

via email: mprelacionespublicas@gmail.com ngosorto@gmail.com  
**Oscar Fernando Chinchilla Banegas**  
Attorney General of Honduras

via email: karlacueva144@gmail.com  
**Lica. Karla Cueva**  
Secretary of State for Human Rights Affairs

February 1, 2020

Dear Attorney General Chinchilla and Secretary Cueva:

We are saddened and outraged at the death, on January 11, of **Karla Ignacia Piota Martínez**, a member of the Garífuna (African-Caribbean descendant) Masca beach community in Cortés Department. She died from seven bullet wounds inflicted during an assassination attempt on December 28, 2019.

Karla Ignacia Piota Martínez (affectionately known in her community as Doña Coty), was the 70-year-old sister of Amada Piota Martínez, a Garífuna spiritual leader and member of the governing board of OFRANEH (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras). This is the third killing of a Garífuna community member in Masca in recent months. Garífuna territorial defender Mirna Teresa Suazo Martínez was assassinated September 8, 2019; another territory defender, Óscar Francisco Guerrero Centeno, was assassinated there on October 18, 2019 (cf our letter of October 26 2019).


The assassinations of Garífuna leaders, women in particular, is part of a strategy to expel the Garífuna people from their ancestral territories by dividing communal Garífuna territories into individual lots. These land conflicts date back 100 years to the era when President Manuel Bonilla illegally granted the territory of several Garífuna communities to US banana baron Sam Zemurray, head of Cuyamel Fruit (later United Fruit). Today, the National Agrarian Institute (INA) continues to illegally issue land titles to third party investors engaged in land speculation. Investors are seizing land for cash crops (palm oil), large-scale mining, hydroelectric projects, and large-scale tourist golf resorts and hotels. This process of concessions to third party investors has intensified since the 2009 coup d'état in Honduras. Siding with investors, the government has militarized much of Garífuna territory, using violence to wrench control of ancestral lands and resources. The Garífuna people are watching their beaches, swamp forests, and lagoons taken away by force, with Garífuna leaders assassinated in the process.

The killing of Karla Ignacia Piota Martínez is the fourth assassination or attempted assassination of someone close to Amada Piota Martínez. On December 12, assailants shot up her home and wounded Paula Álvarez in the incident.

We **strongly urge** that you

- thoroughly investigate the assassination of Karla Ignacia Piota Martínez, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice;
- establish policies that respect the territorial rights of the Garífuna people and protect them from private investors and militarization that are destroying their territories and way of life.

Sincerely,

  
Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinators

  
Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: María Dolores Agüero, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via website or fax, and US mail  
Colleen Hoey, Chargé d'Affaires, US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email  
Nate Rettenmayer, Political Officer at the US Embassy in Honduras ~ via email  
David Tagle, Honduras Desk, US State Dept ~ via email  
Joel Hernández, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail  
Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons of African Descent, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail  
US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Fudge, Gibbs, González, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Ryan ~ via email

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