

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

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

September 26, 2023

Dear Commissioner:

We are outraged to learn of the killing of another land defender in the Bajo Aguán Valley. **José David Fortín**, general secretary of the Cooperativa Agropecuaria Campesina Tarros Limitada, was murdered on September 24 in his home in the village of Los Tarros in Trujillo, Colón Department. Two hitmen arrived on a motorcycle at 2:00pm, entered his home, and shot him. With serious wounds he was transferred to a hospital in Tocoa, where he died.

The members of the Tarros campesino cooperative began a land recovery process in July 2022. They had been forcibly displaced by local politicians about 15 years prior. The lands were mortgaged to a bank and acquired by third parties. In May 2023 they were evicted by orders of the Commission for Agrarian Security and Access to Land, an initiative that began within the controversial National Council of Defense and Security. According to the peasant rights organization Plataforma Agraria, there are strong rumors in the community that the third parties who claim ownership of the disputed land hired hitmen.


It is possible that the name of José David Fortín was listed with those of several other leaders of cooperatives on an assassination list that was made public in October 2022. José David Fortín was a longtime community leader, active in the Local Emergency Response Committee of Las Tarros. Since the 1990s, he had denounced the massive dispossession of agrarian reform lands at the hands of politicians. Because of his outspokenness in defense of campesino lands and enterprises, he had received threats on several occasions, and reported those to the Public Ministry office in Tegucigalpa. To date, according to the Plataforma Agraria, the Public Ministry never carried out any investigative measures.

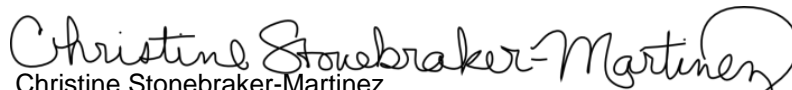
There has been a blood bath of assassinations in the Aguán Valley this year. Among those assassinated so far: Alí Domínguez and Jairo Bonilla (cf our letter 24 JAN 2023), Omar Cruz Tomé and his father-in-law Andy Martínez Murillo (cf our letter 22 FEB 2023), Santos Hipólito Rivas and his son Javier Rivas (cf our letter 24 MAR 2023), Emerson Martínez (cf letter 24 APR 2023), José Gilberto Martínez Cardona (cf letter 12 MAY 2023), and Oscar Oquelí Domínguez Ramos (cf our letter 21 JUN 2023).

We strongly urge that the government of Honduras

- conduct an impartial investigation into the assassination of José David Fortín, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- install the Tripartite Commission (a commitment it made in February 2022) with the mandate to investigate violence and human rights violations against the peasant movement
- implement measures to dismantle the criminal structures that operate alongside organized crime in the Bajo Aguán, many in conjunction with corrupt officials
- offer protection schemes for campesino leaders in the Bajo Aguán, 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
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: