

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

September 23, 2024

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We are writing to express our profound concern for continued attacks by private corporations against campesino families, as well as the complicity of the state in such attacks.

In a violent eviction in the early hours of the morning of August 20, private security guards—along with hooded and armed employees of the sugar company Azucarera del Norte (Azunosa)—destroyed approximately 50 blocks of corn crops belonging to the peasant farmer families of La Sarrosa Village, in El Progreso, Yoro Department. Several human rights defenders, including minors and members of the Landless Peasants' Movement of Yoro (Movimiento de Campesinos Sin Tierra), were victims of physical violence by these employees and security guards, who exercised excessive force. They beat, assaulted and seriously injured the families, using stones, machetes and firing firearms indiscriminately.

As a result of these violent actions, land defender **María Munguía Betancourt**, age 46, was seriously injured. At around 7:00am, she fell to ground unconscious after receiving several blows with stones from Azunosa employees. These same employees and armed guards blocked the main street, preventing access to the fire department ambulance, which had been trying to enter since early hours. After repeated alert calls made by Radio Progreso, the ambulance managed to access and provide care for María Munguía Betancourt until around 9:30 am.

Campesino organizations are struggling for their legitimate right to land, food and a dignified life free of violence. The state must end its complicity in the harassment, stigmatization, and criminalization of campesino leaders, as well as its participation in violent evictions. The violence on August 20 took place under the surveillance of the National Police, whose agents were present to guarantee that the AZUNOSA employees and private security guards were able to carry out the eviction.

We strongly urge that officials in Honduras

- conduct a thorough and transparent investigation into the violent eviction of the campesino families in La Sarrosa village, publish the results, and bring those responsible to justice
- investigate any alliances in illegal activities (including human rights violations) among large landholders, agricultural corporations, public prosecutors, and state security forces
- offer protection schemes to land defenders at risk, in strict accordance with their wishes

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators



Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Javier Efrain 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 (OACNUDH) ~ via email
CNTC: Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo / National Union 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

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