

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

via email: karlacueva144@gmail.com
Hector Leonel Ayala Alvarenga
 Minister of Interior and Justice of Honduras

April 24, 2016

Dear Sirs:

We are outraged at the continuing harassment and attacks on members of the **Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH)**. On April 13, COPINH members, 1300 members of Honduran social movements and international delegations from 22 different countries gathered for the international meeting “Berta Cáceres Vive” celebrating the life of Berta Cáceres and demanding justice for her assassination on March 2 (cf our letter of March 7)

On April 15, the closing day of the conference, the participants went to the village of San Francisco de Ojuera for a ceremony at the Gualcarque River, a sacred place for the indigenous Lenca people. One participant stated, “Before starting to walk down to the river, we were surprised by a group of about 25-30 people, many with machetes and stones. . . They shouted at us to leave and threatened the protesters.” Specific threats were made against the new COPINH’s coordinator and Lenca leader Tomás Gómez. At the end of the ceremony on the river bank, as the first demonstrators started back toward the buses, the same group of people attacked them using machetes and throwing rocks. At least nine people were injured. The police were present during both incidents, but failed to effectively prevent and stop the physical attacks against the peaceful demonstrators. Some members of the caravan heard direct references to the killing of Berta Cáceres and reported that the attackers destroyed a big red blanket with her image.

According to COPINH, the attackers were affiliated with Desarrollos Energéticos S.A. (DESA), the private Honduran energy company which is behind the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam project. Berta and COPINH fought relentlessly to stop the construction of the Agua Zarca in the Gualcarque river basin because the dams had the potential to disrupt the livelihoods of the local communities and their access to water. Some of the attackers were identified as hit-men (“sicarios”) who had previously threatened Berta and COPINH’s members and who had been temporarily detained in 2015 for carrying high caliber guns.

This attack is the latest in a series of incidents since Berta Cáceres’ murder targeting her relatives and other members of COPINH (cf our letter of March 24). Because we believe these incidents amount to a campaign of harassment that is endangering the safety of Berta Cáceres’ relatives’ and of COPINH’s members, we **strongly urge** that you

- take all appropriate measures to guarantee the safety of COPINH members and Berta Cáceres’ relatives in accordance with their wishes;
- publicly recognize the legitimate and rightful work done by COPINH and all human rights defenders in the country and take other effective measures to stop their criminalization.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator

copies: COPINH - via email

Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax 202 525 4004

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 and for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 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

Frontline 4/19/2015_Honduras

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