

PRESS RELEASE

IM-Defensoras Express Concern over Hostility, Attacks and Criminalization Faced by Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras

Mesoamerica 25 June 2015 – We the over 690 women human rights defenders who make up the **Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative (IM-Defensoras)** in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua are concerned with the current state of hostility, aggression and criminalization faced by women human rights defenders (WHRD) in Honduras.

Besides living in a climate of insecurity – as is evidenced by the incidence of femicide (14.6 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2014) and murder (66.49 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2014) which are among the highest on the planet – women human rights defenders have, as recognized by the **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights**,¹ been faced with a highly hostile environment for their work defending human rights since the 2009 coup.

The recently approved “Ley de protección para las y los defensores de derechos humanos, periodistas, comunicadores sociales y operadores de justicia” (Law to protect women and men human rights defenders, journalists, social communicators and justice system workers) has not prevented attacks against women human rights defenders; it has done the opposite. In recent months, there has been a worrisome increase in violence aimed at punishing and discouraging their work as well as that of their organizations and movements.

This trend is especially worrying given that those being targeted include organizations and women human

rights defenders who are beneficiaries of precautionary measures by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and whose cases have been reported by **IM-Defensoras** and the **National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras**:

- **Gladys Lanza**: Defender of women’s human rights and Executive Coordinator of the **Movimiento por la Paz Visitación Padilla** (Visitacion Padilla Movement for Peace) was sentenced to 18 months in prison on 26 March 2015 and disqualification to exercise civil rights for supporting the case of a woman who was a victim of sexual and workplace harassment by a public official. On 29 April, **Gladys Lanza’s** legal defense team brought an appeal before the **Supreme Court of Justice** for annulment of the judgment. Her sentence represents yet another barrier to those who already struggle in their work defending human rights in Honduras. Thus, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has granted her provisional measures since 2010.

¹ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Second Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in the Americas. 31 December 2011. Page 12



- **Berta Cáceres:** Throughout her career defending the human rights of Rio Blanco communities, she has been the target of a number of attacks, including threats, arbitrary detention and criminalization. Recently, the Secretary of the National Congress of Honduras, **Mario Pérez**, threatened to file a complaint against the WHRD on 22 May 2015, for defamation and slander. The complaint was motivated by a press statement made during the funeral of **Moisés Durón Sánchez**, community leader of **COPINH**, who was murdered this past 20 May because of a land conflict, in which the WHRD stated that the Secretary and other public officials were alleged accomplices to the crime. The WHRD has been granted precautionary measures by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights since July 2009.
- **Dilma Consuelo Soto:** Indigenous Tolupan land rights WHRD and member of the **Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y Justicia** (Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice). On 22 May 2015, **Dilma Consuelo Soto's** home was shot at while she was inside; those responsible were recognized and reported to the National Police but authorities have yet to take measures to investigate the charge. To clarify, the persons who gunned **Dilma Consuelo Soto's** home are alleged hitmen from the area, who are also suspected of having assassinated 3 Tolupan activists from the San Francisco Locomapa tribe in August 2013. **Dilma** had already been the target of an attempted assassination and has faced the loss of her husband, also a human rights defender, assassinated in April 2015. The WHRD has been granted precautionary measures by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights since August 2013.
- **Lilian López:** Member of the **COPINH** coordination team, who on the morning of 28 April 2015, during an advocacy day accompanying community members in San Juan, Ceguaca, in the department of Santa Barbara, was the victim of death threats from local landowners, as was **Karen Suárez**, social communicator, land rights WHRD and El Progreso regional member of the **Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo, CNTC** (National Union of Rural Workers), who has previously received death threats and has suffered an attempt on her life by unknown perpetrators who remain in total impunity.

Thus, we the **IM-Defensoras** call upon Honduran authorities to:

- Guarantee the effective implementation of the “Ley de protección para las y los defensores de derechos humanos, periodistas, comunicadores sociales y operadores de justicia” (Law to protect women and men human rights defenders, journalists, social communicators and justice system workers) while integrating a gender perspective into protection measures.
- Comply with the recommendations made to the State of Honduras during the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review in May 2015 and urge authorities to end threats and attacks against WHRDs and women journalists.

- Abstain from making statements that are defamatory or disapprove of the work of WHRDs, such as public statements by different government and public authorities across different communication channels questioning the work of WHRD organizations that denounce human rights violations in Honduras related to the Universal Periodic Review.
- In the cases of **Berta Cáceres**, **Dilma Consuelo Soto** and **Gladys Lanza** fulfill the obligation to guarantee – in a comprehensive fashion – precautionary protection measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.²
- In the case of **Gladys Lanza** respect the deadlines established in article 369 of the Criminal Procedure Code to rule on the appeal brought before the Supreme Court of Justice on 29 April 2015.



National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala

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² In the case of **Gladys Lanza**, this includes the competent authorities responding to the appeal within the established timeframe, and avoiding unnecessary prolongation of the criminalization to which the the WHRD has been subjected. In the case of **Berta Cáceres**, this involves an immediate end to threats by public officials to sue. In the case of **Dilma Consuelo Soto**, this entails a swift investigation to confirm the facts and punish those responsible.