

STATEMENT

IM-DEFENSORAS DEMANDS PROTECTION FOR WHRDs IN HONDURAS

Mesoamerica, March 17th, 2016 - The 691 women human rights defenders (WHRDs) from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua who make up the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders (IM-Defensoras) demand that the Honduran government immediately fulfill its obligation to protect the life and integrity of human rights defenders.

Since the coup in Honduras in 2009, assaults, threats and murders of human rights defenders have increased. The violence generated by this shrinking of democratic spaces has affected WHRDs in particular, who are also subject to increasing violence from prevailing discrimination and inequality. In this Central American country, a woman is murdered every 16 hours¹.

IM-Defensoras has documented 318 attacks against WHRDs in Honduras between 2012 and 2014, including 7 murders in the same period², 1 in 2015³ and 3 in 2016⁴. Most of these attacks were against women defending the land.

On March 3, in the middle of the night, the well-known feminist and land rights defender Berta Cáceres was murdered. She and the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) had been denouncing the serious human rights violations being committed against the Lenca people by the imposition of the hydroelectric dam project called Agua Zarca. The project is being developed by the company DESA within the indigenous Lenca community of Rio Blanco.

In the weeks following this terrible murder, attacks against COPINH have continued. The human rights defender Gustavo Castro, a survivor of the attack against our colleague Berta, has suffered multiple violations of his human rights, including being unjustifiably and illegally detained in Honduras.

On March 15, 150 families from the Lenca community and members of COPINH were evicted by the Military Police in Rio Lindo in the Cortés region. A few hours later, another member of the

¹ Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres, del Centro de Derechos de Mujeres (CDM).

² Source: IM-Defensoras' Mesoamerica Registry of Attacks on Women Human Rights Defenders. 2013 (2): María Enriqueta Matute, Mireya Mendoza; 2014 (5): Margarita Murillo, Alma Janeth Díaz Ortega, Uva Herlinda Castellanos Marlene Banegas, Patricia Eufragio Banegas.

³ Source: Preliminary Data of the IM-Defensoras' Mesoamerica Registry of Attacks on Women Human Rights Defenders to June 2015: 2015 (1) Angie Ferreira.

⁴ Sources: Data based on IM-Defensoras' WHRD Alerts from January to March, 2016: (3) Paola Barraza, Estefanía Zuñiga y Berta Cáceres Flores



COPINH, Nelson Garcia was murdered.

These serious incidents have been accompanied by multiple threats, arbitrary detention, surveillance and intimidation against numerous human rights defenders, including members of Berta's family.

Honduras is experiencing a serious human rights crisis that the government has repeatedly refused to address. Despite the precautionary measures recommended by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and numerous denunciations of threats and attacks against Berta, the Honduran authorities did nothing to ensure her safety. Now that the threats have become reality, the Honduran government has done nothing to ensure that the case be will resolved according to the law, thereby avoiding impunity. On the contrary, the Honduran government's actions, omissions and acquiescence have resulted in continued violence against human rights defenders from COPINH and other organizations in Honduras.

In the face of this extremely serious situation, IM-Defensoras joins the global demand for justice that Berta Cáceres' family, COPINH and numerous national and international organizations have been directing to the Honduran government:

- The immediate signing of a Technical Assistance Agreement between the Honduran government and IACHR for the purpose of appointing a committee of independent experts trusted by COPINH and Berta's family to supervise, support and participate in the investigations currently being carried out by the Public Ministry⁵, within the framework of compliance with the protection measures granted by IACHR.
- The immediate and permanent suspension of the concession granted to DESA for the hydroelectric dam project Agua Zarca, given that this has been the main source of threats, persecution and attacks against the Lenca community of Rio Blanco and against members of COPINH. This DESA project constitutes a permanent danger to their safety.
- Full guarantees that all human rights defenders can mobilize and demonstrate without fear of repression or harassment, and that they can carry out their work under protective conditions. In particular, the Garífuna leader Miriam Miranda, member of OFRANEH who is leading the mobilizations on March 17 in Honduras and in general to all women human rights defenders so they can carry out their important work without risk of being victims of violence, including gender-based violence. The Honduran government must make a public commitment to protect human rights defenders and refrain from any form of attack or criminalization, and must ensure a rapid and effective decrease in violence and the provision of safe conditions for defenders.

⁵ The family and friends of Berta Cáceres demand measures be taken by the Honduran government:

<https://www.cejil.org/es/familia-y-companeros-bertha-caceres-exigen-medidas-al-estado-honduras#sthash.A8dgBzwh.dpuf>



- In the case of Gustavo Castro we demand that the State Attorney immediately withdraw its request to the judicial branch for a 30-day immigration hold, given that he has complied with the necessary steps, and anything additional can be done from Mexico. Under international human rights law and Honduras' own internal regulations, the immigration hold on Gustavo could be regarded as an illegal detention, given that he was not only a witness to the murder, but also a victim and a human rights defender.

We acknowledge and appreciate the global response and the demand by a good number of governments that the murder of our colleague Berta not go unpunished. In particular we recognize the importance of the fact that the Dutch Development Bank (FMO Entrepreneurial Bank) and Finland's Finnfund have suspended all financial aid to the government of Honduras. The demand for justice must continue until justice is done and until urgent actions are taken to resolve the human rights crisis affecting the country.



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