

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

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

February 26, 2023

Dear Commissioner:

We are writing to denounce the killing of young Garífuna leader **Ricardo Arnaúl Montero**, an active member of the Land Defense Committee of Triunfo de la Cruz (CODETT), Tela municipality, Atlántida Department. He worked on the security team of the Gama River sector of Secundino Torres, which is a recovered communal Garífuna territory located inside the Punta Izopo National Park.

He was found dead on the beach on January 29. His body was quickly buried after police preliminarily considered it a drowning. But then on January 31 authorities ordered an exhumation of the body to perform an autopsy.

In December 2022, Ricardo Arnaúl Montero requested protective measures from the Human Rights Secretariat because he had been receiving death threats. He and other Garífuna leaders are targeted because of their opposition to private development projects in Triunfo de la Cruz, such as Club Marbella and Laguna Negra. Club Marbella is owned by Inversiones y Desarrollo El Triunfo, S.A. (Idetrisa), a company made up of millionaire Honduran businessmen. Local political leaders, such as the mayor and president of the community board of Tela, are suspected to favor the private developers over the ancestral land rights of the Garífuna people.

All along the Atlantic coast, the Garífuna people continue to be victimized by harassment, death threats, assassination, and the profiling and criminalization of leaders. The Garífuna Committee for the Investigation and Search of the Disappeared of Triunfo de la Cruz (SUNLA) calls this pattern of persecution "institutionalized racism and a genocidal plan against our people."

We strongly urge that authorities:

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the death of Ricardo Arnaúl Montero, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- respect the mandates of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights by working with Garífuna leadership to start a process of returning their illegally-seized Atlantic coastal lands to them and immediately put an end to the threats against them

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
 Co-Coordinator



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
 Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons of African Descent and Against Racial Discrimination (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 & Vance ~ via email
 US Representatives Balderson, Beatty, Brown, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

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