

## OPEN LETTER

### **Repression and criminalization against social movements and women human rights defenders in Honduras worsens**

*Mesoamerica, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017* – Nineteen months after the unpunished murder of Berta Cáceres, we, the **Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative (IM-Defensoras)** – representing more than 800 defenders in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua – the **National Women Human Rights Defenders Network in Honduras**, and the **169 signed organizations**, express our concern over the grave situation of repression and criminalization faced by social movements, human rights organizations and, particularly, women human rights defenders.

The events that took place on September 8, 2017 exemplify our collective concern. Honduran security forces violently repressed and arrested 16 members of the University Student Movement peacefully protesting on the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH) campus, and then attacked human rights defenders who were observing and documenting the situation. Police then intercepted a bus, provided by the National Commissioner of Human Rights (CONADH), and using a tow truck rocked it back and forth, while spraying teargas inside the bus. Those inside the bus included Hedme Castro, Director of the Association for a Participatory Citizenry (Aci-Participa) and Tommy Morales, a communicator and member of the Association for Democracy and Human Rights in Honduras and the National Women Human Rights Defenders Network in Honduras. Both women human rights defenders were hospitalized and Tommy Morales now faces criminal charges.

Direct attacks against human rights defenders represents the closure of civil society space, regression to authoritarian practices, and flagrant non-compliance with international human rights treaties signed by the government of Honduras. Such attacks are aimed at obstructing and deterring social protest and the work of defending human rights, and are paving the way for new and more serious acts of repression.

It is important to note that this latest attack is not an isolated incident, but instead, signifies an ongoing increase of violence and repression against women human rights defenders in Honduras, which leaves citizens extremely vulnerable. In a three month period since June 2017, IM-Defensoras has issued 14 Urgent Action Alerts about attacks suffered by women defenders, their organizations, and their communities.

#### **Student Movement of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH):**

- ⤴ Attacks, arbitrary arrest and criminalization of defenders Hedme Castro and Tommy Morales during UNAH evacuation (12/09/2017)
- ⤴ Arbitrary arrest with excessive use of force against UNAH students (08/09/2017)
- ⤴ Police violently evacuate UNAH student camp during hunger strike (16/08/2017)
- ⤴ IM-Defensoras letter to Human Rights Prosecutor Soraya Morales on recurrent attacks against UNAH students (22/07/2017)
- ⤴ UNAH-CU students attacked, arrested and criminalized during peaceful takeover (17/06/2017)



**Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH):**

- ^ Criminalization of Miriam Miranda, General Coordinator of OFRANEH (06/09/2017)
- ^ Criminalization of Garifuna territorial defenders and OFRANEH members (06/08/2017)
- ^ Closure threats against Waruguma Garífuna Community Radio in Trujillo (27/08/2017)

**Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ):**

- ^ More arbitrary arrests of defenders of the right to water in Pajuiles (15/08/2017)
- ^ Arbitrary arrest of Angélica Recinos and members of the Camp for Water and Life in Pajuiles (10/08/2017)

**Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH):**

- ^ Attempt on life of Bertha Zuniga, Coordinator of COPINH and daughter of Bertha Cáceres (02/07/2017)
- ^ Criminalization of members of “La Jarcia” comunidad, COPINH (19/06/2017)

**Other territorial defenders:**

- ^ Criminalization, defamation and stigmatization of Dinia Yasmin Sarmiento Suárez and Suany Ibeth Sánchez Argueta (07/08/2017)
- ^ Arrest, cruel and inhuman treatment, and criminalization of Cristian Marisol Hernández, defender in Villa de San Francisco (30/08/2017)
- ^ Threats, criminalization and repression of defenders of the rights to health and territory (28/08/2017)

State agents have perpetrated most of these attacks – concretely, security forces – and the majority involve excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, and/or judicial prosecution. In the cases in which the aggressors were not State agents, the corresponding authorities did absolutely nothing to guarantee security and access to justice to the women defenders affected, despite their obligation to enforce the *Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators and Administrators of Justice*. Of special concern are the attacks against women defenders who have faced repeated attacks, such as Miriam Miranda (Coordinator) and Madeline Martina David of OFRANEH. It is important to note that Berta Cáceres’ assassination was preceded by a series of attacks similar in profile or pattern from those faced by Miriam Miranda, who despite having received international recognition, continues to be targeted in an attempt to restrict her work as a human rights defender.

The outlook is concerning. In spite of repeated calls by the international community to respect human rights in Honduras, a policy of systematic persecution and repression against social movements and human rights defenders triggered after the 2009 coup d’état persist. This same policy has often placed public security and justice institutions at the service of large landholders and national or transnational private businesses to protect their economic interests at the expense of the collective and individual rights of the Honduran people.

For women human rights defenders, the prospect is of even greater concern. Discrimination and gender violence pose additional risks for women activists, who are playing an increasingly greater and more visible role within different social movements or on the frontlines of struggles to defend land and territory. Women defenders work in a context of misogyny and gender discrimination as



seen by increasing femicide rates and cases of violence against women, and in public policies that restrict a woman's right to make decisions about her own body and sexuality. **Between 2012 and 2016, IM-Defensoras has documented 1,128 attacks and 13 assassinations of women human rights defenders in Honduras.**

In this situation, IM-Defensoras, the National Women Human Rights Defenders Network in Honduras and the signed coalitions and organizations, call on the general public and international human rights organizations to remain vigilant and continue placing a spotlight on the situation in Honduras, while demanding that the State comply with its obligation to guarantee the right to defend human rights and to assure the security of those who do so.

To this end, it is crucial that the Honduran government:

- put an end to impunity in the murders of women defenders
- assure access to justice for victims of attacks
- abstain from slandering and criminalizing women defenders, and
- provide the conditions necessary for women's political participation and contributions to justice and equality.

Sincerely,

- 1.AWID
- 2.JASS
- 3.Consorcio Oaxaca
- 4.Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres (FCAM)
- 5.Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local de El Salvador
- 6.UDEFEGUA
- 7.Red Nacional de Defensoras de Guatemala
- 8.Red Nacional de Defensoras de DDHH en Honduras
- 9.Red Nacional de Defensoras de DDHH en México
- 10.Red Salvadoreña de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos
- 11.Iniciativa Nicaragüense de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres
  
- 12.Business & Human Rights Resource Centre
- 13.Center for Constitutional Rights
- 14.Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America
- 15.CIP Americas Program
- 16.CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- 17.CORE Coalition, UK
- 18.Cultural Survival
- 19.Federación Internacional de Mujeres de Carreras Jurídicas
- 20.FIDH, en el marco del Observatorio para la Protección de los Defensores de Derechos Humanos
- 21.Fondo Acción Urgente - América Latina y El Caribe
- 22.Fondo Lunaria – Colombia
- 23.FRIDA
- 24.Front Line Defenders
- 25.Fuerza Mundial
- 26.Global Exchange
- 27.Global Fund for Women
- 28.Global Witness



- 29.Int'l Centre for Women Empowerment & Child Dev (ICWECD)
- 30.International Labor Rights Forum
- 31.KULU-Women and Development, Denmark
- 32.Latin America Mining Monitoring Programme (LAMMP)
- 33.MADRE
- 34.MiningWatch Canada
- 35.Movimiento Mesoamericano contra el Modelo extractivo Minero -M4-
- 36.Observatorio Etico Internacional – OBETI
- 37.Organización Mundial contra la Tortura (OMCT), en el marco del Observatorio para la Protección de los Defensores de Derechos Humanos
- 38."PACWIN" Pacific Womens Indigenous Networks
- 39.Plataforma Internacional Contra la Impunidad
- 40.Protection International
- 41.Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres defensoras de Derechos Sociales y Ambientales
- 42.Regional Centre for International Development Cooperation (RCIDC)
- 43.Regional Latinoamericana de la UITA (Rel-UITA)
- 44.Right Here Right Now Platform
- 45.Uganda Youth Alliance For Family Planning and Adolescents Health -UYAFPAH
- 46.War on Want
- 47.WHRD IC - Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition
- 48.WHRD MENA Coalition
- 49.Womankind Worldwide
- 50.Wretched of The Earth
- 51.Youth Association for Development
- 52.Action Solidarité Tiers Monde (ASTM), Luxemburgo
- 53.Adepza
- 54.Agrupación Ciudadana para la Despenalización del Aborto terapéutico, ético y eugenésico
- 55.AIETI (Asociación de Investigación y Especialización Sobre Temas Iberoamericanos)
- 56.Alba Sud
- 57.Alianza Política Sector de Mujeres
- 58.AMICODE (Amigas en Consejos Comunitarios de Desarrollo)
- 59.Amigos da Terra Brasil
- 60.Asociación COMUNICARTE
- 61.Asociación Cooperativa Leidibella
- 62.Asociación Custodios del Bosque de Jalapa
- 63.Asociación de Desarrollo Economico Social Santa Marta
- 64.Asociación del Movimiento de Victimas para El Desarrollo Integral del Norte de Quiche – ASOMOVIDINQ
- 65.Asociación de Mujeres de Petén Ixkik
- 66.Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas de Santa María Xalapan Jalapa – AMISMAXAJ
- 67.Asociación de Mujeres Las Crisálidas
- 68.Asociación Feminista La Cuerda
- 69.Asociación Grupo Venancia, Matagalpa, Nicaragua
- 70.Asociación para la Promoción y el Desarrollo de la Comunidad "CEIBA"
- 71.Asociación Para Una Vida Mejor de Honduras (APUVIMEH)
- 72.Balance AC – México
- 73.Batay Ouvriye
- 74.Calala Fondo de Mujeres
- 75.Campaña 28 de Setiembre por la Despenalización del Aborto en América Latina y el Caribe - Punto Focal Nicaragua
- 76.CEAMUJER, Nicaragua
- 77.Centro de Derechos de Mujeres
- 78.Centro de Desarrollo Humano CDH
- 79.Centro de Direitos Humanos e Cidadania do Imigrante, CDHIC
- 80.Centro de Documentación y Solidaridad con América Latina y África (CEDSALA), Valencia (Estado Español)
- 81.Centro de Investigación Para la Acción Femenina CIPAF RD
- 82.Centro Martin Luther King
- 83.Colectivo Ansur



84. Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo
85. Colectivo de Mujeres 8 de Marzo, Managua, Nicaragua
86. Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CLADEM)
87. CLADEM México
88. CLADEM Nicaragua
89. Colectiva de Mujeres de Masaya
90. Colectiva Feminista de Izquierda
91. Colectiva Mujer y Salud
92. Colectiva Actoras de Cambio
93. Colectiva AMORALES
94. Colectivo CEAAL Costa Rica
95. Colectivo de Refugio Colombiano Luciano Romero Molina, Asturias
96. Colectivo Voces Ecológicas COVEC – Panamá
97. Comité Campesino del Altiplano – CCDA
98. Comité de Solidaridad con América Latina (COSAL) Asturias – España
99. Comité Monseñor Óscar Romero de Madrid
100. Comisión de Derechos Humanos Hispano Guatemalteca
101. Comissió Agenda Llatinoamericana
102. Comunicando y Capacitando a Mujeres TRANS- COMCAVI TRANS
103. Comunidad Hondureña en Madrid
104. Comunidad Soto Zen – Nicaragua
105. Comunidad Xinka
106. Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.)
107. Consejo de Mujeres Cristianas – CMC
108. Consejo Maya K'iche' de Quetzaltenango
109. Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares del Aguan (COPA)
110. Coordinadora Nacional de Derechos Humanos – Perú
111. Coordinadora Ni Una Sola Mina - Costa Rica
112. Ddeser – Red por los derechos sexuales y reproductivos en México
113. Diakonia de Suecia, Programa Honduras
114. Diálogo 2000 - Jubileo Sur Argentina
115. Ecologistas en Acción
116. Enlace Regional Izabal
117. Equidad de Género, Ciudadanía, Trabajo y Familia – México
118. Equipo GUAM
119. Entrepueblos-Entrepobles-Herriarte-Entrepobos
120. Feminismos-Entrepueblos-Entrepobles-Herriarte-Entrepobos
121. Fondo Apathapi Jopueti
122. Fundación Ética Visionaria, Costa Rica
123. Fundación Hijos del Maiz
124. Fundación para la Comunicación Social Luciérnaga – Nicaragua
125. Fundación para el Estudio y Aplicación del Derecho - FESPAD
126. Grito de los Excluidos/as Continental
127. Grupo de Mujeres Dejando Huellas
128. Grupo Oscar Arnulfo Romero – CUBA
129. HABITAR
130. ICID (Iniciativas de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo)
131. Instituto Nicaragüense en Sexología InSex
132. Instituto para el Rescate Ancestral Indígena Salvadoreño
133. Jóvenes Voceros y Voceras por los Derechos Sexuales y Derechos Reproductivos
134. Joxemi Zumalabe Fundazioa (País Vasco)
135. Jubileo Sur America
136. Kolectivo Antimilitarista de Medellín
137. Mildam (Mujeres Jóvenes de Izabal)
138. Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres de Nicaragua
139. Movimiento Político y Social Marcha Patriótica-Colombia



140. Mundubat
141. MUVACOFUM
142. Nachrichtenpool Lateinamerika e.V. NPLA (Alemania, Berlin)
143. Ojo de Tigre/Comunicación Comunitaria (Guerrero, México)
144. Otros Mundos AC Chiapas
145. Organizaciones de Mujeres de Izabal
146. Pañuelos en Rebeldía
147. Paz con Dignidad
148. Periferias del Món
149. Plataforma de Solidaridad con Guatemala de Barcelona
150. Plataforma per la Sobirania Alimentària del País Valencià
151. Procesos Integrales para la Autogestión de los Pueblos, AC - México
152. ProLegal & SAMU
153. Proyecto sobre Organización, Desarrollo, Educación e Investigación (PODER)
154. Puntos de Encuentro
155. Reacción Climática – Bolivia
156. Red Chilena contra la Violencia hacia las Mujeres
157. Red DDH El Salvador
158. Red de Defensoras de Derechos Humanos de Izabal
159. Red de Educación Popular Entre Mujeres REPEM América Latina y el Caribe
160. Red de Educación Popular Entre Mujeres REPEM Colombia
161. Red de mujeres de Feminismo Comunitario en Defensa del Territorio Cuerpo-Tierra
162. Red de Mujeres de Matagalpa, Nicaragua
163. REDNOVI
164. Semillero de Investigación en Desarrollo Rural Universidad Nacional de Colombia SINDER-UN
165. Sindicato de Trabajadores Organizados del Puerto Quetzal – STOPQ
166. SoldePaz – Pachakuti
167. Tutela Legal María Julia Hernández
168. Unión Nacional de Mujeres Guatemaltecas - UNAMG
169. Voces Caribeñas Nicaragua

