, including information on the murder of Berta Cáceres.

The repeated negligence, impunity and failure of institutions charged with imparting justice to resolve this and other cases of violence against the defenders of territory and natural resources, raises well-founded suspicions over the protection and cover-up that the government of Honduras provides for economic power groups accused of attacking activists and their communities.

We regret that such actions are still going on in view of numerous charges made by COPINH, Berta Cáceres' family, and other human rights organizations against the government of Honduras and its failure to conduct all due legal proceedings in response to the clamor for justice over the murder of Berta Cáceres. According to a recent statement by her legal team, "During these seven months after the Cáceres crime, we have dealt with the inexplicable and illegal secrecy imposed on the case and the government's silence regarding the demand to accept the participation of an independent commission of the IACHR to lend transparency and reveal the criminal structure that ordered the murder."¹

¹ Legal team representing the daughters, son and mother of Berta Cáceres, the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH). Robbery of Berta Cáceres' case file: Ratifies the institutional irresponsibility of the government of Honduras, the imposition of the logic of impunity and the defenselessness of the citizenry. Tegucigalpa, October 4, 2016. <https://copinh.org/media/documents/2016/10/comunicado-caso-berta-04102016.pdf>

The risk of impunity for the murder of Berta Cáceres and other human rights defenders has been repeatedly noted by independent UN experts, including the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the Working Group on the Issue of Discrimination against Women, The Committee Against Torture, the Special Rapporteur on Torture, and the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, specific recommendations made to the government of Honduras have been consistently ignored. Since 2013, the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders has documented in Honduras, 12 murders of women defenders in which impunity prevails.²

Given this situation, we urge the Inter American Human Rights Commission to step up their appeals to the government of Honduras for complete clarification and justice in the case of Berta Cáceres and for urgent attention to structural causes leading to violence against human rights defenders, such as the imposition of economic projects that negatively affect communities and the environment and also provoke attacks against activists, as is the case with the Agua Zarca project.

In particular, we urge you to use your good offices to call on the Honduran government to do the following:

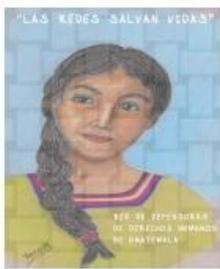
- Guarantee the security and protection of people whose declarations are included in the stolen case file.
- Give a satisfactory response to the questions raised last October 4 by the legal team representing the daughters, son and mother of Berta Cáceres, together with the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) attached³.
- Urgently request that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) establish an interdisciplinary group of independent experts to conduct a reliable, professional investigation, in view of the serious, proven constraints displayed by Honduran institutions to carry out an investigation in accord with the law.
- Definitively cancel the Agua Zarca project in compliance with recommendations made in the recent report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, and acknowledge the responsibility of the DESA company and its financial partners in the “creation of a system

² 2013 (2): María Enriqueta Matute (territorial defender) and Mireya Mendoza (Association of Judges for Democracy), 2014 (5): Margarita Murillo (Sula Valley Social Forum), Alma Janeth Díaz Ortega (campesina leader), Uva Herlinda Castellanos (Bella Vista campesino group), Marlene Banegas (prosecuting attorney), Patricia Eufragio Banegas (prosecuting attorney). Although we are still engaged in the registry process for the last two years, between 2015 and 2016 we registered the murders of Angie Ferreira (Rainbow Foundation, 2015), Paola Barraza (Rainbow Foundation), Alejandra Padilla (2016), Berta Cáceres (COPINH, 2016) and Lesbia Janeth Urquía (COPINH, 2016).

³ Legal team representing the daughters, son and mother of Berta Cáceres, the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH). Robbery of Berta Cáceres’ case file: Ratifies the institutional irresponsibility of the government of Honduras, the imposition of the logic of impunity and the defenselessness of the citizenry. Tegucigalpa, October 4, 2016. <https://copinh.org/media/documents/2016/10/comunicado-caso-bertha-04102016.pdf>

of unrest, intimidations, attacks, and murders in the Río Blanco communities against COPINH, as well as in the murder of Berta Cáceres,⁴ as thoroughly documented by COPINH.

Yours faithfully,



⁴ Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras. The FMO and its Report Plagued with Lies. <https://copinh.org/article/el-fmo-y-su-informe-mentiroso/>