

via fax: 011 504 2239 3298
Sr. Presidente
Juan Orlando Hernández
President of Honduras

via fax: 011 504 2221 5667
Sr. Fiscal
Oscar Chinchilla Banegas
Attorney General of Honduras

January 23, 2016

Dear President Hernández and Attorney General Chinchilla:

We are gravely concerned for the safety and well-being of Garífuna [Afro-descendant] residents on the Atlantic coast after the killing of two Garífuna men by the Honduran Navy.

Late on December 27, approximately 20 members of the Honduran Naval Force, without any warning, opened fire on a group of Garífuna community residents who were attempting to move a car that was stuck on a sandbar in Iriona in Colón Department. The attack killed **Joel Palacios Lino**, age 24, and **Elvis Armando Garcia**, age 19, who died in a hospital four days later as a result of serious wounds. Because of the lack of roads in the area, local people have to use rafts to cross the river sandbanks and they commonly travel by night in four wheel drive vehicles. The vehicles on December 27 also held families with women and children who were traveling between the communities of Tocamacho and San José de la Punta.

The Garífuna communities of Iriona are experiencing the deadly consequences of being caught between the military and the drug traffickers who have taken over the north coast of Honduras in the last few decades. OFRANEH (Black Peoples' Fraternal Organization of Honduras) has sent denouncements to the authorities regarding the appropriation of their lands by organized crime but have received no response.

The arrival of the military has increased the violence against the civilian population while drug traffickers seem to go about their business unaffected. In the past few months, Garífuna residents of Iriona have expressed their objections to the intrusion of the military. In the nearby coastal community of Plaplaya, Gracias a Dios Department (25 miles east of Iriona), Garífuna youth have complained that they have been interrogated and tortured by military agents.

To demonstrate their discontent, on December 30 Garífuna residents staged a roadblock between the communities of Limón and Bonito Oriental in Colon Department, protesting both the killings of December 27 and the militarization of their communities.

In light of these recent incidents, we **strongly urge** you to

- conduct a full investigation of the events reported above;
- take immediate steps to demilitarize the Garífuna communities;
- end accusations of narcotrafficking that result in the criminalization of the Garífuna peoples.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai and Christine Stonebraker-Martínez
Co-Coordinator

copies: Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Amabassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
James Nealon, US Ambassador to Honduras ~ via fax 011 504 2236 9037
Olivia Franken, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email
Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax: 202 458.3992
Rapporteur on the Rights of Afro-Descendants, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and fax
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

Rights Action 12/31/2015_Honduras

The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter:

