

SEP 2021: Rapid Response Network

summaries of RRN letters this month

SEP 11 2021

COLOMBIA

assassinated: student leader Esteban Mosquera

Student leader Esteban Mosquera was killed in Popayán, Cauca Department, when he left the house to walk his dog at 6pm on a Monday. In Popayán, Esteban had played an organizing role in recent protests over inequality and state violence. The 26-year-old was shot dead just several yards from the Humanitarian Refuge for Life meeting, which had been organized by social activists and former combatants with the aim of strengthening human rights and peace. In 2018, Esteban lost an eye when, during student mobilizations demanding a larger budget for public universities, he was attacked by the ESMAD anti-riot squad police, an event which sparked a wave of indignation towards the police and solidarity with the young man. In the three months of the national strike this spring, Institute for Peace and Development Studies (INDEPAZ) reports that 83 protesters suffered eye damage, along with at least 44 citizens murdered, and 1,832 people arbitrarily detained by police. We demand a thorough investigation that leads to the intellectual authors of this heinous crime.

SEP 12 2021

HONDURAS

forced eviction: campesino families in Guaimaca

In the afternoon of August 18, armed men (some wearing hoods) arrived in the Cañada de Flores sector of Guaimaca (Francisco Morazán Dept) and, without presenting a legal eviction order, carried out a forced eviction. They kicked the doors of houses, entered some of the homes, and fired shots into the air to intimidate the families. It is understood that the armed men were private security guards of Maximiliano Elvir, who has been disputing ownership of the campesinos' communal lands since 2014. We are urging that the INA (Instituto Nacional Agrario) investigate the legal titles of these disputed lands to establish true ownership/possession and make accommodations for the 44 impacted campesino families.

SEP 23 2021

HONDURAS

intimidation and assault: Donny Reyes, defender of LGBT rights

Donny Reyes, an active member of the Arcoiris (Rainbow) Association—as well as the director of CIPRODEH (Center for Investigation and Promotion of Human Rights)—has been the victim of intimidation, including assault

Two days after a private security guard was seen recording Donny Reyes exiting the office of SOMOS-CDC (Center for Development and Cooperation of the LGBTBI Community), unknown persons assaulted him on the street. They stole his personal documents, those of his partner, and also other work belongings. This attack occurred just one day after he filed an appeal against the Honduran government for denying him the right to marriage.

We believe that these acts of intimidation against Donny Reyes are occurring because of his work in promoting equal rights—specifically, marriage equality—for the LGBTBI community in Honduras. We urge that officials in Honduras expedite to the National Protection Mechanism any requests for protection measures being solicited by Donny Reyes. The government must ensure the right of all LGBTBI defenders to carry out their work for justice in safety, under protection of the law, and without the threat of reprisal.

SEP 24 2021

GUATEMALA

assassinated: campesino and land rights leader Ramón López Jiménez

Ramón López Jiménez, a 44-year-old father of three small children and rural community leader in Jalapa Department, left home to work early in the morning of September 20. When he had not returned home in the afternoon, his family went out to look for him. His dead body, showing signs of gunshots and machete wounds, was discovered in a gutter near a creek near the Volcán de Paz in the village of La Paz, Santa María Xalapán. Ramón López Jiménez served as treasurer for the Jalapa chapter of CODECA (Committee for Campesino Development) in Jalapa. His assassination on September 20 occurred just five days after CODECA chapters throughout the country held public demonstrations against the government on the occasion of the bicentennial of Central America's independence from Spain. His is the 21st assassination of CODECA members since 2018. To date, there has been no justice in any of the cases.

SEP 25 2021

COLOMBIA

death threats: journalist José Alberto Tejada

José Alberto Tejada’s investigative reporting has been crucial in denouncing human rights violations committed by government security forces against demonstrators during the Colombian National Strike that began in April. High level government officials publicly accuse him of spreading “fake news.” Meanwhile, the InterChurch Commission for Justice and Peace has received credible information about an ongoing plan to assassinate the journalist from Channel 2 in Cali; a sum of thirty million Colombian pesos has already been paid to hitmen. Last month, a team of volunteer security guards observed a man on a red motorcycle drawing a gun near the journalist’s residence at 1:30 a.m. When they intercepted him, the motorcyclist fled to a nearby public establishment where several police officers were gathered. When the man arrived, the officers departed.

The targeting of journalists—especially if the police are involved—raises serious issues about freedom of the press and the ability of the press to hold Colombian authorities to account for the brutal treatment of demonstrators these past several months.

SEP 26 2021

HONDURAS

threatened: journalists Deyni Menjivar and Héctor Madrid

There is a systemic attempt to silence the voices of those who stand up for environmental and social justice causes, including the journalists who report on such causes. In San Pedro Sula: TV reporter Deyni Menjivar was threatened by a private security guard while covering a demonstration by environmental defenders who were demanding action against the construction of a new upscale housing development in a forest reserve. In Choloma: TV reporter Héctor Madrid was followed and threatened after reporting on community opposition to the ZEDs (Employment and Economic Development Zones), which are autonomous zones ceded by the government to private companies. We are urging that authorities in Honduras (1) adopt and uphold prevention mechanisms to avoid violence against those who work in the media, and (2) train public officials, especially the police and security forces, on the guidelines for conduct for respecting the rights of public assembly and respect for freedom of expression.

Rapid Response Network

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