

HONDURAS

Garífuna community of Barra Vieja on trial for defending ancestral territory

Over the past few decade, RRN members have sent more than a dozen letters to officials in Honduras. They have denounced an endless series of politically motivated killings and attacks against the Afro-descendant Garífuna people, carried out by wealthy and powerful sectors trying to take over Garífuna lands on the Atlantic coast for agri-business and the global tourist industry. The government of Honduras has been either complicit in the repression, or complicit through its utter lack of political and legal action to hold the powerful accountable for their political crimes.

GOOD NEWS

[Due to the] plan to install a luxury hotel complex in their community, [...] the community has suffered two eviction attempts and legal complaints against them for land usurpation resulted in the entire community being summoned to court from May 12-14, 2015.

According to OFRANEH [Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras], "*The case of Barra Vieja is a violation of ILO Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples,*" which has been ratified by the State of Honduras.

In the preliminary report on its *in situ* visit to Honduras in December 2014, the Inter American Commission on Human Rights called on the government to: 1) "recognize the cultural identity of the Garífuna" people and 2) "intensify its actions to respect and guarantee their lands, adopt the necessary measures for completing the obligation of the state to guarantee prior, free and informed consultation regarding projects developed in their lands, territories and that impact their natural resources, taking into consideration the special relationship between these peoples, the land and natural resources."

On June 4, 2015 the Court in Tela acquitted 66 Garífuna members from the community of Barra Vieja who were charged with land usurpation. However, a trial against eight leaders of the Barra Vieja community continues.

Honduras Accompaniment Project, June 2015

"We have lived in peace on these lands since 1887. Yet the Port of Tela, who claim these lands as theirs to develop, has existed only since 1962. How can they say we are invaders?"

Carlos Castillo, community president, who said the state has offered them no alternative lands for resettlement.

About 600,000 Garífuna live along the Caribbean coast of Central America; they are the descendants of a ship that brought slaves from Central and West Africa.

Today, the Garífuna of Barra Vieja live in fear and extreme poverty. After two violent evictions by the army in 2014 to make way for an extension to a luxury beach hotel nearby, the population of this community has dwindled to about 250.

Armando Gamboa, Barra Vieja leader, said when people first heard about the resort, they thought it would bring jobs and opportunity, but when they saw the neighbouring Garífuna village evicted and no jobs for their people, they realised they were about to lose out.

The people of Barra Vieja eke out a living from fishing. There is no electricity, running or drinking water on the island; for health facilities and schools, they have to travel to nearby villages, resulting in low school attendance. Health maladies are prevalent.

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