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| via fax: 011 504 2239 3298 Sr. Juan Orlando Hernández President of Honduras | via fax: 011 504 2221 5667 Sr. Óscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas Attorney General of Honduras |
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May 25, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are seriously concerned about the arrest, detention and travel ban of **César Geovanni Bernardez**, director of the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH). Since 1978, OFRANEH has worked for the promotion of the Afro-Caribbean Garífuna people's right to self-determination through programs that support their political, social, economic and cultural advancement. Their traditional lands have been plundered through fraudulent and corrupt processes involving state agents and notary offices. The land is being falsely registered in the name of people other than the real owners and subsequently sold to foreign businesses who want to establish tourism projects in the region. OFRANEH is currently in a legal battle to secure the right of the Garífuna communities to maintain their lands.

On the afternoon of May 18, César Geovanni Bernardez (known as Geovanni) was arrested under charges of illegal occupation of land. The arrest warrant was issued in November 2016 against four directors of OFRANEH who are currently facing criminal charges: Cesar Geovanni Bernardez, Medalime David Fernandez, Celso Alberto Guillen and Cosme Avila. The charges were brought by Patrick Forseth, owner of CARIVIDA, a Canadian tourist company that intends to build a resort and villas on Garífuna lands in Guadalupe and Santa Fé in Colón Department.

On the morning of May 19, César Geovanni Bernardez was transferred from the police station in La Ceiba in Atlántida Department (where he was arrested) to Trujillo in Colón Department (where the capture orders came from). A judge in Trujillo ordered his release but placed him under a travel ban which prevents him from leaving the country. He was also ordered to regularly present himself to the judge in Trujillo to prove that he is still in the region.

We are particularly concerned about Geovanni because he and some Garífuna youth were personally threatened earlier this month by the mayor of Santa Fé, who has connections inside the Honduran military and has been involved in illegal land sales. The mayor made specific reference to Geovanni's "vulnerability," referring to Geovanni's frequent travels to various Garífuna communities along the Atlantic coast in his work with OFRANEH. We welcome the decision to release César Geovanni Bernardez, but we are concerned about the restrictive measures applied against him and the continuing attempts to criminalize OFRANEH members.

We therefore **strongly urge** that you

- remove the restrictive measures against César Geovanni Bernardez;
- drop all charges against him and other OFRANEH members;
- guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders and activists in Honduras are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities to defend their land and communities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator

and

Christine Stonebraker-Martínez

copies: Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Ambassador 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
 James Cavallaro, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via fax
 Margarett May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Afro-descendants, 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

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