

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

August 26, 2025

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We condemn the unjust criminalization and prosecution of **defenders of ancestral Garífuna lands**. We also denounce the Honduran National Police's abuse of power when they arbitrarily detained **Cesia Guillén** (without a warrant) on July 19 and tear gassed human rights defenders from the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH) who came to her defense.

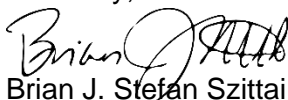
Five defendants who are facing charges of land usurpation (Cesia Guillén, Cindy Fernández, Gilma Bernárdez, Luis Calderón, and Cesar Geovanny Bernárdez) presented themselves in a courthouse hearing in Trujillo, Colón Department, on August 11. All five are members of OFRANEH, an organization that for decades has accompanied Garífuna communities along the Atlantic coast to defend their collective ancestral properties. OFRANEH has been involved in the recuperation (recovery) of a 32-acre land parcel in Santa Fé, for which they hold a property title dating back to 1882. Members of OFRANEH are now being criminalized and prosecuted after the complaint of two private actors who claim to have purchased the land. Despite a report from the National Agrarian Institute (INA) indicating that the land parcel is clearly located within Garífuna ancestral territory (and that its sale is void), the Trujillo Public Prosecutor's Office has continued moving forward with judicial proceedings. (The office even expedited the process by filing the prosecutor's request on July 8, during the Honduran judicial system's holiday season.) The criminalization of Garífuna land defenders is particularly alarming given the Trujillo Public Prosecutor's office record of denying cases pursued by Garífuna communities.

The Garífuna people, descendants of Indigenous peoples from the Caribbean and formerly enslaved Africans, have lived on the Atlantic coast since 1797. The State of Honduras has already been condemned three times by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights for violating the Garífuna people's right to collective land ownership in three separate communities: (1) Triunfo de la Cruz, Atlántida Department (2015); (2) Punta Piedra, Colón Department (2015); and (3) San Juan, Atlántida Department (2023). This most recent prosecution by the Trujillo Public Prosecutor's office demonstrates the complicity of the government in siding with private actors who want to appropriate their ancestral lands.

We strongly urge that authorities:

- (1) end the legal prosecution of the five Garífuna individuals being criminalized for defending their land
- (2) end the persecution of Garífuna communities, their leaders, and members of OFRANEH
- (3) implement the full enforcement of land titling decisions in favor of the Garífuna and accountability for public officials who failed to protect their ancestral land rights.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-coordinators



Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington, DC ~ via email and US mail  
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): Andrea Pochak (Rapporteur for Honduras) and Gloria Monique de Mees (Rapporteur on the Rights of Afro-descendants) ~ via email  
Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH): Isabel Albaladejo Escribano (Representative to Honduras), Alice Shackelford (UN Resident Coordinator in Honduras) ~ via email  
US State Department: Honduras Desk Officer (Washington, DC) ~ via email  
US Embassy in Tegucigalpa: Roy Perrin (Chargé d'Affaires ad interim) and Human Rights Officer ~ via email  
US Congress: Senators from Ohio (Husted and Moreno) ~ via email  
US Representatives from Ohio (Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Rulli, Sykes) ~ via email

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