

Blanca Sarahí Izaguirre Lozano

National Commissioner for Human Rights of Honduras (CONADEH)

via email

October 25, 2023

Dear Commissioner:

We are writing to you today to express our collective and continued outrage about the ongoing violence against campesinos in the Bajo Aguán, which has resulted in yet another death. In Trujillo, Colón, on October 14, the National Police shot live ammunition indiscriminately at peasant farmers who were carrying out a public action to claim their legitimate right to land. **Kevin Azahel Meza**, a 24-year-old farmer who was a member of the Empresa Asociativa Campesina de Isletas (EACI), died due to the excessive use of lethal force by the National Police.

There are two elements that prove the farmers of Isletas have the right to defend their land. The first is that the National Agrarian Institute (INA) awarded the EACI a property title for 4,036 hectares on September 9, 1984, which the Santa Inés Agricultural Company (ASISA), a subsidiary of the transnational company Dole Food Company, then stripped away through multiple violations of the legal system. By 1990, ASISA had forcibly taken control of EACI campesino lands with the assistance of the Honduran military and death squads. The second reason is that the EACI has filed at least two civil lawsuits in Tocoa, Colón, (in 2011 and 2012) claiming rights to the land. More than a decade later, however, the EACI campesinos are still waiting for resolution of those pending lawsuits.


As in the last century, once again, the Honduran government kneels before power and transnational capital, despite the fact that these companies have sustained and maintained possession of these lands in a corrupt and violent manner. Kevin Meza's death would have been avoidable if only the judicial system in the country worked and if the official discourse of protection of human rights was implemented in practice, above the economic interests of the US business community, landowners, and national agro-industrial companies.

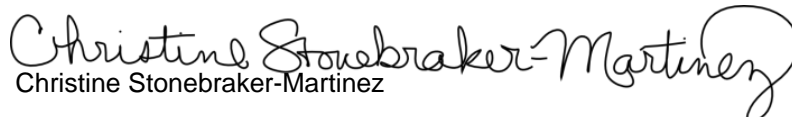
El Aguán can no longer tolerate this level of violence. There have been at least ten killings of campesinos since the current administration took power in January 2022. And the families of the Aguán are still awaiting adequate investigations and the assignment of responsibility for the almost 200 murders of campesinos there over the past 30 years.

The freedom and impunity that national and international companies in the area have to operate and maintain irregular possession of some of the best agricultural lands in the country, with the help and complicity of the government, is unparalleled and shameful. We therefore strongly urge that the Honduran government:

- conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of Kevin Meza that includes the Minnesota Protocol for the investigation of potentially unlawful deaths
- verify that the land legally belongs to EACI and that it is registered with INA
- implement the Tripartite Commission (a commitment it made in February 2022, and to which EACI is a signatory) with the mandate to investigate violence and human rights violations against the peasant movement
- end all violent evictions of campesino families who claim their right to their lands
- 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
Sean Minnier, Vice President of Supply Chain, Dole Fresh Fruit Co. ~ via email and US mail
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

15 OCT 2023_CriterioHN_Honduras

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