

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

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

March 23, 2023

Dear Commissioner:

We write to you today out of grave concern for the safety of **Misael Martínez**, an environmental leader in Tegucigalpa and member of the organization ARCAH (Alternativa de Reivindicación Comunitaria y Ambientalista de Honduras, or Alternative for Community and Environmental Vindication of Honduras), who suffered a kidnapping attempt last month.

On February 9, Misael Martínez was walking through a neighborhood in Tegucigalpa in order to catch a bus when a man in an unknown car started following him, yelling at him and threatening to make him get into his car and threatened to use force. Misael Martínez tried to evade the man by going into several shops and exiting onto different streets, but the stranger was waiting for him and continued yelling angrily at him to get into the car.


Misael Martínez is a member of ARCAH, which was founded in 2017 and has been a thorn in the side of private development investors pouring money into the controversial ZEDEs (Special Economic Development Zones). In August 2022, 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. In defense of the environment and local sovereignty, ARCAH has filed lawsuits against multinational corporations operating in the ZEDEs, which are continuing to destroy and pollute, despite the decree issued by President Castro in April 2022 to repeal the ZEDEs. ARCAH has recently been involved in denouncing the ZEDE Próspera, where construction of a luxury hotel is destroying the Bay Islands forest and coral reef. In Tegucigalpa, ARCAH has been fighting against the company El Cortijo because its poultry production is contaminating the Choluteca River.

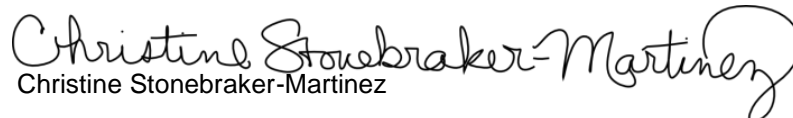
We know that this kidnapping attempt on Misael Martínez is just the latest chapter in a string of threats made against him and other members of ARCAH. Christopher Castillo, the general coordinator of ARCAH, has experienced harassment, unjust criminalization, and death threats (cf our letter 24 OCT 2022). In 2020, intruders entered the home of Misael Martínez and stole his computer. Although Misael Martínez and other members of ARCAH have been listed as beneficiaries of the National Protection Mechanism since 2020, the implementation of protection schemes has been slow. It is possible that ARCAH members are being targeted even more because they are on the Protection Mechanism list but are not receiving the required protection measures.

In light of this, we strongly urge you to:

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the attempted kidnapping of Misael Martínez, publish the results, and bring those responsible for the attack to justice
- take the necessary measures to guarantee the life, physical and psychological integrity, and safety of Misael Martínez and all other members of ARCAH, in strict accordance with their wishes
- ensure that all 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: Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington, DC ~ 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 Ariel Jahner~ via email
US State Department: Bryan Schell, Honduras Desk Officer ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Vance and 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: