

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

July 23, 2026

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We are writing to express our deep concern over the criminalization and detention of five members of the Honduran Black Fraternal Organization (OFRANEH) in the violent and unjust eviction of the Garífuna community of San Juan, Tela Bay, in Atlántida Department.

On July 6, more than 200 police officers, with the use of tear gas, threats, and live ammunition, invaded the Garífuna community of San Juan-Tela to execute an eviction. In the process, **Deinor Osmany Mejía Arzu, Irbin Rene López Cortes, Carlos Enrique Fernández Guzmán, Onil Rigoberto Hernández Zelaya, and Sara Abigail Acosta** were detained on a wrongful account of aggravated usurpation of their ancestral territory. These events were performed under the pretext of the Law for the Strengthening and Protection of the Agro-industrial Sector, Energy Projects, Tourism, Livestock, and Small Agro-industrial Producers of Honduras. Although the detainees were released hours later (after pressure from Garífuna communities and national and international organizations), they all remain criminalized. At the initial hearing on July 15, the judge transferred the case to the National Jurisdiction Court in San Pedro Sula, deeming the alleged land usurpation to be part of organized criminal activity.

The eviction and subsequent criminalization of the five Garífuna community members are indicative of racism and possibly corruption by the government. The eviction is a flagrant violation of the 2023 judgment issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in favor of the Garífuna people of San Juan, which recognizes their right to collective ownership and their ancestral rights to that territory. It also violates Circular DGPN-(S/D)-No. 009-2026, issued by the National Police Directorate on June 27, which orders the police to act immediately in cases of "illegal occupations," with the exception of Indigenous and Tribal Lands as defined by ILO Convention 169.

We strongly urge that the authorities in Honduras:

- drop all charges against San Juan community members: Deinor Osmany Mejia Arzube, Irbin Rene Lopez Cortes, Carlos Enrique Fernández Guzmán, Onil Rigoberto Hernandez Zelaya, and Sara Abigail Acosta
- immediately implement the rulings of the InterAmerican Court of Human Rights court that recognize and protect the rights of the Garífuna communities of San Juan, Triunfo de la Cruz, Punto Piedra, and Cayos Cochinos
- stop all violent violations of the territorial, civil, and human rights of the Garífuna people

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinator

copies: Roberto Flores Bermúdez, Embassy 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-descendant Persons) ~ via email
Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH): Juan Carlos Monge (Representative to Honduras)
UN Team in Honduras: Alejandro Alvarez (Resident Coordinator) ~ via email
US State Department: Honduras Desk Officer (Washington, DC) ~ via email
US Embassy in Tegucigalpa: Colleen Hoey (Chargé d'Affaires) and Human Rights Officer ~ via email
US Senators from Ohio (Husted and Moreno)
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: