

IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America
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Ambassador Laura F. Dogu
US Embassy in Honduras
Av. La Paz . Aptdo. Postal no. 3453
Tegucigalpa, HONDURAS

January 19, 2024

Dear Ambassador Dogu:

We are writing about the attacks on Garífuna community members who oppose the construction of the Próspera-ZEDE (Employment and Economic Development Zone) on the Island of Roatán. Cryptocurrency investors, including citizens of the United States, are embattled with local residents over their plans to build infrastructure for tourism inside 58 acres it claims. The center of the battle is Crawfish Rock, a community of a few hundred mostly ethnic Garífuna residents.

The government of Honduras passed a law in 2013 that paved the way for the ZEDEs. Próspera-ZEDE Investors first appeared in Crawfish Rock in 2017 as a charitable foundation, opening a community center and talking about plans to build a tourist center nearby. Representatives of Próspera-ZEDE have said that they informed the community of their intentions to build development projects in June 2019, citing a document that was signed by 49 residents. Próspera posted on its website drawings of three stages of expansion that appeared to include the center of Crawfish Rock within its jurisdiction, stoking fears that investors could invoke a legal clause that would allow for the expropriation of the land the community has lived on for generations. In early 2022, Próspera-ZEDE announced a new round of investments totaling \$60m and the adoption of the cryptocurrency bitcoin as legal tender. Some residents say they were deceived.


OFRANEH (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras) reported that on December 8, 2023, armed men broke into a meeting at which community members were discussing what they call violations of human rights by Próspera-ZEDE. Crawfish resident **Vanessa Cárdenas** was attacked and seriously injured. OFRANEH, along with local and national environmentalist groups, point to Erick Brimen, executive director of Próspera-ZEDE, as the instigator of violent aggression against the community of Crawfish Rock.

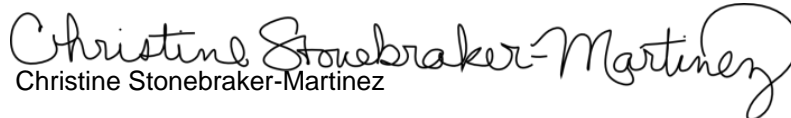
In April 2022, President Xiomara Castro announced that she would repeal the 2013 ZEDE law, but the company has threatened to sue Honduras for \$11 billion (under the DR-CAFTA trade agreement) if it does not allow the Próspera-ZEDE to proceed.

We urge that you

- consult with the Public Ministry (MP) about any investigations into acts of violent aggression against Crawfish Rock residents
- speak with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the government of Honduras to ensure that any protection measures requested by Vanessa Cardenas are fully implemented
- speak with executive leadership of Próspera-ZEDE about their plans to mitigate acts of further violence
- offer to bring together affected parties (including Crawfish Rock residents, OFRANEH, and Próspera-ZEDE) to discuss a peaceful solution to the conflict

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Blanca Sarai Izaguirre Lozano, National Commissioner for Human Rights/Comisionada Nacional de los Derechos Humanos (CONADEH) ~ via email
Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington, DC ~ via email and US mail
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) Rapporteurs: Andrea Pochak (for Honduras), Gloria Monique de Mees (Rights of Afro-descendants) ~ 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
OFRANEH: Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras / Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña ~ via email
Honduras Próspera ~ via US mail
US State Department: Bryan Schell, Honduras Desk Officer (Washington, DC), Joe Duran, Human Rights Officer at US Embassy (Tegucigalpa) ~ via email
US Senators Brown & Vance ~ via email
US Representatives Beatty, Brown, 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: