

via email: comunicacionCNDS@gmail.com**Sr. Julián Pacheco Tinoco**

Minister of Security of Honduras

via fax: 011 504 2221 5667

Sr. Oscar Chinchilla Banegas

Attorney General of Honduras

July 2, 2017

Dear Sirs:

We are extremely concerned about recent attacks on three leaders of COPINH (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras): national leadership coordinators **Sotero Chavarría Fúnez** and **Asunción Martínez**, and general coordinator **Bertha Zúñiga Cáceres**, daughter of the slain indigenous and environmentalist leader Berta Cáceres. They were threatened and attacked on two occasions by four men on June 30.

In the afternoon of June 30, the three COPINH leaders were returning by car to the community of Cancire, in the municipality of Santiago de Puringla, La Paz Department. In the first incident, three men blocked the road that leads from Cancire to San Antonio. Standing next to a black Toyota Tacoma with PCH 1886 plates, they threatened them with machetes. A fourth man, the driver of the Toyota Tacoma, threw a stone that hit the driver side window of the COPINH leaders' car.

On the second occasion, the same black Toyota Tacoma, with only the driver, pursued the COPINH car and tried to force it off a narrow mountainside road. Later the Toyota Tacoma blocked the COPINH car and tried to stop it for at least ten minutes. Fortunately, the driver of the COPINH car was able to take a detour and avoided further incidents.

COPINH reported: "This incident has to do with...the communities of Lomas de San Antonio and Las Delicias, with the support of the U.S. government agency USAID, to cut access to water for the communities of San Antonio, Cancire, Higuito and Cedrito. These communities have been negatively affected by the [USAID-financed] Zazagua Hydroelectric dam, which has left its water sources dry."

At least 124 environmental and land activists have been murdered in Honduras since the 2009 coup, making it the most dangerous country in the world in which to defend natural resources, according to NGO Global Witness. COPINH members have been subjected to smear campaigns, criminalization, harassment, threats, attempted assassinations, and assassinations. In June, unknown men tried to kidnap the mother of the children of Sotero Chavarría Fúnez. On June 21, while working on his land, **Francisco Javier Sánchez**, another COPINH coordinator, was approached by an armed man who threatened to kill his children.

We strongly urge you to:

- take immediate action to safeguard Bertita Zúñiga Cáceres and her family members, as well as other COPINH leaders, in strict accordance with their wishes
- carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threats and acts of intimidation against members of COPINH, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- guarantee that all human rights defenders in Honduras are able to carry out their legitimate activities to defend their land and communities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator

copies: COPINH ~ via email
Jorge Alberto Milla Reyes, Honduran Ambassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751
Heide B. Fulton, Chargé d'Affaires, US Embassy in 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 or email
Francisco José Eguiguren Praeli, Rapporteur on 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

UA60/16update_6/30/17_Honduras

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