

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

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

April 23, 2023

Dear Commissioner:

We are writing to express our concern over the ongoing criminalization and threats against territorial and environmental defenders in southern Honduras. On March 27, **Santos H. Ortiz** was arrested by Honduran police for unknown reasons. Then, when his spouse, **María Concepción Hernández**, went to visit him in jail on April 1, she was arrested allegedly because of a pending arrest warrant dating back to August 29, 2019. Their 12-year-old son, who accompanied his mother to the police station, was forced to travel alone back to their home. The police refused to provide any information about their detention to their lawyers and colleagues from the Association for the Development of the Peninsula of Zacate Grande (ADEPZA), only telling them that she had been transferred to Amapala on El Tigre Island, Valle Department.

Santos Ortiz and María Concepción Hernández have been criminalized on multiple occasions for protecting their land and the privatization of public beaches on the peninsula of Zacate Grande in the community of Playa Blanca. ADEPZA holds the large land owner Jorge Luis Cassis Leiva and municipal authorities, including Mayor Alberto Cruz, Roman Sierra and Nelson Flores, for any violence committed against the Zacate Grande communities.

Defenders of the ADEPZA organized communities, such as Santos Ortiz and María Concepción Hernández, have been a benchmark of resistance against the territorial dispossession by large landowners who seek to monopolize all the lands at their disposal using violence, criminalization and corruption. We denounce the systematic judicial persecution against the defenders of the Zacate Grande peninsula, who also in recent weeks have faced a number of incidents in their communities.

We strongly urge that authorities in Honduras

- immediately release Santos Ortiz and María Concepción Hernández from detention
- repeal Decree 93-2021, which allows for preventive and immediate evictions without judicial control and aggravates land and territory conflicts.
- protect the constitutionally guaranteed rights of land defenders who work to protect their ancestral territories

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
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
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: