

# IRTF

InterReligious Task Force on Central America  
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Blanca Saraí Izaguirre Lozano  
National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH)  
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

February 12, 2024

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We are deeply concerned about the continued **persecution by the State of residents and leaders of Garífuna communities** in northern Honduras.

**Cosme Ávila**, a territorial defender of the Garífuna community of Guadalupe in Trujillo, Colón Department, was arrested by the National Police on January 24. The arrest was carried out when he was traveling by bus near the community of Agua Amarilla, Colón Department. He was later released.

Cosme Ávila had previously been accused of invading Garífuna communal land by a Canadian businessman who owns the Carivida Club Café in Trujillo. He was arrested on this charge on Roatán Island in 2017, but he was released and the charges were dismissed. It appears that there are arrest warrants for persons like Cosme Ávila who have already had their charges dismissed. According to the National Network of Human Rights Defenders in Honduras, the Police Investigation Directorate (DPI) has not been updating their records.

The arrest of Cosme Ávila is another example of the systematic persecution against the Garífuna people who defend their territories against foreign investors who are illegally expropriating their ancestral territories to construct tourist and residential projects in the Bay of Trujillo and other locations along the Atlantic coast of Honduras. Foreign investors use false criminalization, stigmatization of community leaders, and judicial persecution as strategies to silence the Garífuna communities' defense of their territories.

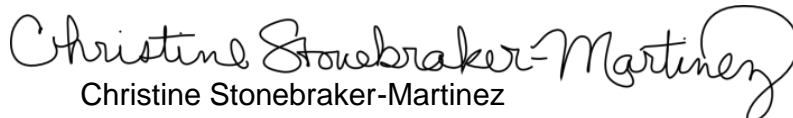
We urge that you

- create processes to update the files of the DPI so that they stop arresting Hondurans who have already been issued definitive dismissals of criminal charges or letters of freedom
- ensure that protection measures for Garífuna community leaders that have been prescribed by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights are fully implemented
- speak with foreign investors in the Bay of Trujillo to mitigate future false criminalization or any acts of violence against Garífuna territorial defenders

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator



Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: 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 (Afro-descendant 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  
OFRANEH (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras) ~ via email  
US Embassy in Tegucigalpa: Laura F. Dogu (ambassador) and Joe Duran, Human Rights Officer ~ via email  
US State Department: Bryan Schell, Honduras Desk Officer (Washington, DC)  
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:**

