

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

August 3, 2024

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We are deeply distressed that **Nolvia Albertia Obando Turcios**, a respected Christian pastor and leader of the Las Galileas Women's Rural Movement in the La Bomba community of Jutiapa, Atlántida Department, continues to be persecuted through irregular judicial proceedings. In March 2023, after the eviction of the 60 women members of Las Galileas, she was unjustly indicted with land usurpation and spent five months in pretrial detention at El Porvernir, released only because of a \$2,000 bail payment.

A recent pretrial hearing held in the third chamber of the La Ceiba Sentencing Court has raised concerns about the fairness of the judicial process. The Public Prosecutor's Office (MP) presented testimony from police officers who simply retold what was already included in their written reports. A private prosecutor surprised the defense by presenting new witnesses and evidence that were accepted by the court. With the public trial scheduled for August 12, her defense attorney is concerned that the proceedings have been prejudicial against Nolviva Obando.


The criminalization of Nolviva Obando is part of a larger attack of systemic criminalization against women's rights workers and land defenders. In its 2024 Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Honduras, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) warned: "The use of criminal offenses such as incitement to violence, usurpation, insults and slander are the most commonly used to criminalize human rights defenders, especially those who defend the environment, land and territory." The judicial process has violated Nolviva Obando's procedural rights and has done harm to her personal, emotional, and mental integrity. The Supreme Court of Justice, however, still has not resolved the Appeal for Protection filed more than a year ago in favor of Nolviva Obando.

Even though Nolviva Obando is no longer detained by prison walls, her human rights efforts are thwarted by judges' orders of prohibition on entering the disputed Las Galileas territory or communicating with the private landholder or his family. Nolviva Obando has reported many other violations of her rights, including: aggression against her at the time of her arrest; harassment, threats, and severe indignities, including sexual humiliation; defamation and stigmatization from police authorities and news agencies. The police and media baselessly claim the Las Galileas Women's Rural Movement is a criminal gang that conducts terrorist activities.

We urge that authorities in Honduras:

- end the judicial process against Nolviva Alberta Obando Turcios
- offer a protection scheme to Nolviva Obando so that she can carry out her legitimate human rights work without fear
- investigate the possible complicity of judges, magistrates, police, and the Public Prosecutor's office with the private landholder of the disputed territory of Las Galileas
- avoid the misuse of the judicial process against human rights defenders by reviewing and adjusting any current criminal cases, as recommended by the IACHR.

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
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): Rapporteur Andrea Pochak (for Honduras) and Roberta Clarke (for Women's 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 (OACNUDH) ~ 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 and US Representatives Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Sykes ~ via email

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