

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

National Commissioner for Human Rights of Honduras (CONADEH)
via email

November 24, 2022

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre:

We are deeply distressed about the criminalization of Indigenous Tolupán leader **Reinaldo Baharona Reyes** in Victoria, Yoro Department, and the threats to members of his tribe, the **Las Vegas tribe of Tepemechín**, for whom he currently serves as president. October 26, he was given a national award for his environmental defense, named the Carlos Escaleras National Prize. Despite the national honor, Reinaldo Baharona Reyes still faces threats of criminalization and imprisonment.

In June, he was put under protection because he received death threats for speaking out against illegal gold mining happening in the tribe's forest, where illegal logging also occurs. These are violations to communal land that belongs to the Tolupán peoples. Radio Progreso explained: "Las Vegas de Tepemechín is one of the 32 tribes that make up the Tolupana indigenous population, distributed among the municipalities of Morazán, El Negrito, Victoria, Olanchito, Yorito and Yoro in the department of Yoro and in the municipalities of Orica and Marale in the department of Francisco Morazan" and that since 1864 "there is a property document for the Tolupan peoples."

Keyla Canales, a human rights lawyer with the Reflection, Investigation and Communication Team (ERIC-SJ) told Radio Progreso that Reinaldo Baharona Reyes is at risk and needs the special attention of the authorities to guarantee his safety to do his human rights work. On November 4, they went to court in Victoria to address the criminal complaints against him.

The tribe's territory has been threatened by landowners linked to cattle ranching, loggers, and miners, who have decades-long legacy of controlling mayors' offices and using them as organized crime structures to dispossess the Tolupán. When bribes and tribal division do not work, tribal council leaders have been assassinated. Indigenous people have been dehumanized as just another species by those who covet land.

Because of the threats to Reinaldo Baharona Reyes and in concern for the safety of the tribe's members, we call upon your integrity and humanity to:

- re-evaluate the protection mechanism currently provided for Reinaldo Baharona Reyes, in consultation with him and his legal representatives
- uphold respect for the self-determination of the peoples established in ILO Convention 169 to exercise sovereignty over their territory where they have historically inhabited
- establish a dialogue table to address territorial conflicts and state investment with the involvement of the tribal and governmental leaders
- guarantee that all human rights defenders, in particular Indigenous defenders, are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities including defending the environment, without fear of criminalization or reprisals in Honduras.

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinators


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador 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
Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 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
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: