

via fax: 011 504 2239 3298 Sr. Presidente Juan Orlando Hernández President of Honduras	via fax: via fax: 011 504 2221 5667 Sr. Fiscal Óscar Fernando Chinchilla Attorney General of Honduras
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April 22, 2016

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned that the Honduran government has placed a risk on the life of human rights defender **Martha Ligia Arnold** in the Bajo Aguán Valley but accusing her of having ties to organized crime.

Martha Ligia Arnold, President of the Permanent Human Rights Observatory for the Bajo Aguan (OBDHBA), recently requested information about the status of cases the Human Rights Commission had presented to UMVIBA for investigation. (UMVIBA is the Public Ministry's Violent Deaths Unit in the Bajo Aguan.) On March 16 Martha Ligia Arnold received a communication from Javier Guzmán, the Local Coordinator of UMVIBA, stating that they would provide no information regarding the status of the investigations because they consider that she has ties to organized crime bands operating in Bajo Aguan.

Martha Ligia Arnold has been persecuted and threatened, her children have been threatened and efforts to discredit her have required her to lower her profile in an attempt to protect her life and the lives of her children. She denounced these acts before the Special Prosecutor for Human Rights on February 26, 2015. She also requested an immediate order to investigate these acts and to secure protection for herself and her children. She is the beneficiary of protective measure No.MC 65-15 from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR).

These events cannot be seen in isolation from recent assassinations, death threats and persecution. Two members of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) were recently assassinated: **Berta Cáceres** on March 2 and **Nelson García** on March 15 (cf our letters of March 7 and March 31). On March 12, **Jaime Cabrera**, Coordinator of the Agrarian Platform of the Bajo Aguán, was followed by a red, double cabin vehicle with darkened windows and no license plates; his home was also surveilled. On March 20 **Vitalino Alvarez**, spokesperson for the Agrarian Platform of the Bajo Aguán, had to leave the country because of constant persecution and threats against him and his children. Both Cabrera and Alvarez are beneficiaries of IACHR protective measure No.MC50-14.

We believe that the declaration about Martha Ligia Arnold from high level State officials, who are obligated to respect and guarantee the rights of citizens, places Martha Ligia Arnold at great risk. It also stigmatizes other human rights defenders who are part of OBDHBA. We therefore **strongly urge** that you

- implement IACHR protective measures for Martha Ligia Arnold and her children;
- Implement the Law to Protect Defenders, Journalists and Justice Operators so that Martha Ligia Arnold and members of the OPDHBA are able to do their work in the defense of human rights in a secure environment

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai and **Christine Stonebraker Martínez**
 Co-Coordinators

copies: COFADEH: Committee of the Detained and Disappeared in Honduras ~ via email
 Karla Cueva, Subsecretaria de Esatdo en los Despachos de Justicia, Derechos Humanos, Gobernación y Decentralización ~ via fax 011 504 2232 7800
 Javier Guzman, Coordinador Local de UMVIBA ~ via fax 011 504 2444 3992
 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
 Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, ~ via email
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

HSN 3/29/16_Honduras

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