

One Year Later: Berta Lives, COPINH Continues On

Ottawa, April 1st, 2017

On March 2, 2016, Berta Cáceres was assassinated in an attempt to silence her voice, bring an end her important leadership and destroy the political project and struggle of a people acting in defence of their territory. The aim was not only to do away with her, but the organization of which she was a part for over 20 years, the Civic Counsel of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH).

But this crime did not succeed to stop this movement. Rather, Berta Cáceres, the legacy of her commitment, resistance and clarity continue to live on in peoples around the world who are confronting the threats of savage capitalism, patriarchy and of a predatory, racist and colonial system.

To date, eight people have been detained in connection with Berta's assassination and the attempted murder of Gustavo Castro, who was in Berta's house at the time of the attack. Among those arrested are members of the Honduran military and retired military officials, as well as people who worked for the Energy Development Company S.A. (DESA), the company responsible for the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project that COPINH has long opposed and that has become one of their most well-known struggles. However, despite having detained the suspected material authors of the crime, the assassination of Berta will remain in impunity until the intellectual authors have been identified and brought to justice.

Berta's family, COPINH and the only witness and survivor of the attack, Gustavo Castro, continue to denounce the many irregularities and lack of transparency in this investigation that remains secret, leading to suspicions that this is taking place in order to protect those in the upper echelons of Honduran society who are truly responsible.

Less than a month ago, Global Witness released a report about environment defenders in Honduras, identifying conflicts over extractive projects linked to the political and economic elite in Honduras as behind the murder of more than 120 environmental activists since the 2009 coup. According to the report, Honduras is the most dangerous country in which to be an environment defender, where people put their lives on the line and face threats, attacks, dispossession and criminalization on a daily basis.

The below-signed organizations and individuals hold the Honduran state responsible for the assassination of this Lenca Indigenous leader as a result of having failed to ensure the protection measures issued for her by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). We also express our support for the complaint brought by Gustavo Castro against Honduras to the IACHR for the human rights violations he suffered as a result of the Honduran state detaining him during March 2016.

Further, we condemn the smear campaigns in the press and from the Honduran government against the work of COPINH and other organizations in Honduras – national and international –, and the constant criminalization of human rights defenders in this Central American country.

In this repressive context, in which there are tremendous levels of corruption and impunity within various parts of the Honduran state, it is unacceptable that the Canadian government is contributing financial, technical and political support to the Attorney Generals' Office, including specifically to the investigation into the assassination of Berta Cáceres and the attempted murder of Gustavo Castro through the Technical Agency for Criminal Investigations (ATIC its initials in Spanish). There are at least two high ranking officials in the Attorney Generals' office with links to the approval of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project that Berta and COPINH have been resisting, for which reason the political will of this state body to carry out a full and impartial investigation has been seriously questioned.

One year since Berta was buried, we express our support for COPINH, the people of Honduras and Gustavo Castro, and unite our voices to demand:

1. An independent investigation of Berta Cáceres' assassination by impartial international experts under the auspices of the IACHR that will get to the bottom of this crime and reveal the truth.
2. The immediate cancellation of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project and more than fifty concessions that have been granted on Lenca territory without respect for their processes of self-determination and their free, prior and informed consent.
3. The demilitarization and departure of the police forces from Lenca territory.
4. An end to the criminalization and attacks against COPINH and its members.
5. An end to the technical, financial and political support from the Canadian government to the state of Honduras, including to state security forces and investigative bodies of the Attorney General's Office such as ATIC.
6. A halt to Canadian diplomacy oriented to promote the interests of Canadian investors in Honduras, which have a strong presence in the mining, energy, telecommunications and tourism sectors, to the detriment of democracy and respect for fundamental human rights and Indigenous territories in Honduras.
7. An end to bilateral funding to the Honduran state through International Financial Institutions (IFIs).
8. Annulment of the Canada Honduras Free Trade Agreement that was negotiated months after the fraudulent elections of November 2009 and signed with Honduran officials who were consolidating the coup in the country and have demonstrated disdain for the human rights of the population.

In March, we will not only remember the pain of this terrible crime, above all we will celebrate life. The life of Berta Cáceres who was born on March 4th and the work of COPINH that was founded 24 years ago on March 27th.

Today, we celebrate life and demonstrate our solidarity with the people, communities and social movements of Honduras who are defending human rights, the environment and life in the context of a grave crisis in their democracy following the 2009 coup and who are confronting growing threats against communities and territories in the country.

Berta lives, COPINH continues on!

SIGNATORY ORGANISATIONS

CANADA

1. Alternatives
2. Americas Policy Group
3. AmiEs de la Terre de Québec
4. Les Artistes pour la Paix
5. Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network
6. L'autre Parole, le collectif des femmes féministes et chrétiennes
7. B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union
8. British Columbia Teachers' Federation
9. Bureau des Missions jésuites
10. Canadian Jesuits International
11. Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
12. Carrefour d'éducation à la solidarité internationale – Québec (CESIQ)
13. Cebes "Martires de El Salvador" Montreal
14. Centre for Gender Advocacy
15. Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO)
16. Centre justice et foi
17. Centre Entre-Femmes
18. Cercle citoyen au cœur de Sainte-Foy
19. Clayoquot Action
20. CoDevelopment Canada
21. Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (CDHAL)
22. Common Frontiers
23. Comité de Solidarité/Trois-Rivières
24. Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN)
25. L'Entraide missionnaire
26. Education in Action
27. Fédération des femmes du Québec
28. Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)
29. First Nations Women Advocating for Responsible Mining (FNWARM)
30. Friends of the Earth Canada
31. Funambules Médias
32. Fundación Monseñor Oscar A Romero de Canada
33. Immigrant Workers Centre
34. Groupe ORVERT Ltée
35. KAIROS Canada
36. Indigenous Leadership Initiative
37. Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
38. International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group
39. Jésuites du Canada français et d'Haïti
40. Jesuits in English Canada
41. Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice
42. Louis Riel Bolivarian Circle, Toronto

43. Makila Coopérative Multimédia
44. Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network (BTS)
45. MiningWatch Canada
46. Mining Justice Action Committee
47. Oxfam Canada
48. PINAY (Filipino Women's Organization in Quebec)
49. Projet Accompagnement Québec-Guatemala
50. Quebec Native Women (FAQ-QNW)
51. L'R des centres de femmes du Québec
52. Rights Action
53. RightOnCanada.ca
54. Union paysanne
55. United for Mining Justice
56. Steelworkers Humanity Fund
57. Les Soeurs Auxiliatrices du Québec
58. Solidarité Laurentides Amérique centrale (SLAM)
59. Projet Accompagnement Solidarité Colombie (PASC)
60. Réseau du Forum social de Québec Chaudière-Appalaches
61. Réseau Québécois des Groupes Écologistes (RQGE)
62. Victoria Central America Support Committee
63. Women of Diverse Origins (WDO-FDO)
64. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

INTERNATIONAL

1. Biofuelwatch, United Kingdom
2. Cadena de Derechos Humanos Honduras (CADEHO), Germany
3. Church Women United in New York State, United States
4. CODEPINK, United States
5. Comité de Defensa del Borde Costero de Cobquecura, Chile
6. Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), United States
7. Costureras de sueños, teatro independiente mexicano, Mexico
8. Environmental Network for Central America (ENCA), United Kingdom
9. Friendship Office, United States
10. Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, United States
11. Honduras Solidarity Network, United States
12. Human Rights Observation/Honduras, United States
13. Information Network for Responsible Mining, United States
14. MITF on the Americas, United States
15. Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala – NISGUA, United States
16. Nicaragua Center for Community Action (NICCA), United States
17. Office of the Americas, United States
18. Observatorio Ciudadano, Chile
19. Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales (OLCA), Chile
20. Other Worlds, United States
21. Procesos Integrales para la Autogestión de los Pueblos (PIAP), Mexico

22. Public Good Law Center, United States
23. [Rangintulewfü] Colectivo Mapuche Feminista, Chile
24. Red de Accion por los Derechos Ambientales (RADA), Chile
25. Red por la Defensa de los Territorios, Chile
26. Red Mexicana de Afectados por la Minería (REMA), Mexico
27. Rochester Committee on Latin America, United States
28. Tikva Grassroots Empowerment Fund, United States
29. Wellington Zapatista Support Group, New Zealand