

Blanca Saraí Izaguirre Lozano
National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH)
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

April 25, 2024

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We are writing to you because of our deep concern about recent reports concerning the **illegal and violent eviction of peasant farmers** (campesinos) in El Progreso, Yoro Department.


Media outlets reported that on February 29, an unprecedented deployment of over 1,500 members of the Honduran National Police was ordered to forcibly remove campesino families from lands legally attributed to their cooperatives since the agrarian reforms of the 1970s and 1980s. Police used heavy machinery to destroy corn plantations, fired gunshots, used physical violence against farmers and their families, and made arrests. These farmers, who had been in the process of recovering their lands for the previous ten months, now find themselves in a situation of extreme vulnerability. Almost 20,000 quintales of food, including basic grains and vegetables, and an estimated 300 blocks of crops were destroyed, directly affecting about 1,500 people.

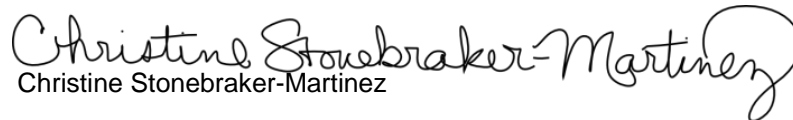
The violent evictions were carried out against three campesino cooperative bases of the Landless Peasant Movement of Yoro (MCSTY): El Bálsamo, Agua Blanca Sur, and La Sarrosa. Furthermore, these evictions reportedly favor the interests of the sugar company Azucarera del Norte SA (Azunosa), which has acquired land titles through intimidation, fraud, and violence since the early 1990s. To date, Azunosa has presented 15 criminal accusations against several members of MCSTY and another 40 against members of the regional chapter of the National Central of Farm Workers (CNTC- Progreso).

The violent evictions undermine the rule of law and contradict the statements made by representatives of your government at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, claiming a commitment to avoiding human rights violations during evictions. We therefore strongly urge that:

- the Supreme Court of Justice rule on the appeal of unconstitutionality against Decree 93-2021, which expands the crime of usurpation, affecting peasant families that legitimately claim their right to land
- the Supreme Court of Justice rule on another appeal of unconstitutionality against the Law of Modernization of the Agricultural Sector, considered contrary to the Constitution of the Republic
- the National Congress issue a final ruling on the legislation aimed at the transfer of lands under the administration of the Seized Assets Management Office (OABI) so that the National Agrarian Institute can proceed in transferring land titles to campesino associations
- the Agrarian Security Commission update Decree 18-2008 to allow for open discussion of structural reforms that address the historical demands and current needs of campesino communities
- the offices of the National Human Rights Commissioner and the Human Rights Secretariat assume a more proactive role in protecting the rights of campesino communities, beyond the registration of violent eviction operations

Sincerely,


Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-Coordinator


Christine Stonebraker-Martinez

copies: Lica. Rebeca Lizette Ráquel Obando, President of the Supreme Court of Justice ~ via email
Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington, DC ~ via email and US mail
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): Rapporteur Andrea Pochak (for Honduras) ~ 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
CNTC: Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo / National Central of Rural Workers ~ 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

07 MAR 2024_ConexionHN_Honduras

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