

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

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

March 24, 2023

Dear Commissioner:

We are writing to energetically condemn the assassination of two more land defenders in the Bajo Aguán Valley region of Colón Department. We join with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in condemning the murder of campesino leader **Santos Hipólito Rivas** (age 48), and his son **Javier Rivas** (age 15) from the small town of Panamá, municipality of Trujillo. The two were riddled with bullets on February 12 while riding a motorcycle in the Ilanga sector.

Santos Hipólito Rivas was a founding member of the Gregorio Chávez Peasant Production Association (Movimiento Campesino Fundación Gregorio Chávez, also known as MCRCG, or simply “Gregorio Chávez”). The campesino cooperative was named for Gregorio Chávez, a 69-year-old campesino who was disappeared on July 2, 2012 by security guards of the large landowning family of the late Miguel Facussé and found on July 6, tortured and murdered on Facussé’s farm Paso Aguán in Panamá (cf our letter 12 JUL 2012). The families of MCRCG have been victimized with intimidation, violence, and forced evictions for the past decade. A particularly violent episode occurred on July 3, 2014 when approximately 300 police and military members of Joint Task Force Xaltruch III, accompanied by National Police agents and private security guards of the Facusse family’s Dinant corporation, invaded the Paso Aguán farm and indiscriminately fired tear gas and live bullets during a forced eviction, which resulted in the arrests of eight campesino leaders (cf our letter of 14 AUG 2014).


In 2021, Hipólito Rivas was falsely criminalized after the assassinations of two Gregorio Chávez members, Santos Marcelo Torres and Juan Manuel Moncada (cf our letter of 15 AUG 2021). Hipólito Rivas’ committed activism made him a focus of attention for those who oppose the struggles of the campesinos, especially for the trained security guards of private landowners and the paramilitary groups that have been operating with impunity in the region for years. Hipólito Rivas denounced on several occasions that he was the victim of threats, persecution and surveillance by these armed groups. Hipólito Rivas was enrolled in the National Protection Mechanism, and it is widely understood that the protection authorities knew of an assassination plot against him and 24 other campesino leaders in the area.

With the killings of Hipólito and Javier Rivas, there have already been seven defenders of land and water murdered in the Bajo Aguán in during the first 40 days of 2023. It is imperative that the government take urgent measures to find a real solution to these problems that target campesino communities.

We strongly urge you to:

- carry out an impartial and exhaustive investigation into the assassination of Hipólito and Javier Rivas, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- ensure that other campesino leaders in the Bajo Aguán are able to carry out their legitimate activities in defense of land rights and offer them protective measures, in accordance with their wishes
- fully implement the Precautionary Measure 50-14 granted to 123 campesino leaders in the area by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in May 2014

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
Jsabel 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 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: