

Honduras

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights sends Garífuna case to the Inter-American Court

Rapid Response Network News

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For the past decade, IRTF has denounced an endless series of politically motivated killings and attacks against the Garífuna people, carried out by wealthy and powerful sectors trying to take over Garífuna lands for agribusiness and the global tourist industry. At its annual human rights banquet in November 2011, IRTF hosted Garífuna leader Miriam Miranda, who has been targeted by the Honduran government because of her fearless and outspoken leadership on the defense of land and cultural sovereignty of the Garífuna people.

The Garífuna are descendants of Africans and native Carib and Arawak Indians, and they represent a sizeable percentage of Central America's coastal inhabitants, particularly along the northern coast of Honduras. For over 200 years, the Garífuna have managed to maintain a strong collective identity, including a distinct language, traditions and a communal way of life. The Garífuna have preserved their rich cultural heritage despite facing discrimination, including lack of adequate education or health services and entrenched poverty.

Good News

in Case No. 12.548, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) took the Garífuna's case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

The facts of this case refer to

- the failure of the Honduran government to protect the ancestral territory of the Garífuna community at Triunfo de la Cruz from occupation and dispossession by third parties
- a situation of permanent conflict due to actions in community territory by third parties, both private individuals and public authorities
- the sale of communal lands by public authorities, which has negatively affected the community's ancestral territory and led to pressure, threats, and even murders or arrests of community leaders and authorities
- the community's lack of appropriate title to its ancestral territory
- the restriction of access to certain parts of community territory

In its application to the Inter-American Court, the IACHR stated that all of these conditions by the government and by private interests have hampered the ability of the Garífuna community to maintain their traditional way of life.

In addition to the need to obtain justice for the victims, the IACHR believes that this case will allow the Inter-American Court to establish the parameters that should be considered when creating legislation regarding the territory claims of indigenous and tribal peoples, so that such laws can achieve their objectives and meet international standards in this area.