

**Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano**

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

June 22, 2023

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We are writing to denounce threats and attacks against the families of the Lenca Indigenous Council of Nueva Palestina in Marcala, San José municipality, La Paz Department. The 38 campesino families who make up the community report that beginning on June 2, private landowner Juan Gabriel Argueta Montoya and his workers have been coming to the community with insults and threats to harm the families. At particular risk is **Benjamín Cruz Bonilla**, president of the Indigenous Council.

In 1999 the National Agrarian Institute (INA) gave property title to 229 hectares of ancestral land to the Lenca Council of Nueva Palestina. However, a private landowner, Juan Gabriel Argueta, has an ongoing land dispute with the Lenca campesino cooperative. Juan Gabriel Argueta Montoya was also granted property by INA in 2016, but his title affects only about two blocks of the 229 hectares. Nevertheless, in May 2022 he was successful in obtaining an eviction order instructing some of the families to abandon three plots of land. On May 18, 2022, 40-50 military personnel and police officers arrived at the community, accompanied by about 200 employees of the Argueta family, telling the campesino families that they had to leave by order of a court of law. Two residents who resisted were arrested and detained for several hours, but they were not charged with any crime (cf our letter May 24, 2022).

The community received a favorable ruling from another court this month. On June 8, the Court of Appeals of Comayagua ruled in favor of several members of the Indigenous Council of Nueva Palestina who had been subjected to an illegal judicial process, accused of aggravated usurpation and alteration of terms or boundaries. Now, both the court and the Public Ministry agree with the Indigenous Council of Nueva Palestina that there is no aggravated usurpation or alteration of terms or boundaries.

We urge that the government of Honduras

- instruct Juan Gabriel Argueta Montoya to abide by the June 8 court ruling
- instruct INA to clarify any other land titles in dispute
- note that the community of Nueva Palestina is a beneficiary of the National Protection Mechanism
- uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted by the State of Honduras, by protecting the rights delineated in the document, including food, land and water, and respect for the cultural identity and traditional knowledge of Indigenous populations

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinators



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras to the US ~ via email and US mail  
Carlos Bernal Pulido, Rapporteur for Honduras, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ via email and US mail  
Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ~ 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 Ariel Jahner, Human Rights Officer ~ via email  
US State Department: Bryan Schell, Honduras Desk Officer ~ via email  
US Senators Brown & Vance, and US Representatives 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:**