

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

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

September 25, 2023

Dear Commissioner:

We are deeply saddened to learn of the killing of Pech Indigenous community leader **Juana María Martínez** and her companion in the community of Pueblo Nuevo Subirana in Dulce Nombre de Culmí, Olancho Department. Neighbors found the bodies of both people on the morning of September 23. Both had gunshot wounds and their bodies had been burned. The body of her companion was not initially identified because he did not have documents that would identify him.


The Pech peoples were the original inhabitants of the Bay Island of Roatan but were relocated to the mining areas of the mainland by the Spanish during the early colonial period. The total population of Pech Indigenous peoples in Honduras today is only about 6,000, and they are divided into nine communities. About 90% of the Pech live in Olancho Department; others are in Colón and Gracias a Dios Departments. Resisting total assimilation, about half still speak their native Pech language. Julián Mass, Pech Indigenous chief of the Vallecito community in Dulce Nombre de Culmí, told the media that Juana María Martínez was a local leader of entrepreneurship projects who was dedicated to working on behalf of the Pech, actively participating in assemblies of Indigenous organizations.

The vicious way that Juana María Martínez and her companion were killed and burned is reminiscent of the killing and burning of Tolupán Indigenous defender Amilcar Vieda and Naún Ismael Chacón on May 9 in San Francisco de Locomapa, Yoro Department (cf our letter 26 JUN 2023). Other Indigenous leaders active in defense movements who have been killed so far in 2023 include Martín Morales Martínez and Ricardo Arnaúl Montero (cf our letter 26 FEB 2023). The murder of Juana María Martínez is emblematic of the vulnerability and violence faced by Indigenous peoples in Honduras.

We strongly urge that the government of Honduras:

- conduct a transparent investigation into the killing of Juana María Martínez and her companion, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- consult with Pech Indigenous leaders in Vallecito to devise security measures for their protection, in strict accordance with their wishes

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinators


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
Esmeralda Arosemena de Troitiño, Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 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 (Joe Duran) ~ via email
US State Department: Bryan Schell, Honduras Desk Officer ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email
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: