

<b>Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano</b> National Commissioner for Human Rights of Honduras (CONADEH)	<b>Rosa Seaman</b> Vice-Minister for Protection Secretariat for Human Rights (SEDH)
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October 24, 2022

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre and Vice-Minister Seaman:

We are writing with deep concern about harassment and death threats targeting environmental leader **Christopher Castillo**. Christopher Castillo is the general coordinator of ARCAH (Alternativa de Reivindicación Comunitaria y Ambientalista de Honduras, or Alternative for Community and Environmental Vindication of Honduras).

ARCAH, which was founded in 2017, has been a thorn in the side of private development investors whose money is pouring into the controversial ZEDEs (Zones of Employment and Economic Development, also known as “Model Cities,” or “Charter Cities”). Last month, ARCAH denounced the destruction of the Bay Islands forest because of construction by the ZEDE Próspera of a luxury hotel just a few meters from the coral reef. Public records show that there has been no request for an operating permit for the ZEDE Próspera, nor has the city of Roatán granted an operating permit. ARCAH and other environmental groups argue that the construction is therefore happening illegally.


ARCAH has helped to shine the international spotlight on abuses occurring with the ZEDEs. In August, ARCAH filed a complaint (“denuncia”) with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, claiming that the ZEDEs are responsible for threatening the environmental, territorial, and human rights of ancestral peoples in Honduras.


Christopher Castillo, a resident of the Loarque neighborhood of Tegucigalpa, has been subject to unjust criminalization by the Honduran State. In March 2021, he and six co-defendants were arrested, placed under house arrest, and faced false criminal charges with possible prison sentences of three to nine years. Their criminalization resulted from a demonstration at the corporate office of El Cortijo to protest the poultry company’s polluting of the Choluteca River. The protesters were violently detained and threatened by 90 state security forces who arrived on site in two military tanks and five patrol cars. Finally in April 2022, the Court of Appeals in the Criminal Court of Tegucigalpa ruled in their favor and dismissed the charges.

We are deeply concerned for the safety of Christopher Castillo, who, since January 2020, has been a beneficiary of Security Measures from the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders in Honduras, due to previous attempts on his life and repeated death threats he has received. We therefore strongly urge that you:

- carry out a transparent investigation into the threats against Christopher Castillo, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- provide protection measures to members of ARCAH, in strict accordance with their wishes
- ensure that environmental defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisal

Sincerely,

  
 Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
 Co-Coordinator

  
 Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Embassy of Honduras in Washington, DC c/o Alejandra Sandoval Taixes ~ via email and US mail  
 Carlos Pulido, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) ~ via email and US mail  
 Isabel Albaladejo Escribano, Representative to Honduras of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH) ~ via email  
 Alice Shackelford, UN Resident Coordinator in Honduras, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ~ via email  
 ARCAH (Alternativa de Reivindicación Comunitaria y Ambientalista de Honduras) ~ via email  
 PBI-Honduras (Peace Brigades International) ~ via email  
 US Embassy in Honduras: Ambassador Laura F. Dogu and Human Rights Officer ~ via email  
 US State Department: Bryan Schell, Honduras Desk Officer ~ via email  
 US Senators Brown & Portman and US Representatives Beatty, Brown, 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:**