

April 12, 2016

Canadian Delegation to Participate in the International Gathering Celebrating the Life of Berta Cáceres in Honduras

(Ottawa/Montreal) Today, the 'Canada Honduras Delegation for Justice, Land and Life' is traveling to Tegucigalpa for the International Peoples Gathering 'Berta Cáceres Lives'. First Nations women leaders, lawyers, filmmakers and solidarity activists make up the delegation that has been organized in the wake of the murder of Berta Cáceres' on March 3rd, followed closely by her colleague Nelson Garcia's murder on March 14th.

Berta Cáceres was a Indigenous, feminist and environmental activist and winner of the 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize whose murder has sparked an unprecedented outcry around the world for justice, truth and reparation in Honduras. Berta and the organization that she helped found, the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), have been fighting powerful economic and political interests to keep hydroelectric dams and mining concessions off of Indigenous Lenca territory.

"From the get go, the investigation into Berta's murder and the attempted murder against Mexican activist Gustavo Castro, who was with her at the time, has been fraught with irregularities. Yet, the Canadian government's response has been insufficient, failing to question this process. We will be documenting what we hear to bring that back to Ottawa next week," remarked Catherine Morris from Lawyers Rights Watch Canada.

Berta's family and COPINH have denounced Honduran officials as incapable of undertaking a full and impartial investigation, outing one official for close ties to the hydroelectric company that Berta was protesting and citing bias against her, given prior attempts to legally persecute her on baseless charges. They insist that the Honduran government needs to reach an agreement with the Inter American Commission on Human Rights to involve a group of independent, international experts in the investigation.

"We know that Berta's murder is just the tip of the iceberg. We are going to Honduras to hear first-hand about the deadly environment that community activists face and how the Canadian government and business have been taking advantage of the repressive context to facilitate economic interests. We need this to change," remarked Mary Hannaburg, Mohawk Nation Director for Quebec Native Women.

Since a military-backed coup in 2009, hundreds of indigenous activists, campesinos, trade unionists, journalists, judges, opposition political candidates, human rights activists and others have been murdered with impunity. Despite the prevailing climate of fear and violence for many campesino, Indigenous and Indigenous-Garífuna communities, the Canadian government struck a free trade agreement with Honduras and provided technical assistance to a new mining code that provides little protections for people and the environment, while it favours companies.

During their visit, the Canadian delegation will participate in the international gathering and meet with lawyers, activists and communities. The delegation will return to Ottawa

on April 20th for meetings with government and members of parliament. They will participate in a press conference on April 21st on parliament hill.

The delegation is being supported by roughly twenty organizations and networks in Canada and Quebec, including unions, human rights organizations, academic and solidarity groups. These, and dozens more, signed a joint statement to the Canadian government after Berta's murder in March.

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Delegation Participants:

Mary Jane Hannaburg is the Mohawk Nation Director for Quebec Native Women. She is from Kanesatake, Oka, Quebec and a mother of six children and grandmother of one. She graduated from Concordia University in Applied Human Sciences and completed training at John Abbot College in Human Rights. She has been employed as a mental health worker for 18 years and is a crisis intervenor. She lives and works in her community.

Bev Sellars is a counsellor and former chief of the Xat'sull (Soda Creek) First Nation in Williams Lake, British Columbia. Sellars has a degree in history from the University of Victoria and a law degree from the University of British Columbia, and was an adviser for the B.C. Treaty Commission. She is author of "They Called Me Number One", a memoir about three generations of women in her family and their experiences at a church-run residential school in Williams Lake, B.C. She is also chair of the First Nations Women Advocating for Responsible Mining.

Catherine Morris is an Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of Victoria and Research Director for Lawyers Rights Watch Canada (LRWC). LRWC is a committee of Canadian lawyers and others who promote human rights and the rule of law internationally, including by campaigning for human rights defenders in danger because of their advocacy. LRWC has special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council at the United Nations. Catherine has contributed to publications and presentations on dispute resolution, legal education, religion and peace, peacebuilding after massive human rights violations. She is a member of the Law Society of British Columbia and the Canadian Bar Association.

Catherine Martin is a member of the Millbrook First Nation in Truro, Nova Scotia and the Nancy Rowell Jackman Chair in Women's Studies (Nancy's Chair) at Mount Saint Vincent University. She is an independent film producer, director, writer, facilitator, communications consultant, community activist, teacher, drummer, and the first woman Mi'kmaw filmmaker from the Atlantic region.

Maggie Padlewska is a videojournalist and founder of the online video series, One Year One World, which aims to bridge the global communications gap through documenting stories of under-reported communities from around the world. She also freelances as a producer and reporter and has worked for CTV and the CBC.

Amelia Orellana is a translator and the Urgent Actions Coordinator for the Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (CDHAL). CDHAL is a solidarity organization based in Montreal that works for the respect of individual and collective human rights in Latin America, including for peasant farmers, workers, Indigenous peoples, women and all those defending human rights.

Grahame Russell is a non-practising Canadian lawyer, adjunct professor at the U. of Northern British Columbia, author and activist. Since 1995, Grahame has been a director of Rights Action that raises funds for community-controlled development, environment and human rights projects in Guatemala and Honduras; and carries out education and activism work in the US and Canada about how our governments and companies (and the US military) often contribute directly to and benefit from human rights violations (including repression), environmental harms, exploitation, corruption and impunity in these countries.

Karen Spring is coordinator for the Honduras Solidarity Network in Tegucigalpa, which brings together about thirty US and Canadian organizations that are committed to demonstrating and advocating for solidarity with the Honduran social movement.

The delegation will bring back observations and testimonies from Honduras to Ottawa on April 20 and 21.
