

Monday, May 05, 2003 5:18 PM  
Urgent action - Indigenous-Campesino prisoners in Honduras  
May 5, 2003

Rights Action is extremely concerned for the safety of Lenca indigenous land rights activists and Leonardo Miranda. The two have been imprisoned in Gracias, Lempira, Honduras, detained, beaten and tortured on January 8, 2003. On April 6, 2003 they were again taken into custody by members of the Honduran elite police force, the Cobras.

NEEDED: Letter writing, tax-charitable donations and human rights accompaniment.

Please re-distribute and publish this information, citing author and Rights Action information on this e-list: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org).

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#### GLOBAL ACTIVISM WORKS

Of the four local leaders from the Lenca community of Montana Verde (municipality of Lempira, Honduras) who have been illegally and brutally jailed over the past couple of years, two are now available: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org), two have been set free due to national and international pressure.

This urgent action report is based on a site-visit report prepared by Tarik Perkins ([tarik@risingroots.org](mailto:tarik@risingroots.org)). Supported by Rights Action, Rising Roots activists are working with COPINH (Civic Council of Indigenous and Popular Organizations of Honduras).

KEEP IN MIND: These are not isolated incidences of repression. The poor majority of Honduran campesinos across the Americas) have long suffered repression and racial discrimination to control their land and communities against the violent incursions of national and global forces.

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"ENDLESS TERRORISM CONTINUES FOR INDIGENOUS LAND RIGHTS DEFENDERS"  
by Tarik Perkins ([tarik@alumni.uchicago.edu](mailto:tarik@alumni.uchicago.edu)), La Esperanza, Intibucá, Honduras.

#### THE FORTRESS (APRIL 28, 2003)

The precipitous hike up the hillside of the Colonia Bella Vista, where the penal compound is located, was not only physically taxing but also made the high walls and barbed wire even more foreboding. I was accompanied by two compañeros of COPINH (Civic Council of Indigenous Organizations of Honduras), one of whom is a resident of Montaña Verde, the terrain from where the four inmates hail.

We passed through the heavily guarded front gates and proceeded to the prison registration area. Possessions and persons were thoroughly searched in private rooms by two prison guards. Personal items that were in my bag, a nail trimmer, a money clip, along with my passport.

After the search procedures, we were put to wait in the corridors outside of the gated perimeter. A man, who I immediately recognized as a Miranda from his striking resemblance to others I interviewed three months before in Montaña Verde, was being escorted out of the prison by armed guards. It was Marcelino. We exchanged quick head nods followed by mutual smiles. He was marched down the corridors and out the gates of the prison. He was being taken to the city below to meet with his attorney provided by COPINH.

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Felipe Bejarano	Luis Benites	Marcelino Miranda	Leonardo

#### THE PRISON

We were led into the prison yard, where we waited for the three other men to be brought. Felipe Bejarano who has been detained in Gracias for twenty seven months, and Luis Benites, more than fourteen. When I asked Felipe what he thought was the reason for his imprisonment of his fellow campesinos from Montaña Verde, he explained to me that it was the rich land owners trying to get them to pack up and leave their homeland. By this time Luis Benites said "We will continue to denounce the injustices ... Our community has already said NO! to

I asked Luis and Felipe if they thought there was any truth to the rumors that they may be released within the next few days. They told me that they had heard there was a possibility for the first time felt confident they would be released. "Marcelino (the lawyer) is really good at defending us, we really believe that we will soon be released."

#### THE TORTURE

I then sat to speak with Leonardo Miranda who immediately told me that ever since the January 2003, when he was severely beaten and tortured in front of his wife and children, he has been the best. He delivered his account of the more recent happenings on April 9, in a practically a whisper. He told me that at somewhere around nine in the morning on the 9th of April, he was terrorized him by assuring him that his "his days were numbered." Although the bruises he showed me where he had been beaten on his shoulder and back. The deep scars on his back were still prominent. I asked what medical treatment they had been given, his response was "just a band-aid each."

At that moment Marcelino Miranda was escorted into the prison yard. He sat down on the ground and I took his hand. I introduced myself and told him why I was inside the prison. He calmly sat down and began to speak. He clarified that it was actually on Sunday the 6th of April, and that there had been a special check in which Cobra officers normally do not participate. The cell searches started at 8:00 in the morning and they got to his cell somewhere between 8:30 and 9:00 in the morning. He told me that the Cobra officers were two of the four from the previous incident on the 8th of January. They searched his cell, punched him in the stomach and then gun butt him in the back of his head and threw him to the ground. They started kicking and threatening that they would kill him right then and there.

They then saw Leonardo walking by and they told Marcelino to call his brother. He called out to his brother and then also thrown to the ground with punches and kicks from the officers. They told him to get up and go to the curb side. He resisted as much as he could as they pulled his clenched fist from his side. They began to smash his fists with a heavy steel pipe. "If he had opened his hand his fingers would have been cut off," explained Marcelino as his voice started to crack. The torture lasted for about an hour. They then showed me a plain view of cells number five and six which were still occupied by their inmates.

Five days passed before the brothers had the courage to leave their cells. Marcelino promised me that he would be released as he said "you never know, they could just shoot you from up there." Nevertheless, he told me that the following days had been fairly calm and that they feel like for the moment they are out of the prison. He assured me that the struggle for land was not over, however they fully intend to defend their land in Montaña Verde. I delivered some medication and other donated goods to the four men in the prison yard in complete and total amazement of what I had been told.

On the night of the 30th of April, I went to Central Park of La Esperanza, Intibucá for a "celebration of the International Day of the Worker which was on the 1st of May the next day. I had to make my way into the crowded central park the word had already begun to spread that the Bejarano were free. The announcement was made over the microphone. The cheers grew louder and louder. "¡El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido!" Chants, followed by celebrations, a framed bull that launched brightly colored fireworks into the dark night sky, worn on the dancer, who leaped and pranced in a fashion reminiscent of a Chinese dragon dance

Luis and Felipe are free, but Marcelino and Leonardo Miranda remain locked away in a cell that overlooks the city of Gracias.

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#### HOW YOU CAN HELP:

##### 1- TAX CHARITABLE DONATIONS

The brothers and community members of Montaña Verde need help. Marcelino Martín, representing this case, is working under tremendous conditions – including being threatened. Make a tax-charitable donation for the work to support and release the two men, check "Rights Action" (writing "COPINH-legal" on the memo line), and mail to:

##### UNITED STATES:

Rights Action  
1830 Connecticut Av, NW  
Washington DC, 2009

##### CANADA:

Rights Action  
509 St. Clair Av. W. box73527  
Toronto, ON, M6C-1C0

##### 2- URGENT ACTION -- Please email or fax this short letter to the officials listed below.

Hon. Ricardo Maduro, President of the Republic of Honduras

I write to express grave concern over the on-going torture and illegal imprisonment of Leonardo Miranda, two indigenous leaders from the Lenca descendent village of Mont Lempira who are members of the indigenous organization, COPINH.

At midnight on January 8, 2003, twenty-one men entered their town in the municipality breaking into their houses, threatening their families, and brutally beating them. Marcel then dragged to Gracias where they were tortured and are now imprisoned under false charges.

Honduras's justice and penal systems are being used as instrument of repression.

On April 6, 2003, both Miranda brothers were again brutally beaten and terrorized, this time by armed men from the COBRA security force unit.

I urge the immediate release of the Miranda brothers, whose health and security are at risk. I call for an end to the intimidations and violence against the indigenous movement in Honduras and the solution of existing land conflicts.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to hearing from you when the Miranda brothers have been released.

Sincerely,

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SEND LETTERS TO:

Dr. Hugo Noe Pino, Honduran Ambassador to the USA, T: (202) 966-7702, F: (202) 966-9775  
embassy@hondurasemb.org.

EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF HONDURAS, 151 Slater St. Suite 805, Ottawa ON, K1P 5H3,  
[embhonca@magma.ca](mailto:embhonca@magma.ca), T: (613) 233-8900, F: (613) 232-0193. Roberto Martinez, Third Secretary,  
[roma@magma.ca](mailto:roma@magma.ca).

Denis Thibault, Canadian Ambassador for Honduras, F: 011-504-232-8767,  
e: [sjose-gr@dfait-maeci.gc.ca](mailto:sjose-gr@dfait-maeci.gc.ca).

Frank Almaguer, USA Ambassador to Honduras, T: (504) 236-9320, F: (504) 236-9037.

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ARE YOU INTERESTED IN:

- Participating in an education delegation to Honduras?
- Getting on our newsletter list?
- Making tax-deductible donations for community development work in the global south?
- Being a human rights accompanier in the global south?

E: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

T: 416-654-2074

W: [www.rightsaction.org](http://www.rightsaction.org)

RIGHTS ACTION

With offices in Guatemala City, Washington DC, and Toronto, Rights Action is a tax-charitable organization (501(c)(3) in both Canada and the United States) that raises funds for over 50 community development and human rights projects in Southern Mexico, Central America (mainly Guatemala & Honduras). We educate and advocate about global "development" and human rights issues.

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