

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

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

May 12, 2023

Dear Commissioner:

We are deeply concerned about the continued violence against land and water defenders in Honduras, including the recent assassination of **José Gilberto Martínez Cardona** in Olanchito, Yoro Department, on April 18. This incident is only adding to the eight human rights defenders who have already lost their lives in the Aguán Valley in northern Honduras this year alone.

José Gilberto Martínez Cardona, age 64, was a community leader, a member of the National Association of Honduran Peasant Farmers (AHACH), as well as the secretary of the Peasant Associative Production Company "Blessing of God #2." He was murdered on Tuesday, April 18, after participating in a commemoration in celebration of the International Day of Peasant Struggle.

According to ANACH, José Gilberto Martínez Cardona had been active in his community's fight for their land and water for more than 30 years. He became the first land defender killed in the Aguán Valley this year outside the departments of Colón or Atlántida. In the Aguán Valley, local communities have been fighting peacefully for decades to protect their waterways and land that have been seized and destroyed through various hydroelectric and mining projects made possible by the 1992 Law for the Modernization and Development of the Agricultural Sector. We understand that your office has condemned the assassination of José Gilberto Martínez Cardona and these other assassinations:

- Jan 7: Aly Domínguez and Jairo Bonilla (Guapinol village, Tocoa, Colón)
- Jan 18: Omar Cruz Tomé and Andy Martínez Murillo (Los Laureles cooperative, Tocoa, Colón)
- Jan 29: Ricardo Arnaúl Montero (Triunfo de la Cruz, Atlántida Dept)
- Feb 12: Santos Hipólito Rivas and his 15-year-old son Javier Rivas (Panamá village, Tocoa, Colón)
- Feb 18: Benigno Maldonado (Pajuiles sector of Tela, Atlántida Dept)
- Mar 25: Emerson Martínez (Los Laureles cooperative, Tocoa, Colón)

We thank your office for calling for an end to the repeated acts of violence against human rights defenders and community leaders in the Aguán Valley. This persistent violence against defenders of water and land is unacceptable. We highly condemn these crimes and **strongly urge you to:**

- thoroughly and impartially investigate the assassination of José Gilberto Martínez Cardona, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- employ any measures needed to protect land and water defenders in the Aguán Valley from any further violence or persecution, in strict accordance with their wishes
- prohibit any further construction work of major projects endangering the land and water until an agreement has been found in alignment with the rights and demands of the local communities

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
ANACH: Asociación Nacional de Campesinos Hondureños ~ 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 ~ via email
US Representatives Balderson, Beatty, Brown, Johnson, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

19 APR 2023_CriterioHN_Honduras

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