

Intibuc., Intibuc., Honduras, May 24, 2004.

HONDURAS URGENT ACTION: COPINH AND OTHER ORGANIZATION LEADERS FACING DEATH THREATS, HARASSMENT, PERSECUTION IN INTIBUCI

On April 26, the Regional Coordination of Popular Resistance (CRRP), comprised of a number of grassroots and indigenous organizations, sectors of the Catholic Church, public sector unions and others, initiated 4 actions: protests and occupations of the municipal mayor's office, the departmental ministry of education building, the premises of the Ministry of Agriculture, and a partial blockade of the highway in order to stop logging trucks.

Their demands were many: a halt to illegal and irregular logging practices in the department, the removal of departmental Education Director Mario Cantarero and a halt to the politicization and corruption of the education system and direction, initiatives to support local potato producers, transparent audits of various municipalities, among many others. The 4 actions continued, interspersed with various protests, marches and actions in Intibuc., along the main highway in Siguatepeque and in Tegucigalpa, for almost a month.

On Friday, May 21, the negotiating commission from the Regional Coordination, in communication with a people's assembly in Intibuc., finally reached an agreement with central government authorities in the national capital in Tegucigalpa. The agreements, signed by both parties, respond to all of the CRRP's central demands: the definitive removal of Education Director Mario Cantarero and an investigation into the more than 50 documented cases of corruption; a 40 day logging ban in the department of Intibuc., during which time a commission composed of government authorities and local organizations will undertake an in situ study of all logging activity, reviewing concessions, water sources and allegations of illegal and irregular activities; exhaustive audits of several municipalities;

the implementation of concrete initiatives and the formation of a commission to support local potato producers and to establish import regulations; the construction of a sewage system in the twin towns of La Esperanza and Intibuc.; among others.

While this represents a victory for the people of Intibuc. and for the Regional Coordination of Popular Resistance, there has been a string of death threats and acts of intimidation and persecution against many leaders and coordinators of the organizations belonging to the CRRP.

- On Thursday, May 20, at approximately 9am, an unknown man entered the office of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), asking who the leaders of the organization were and who was currently present. Eugenio Mejía, the COPINH Secretary and part of the organization's General Coordination, identified himself as such when asked.

The intruder, reportedly the son of a local logger linked to the Lamas logging company, asked him "with what right did you rob my wood," insulting

COPINH. He was referring to an action the previous night, when COPINH members in the department of La Paz maintained a highway blockade in solidarity to stop wood being transported from Intibuc. along the road leading to Marcala, La Paz. Logging trucks were being stopped and wood

peacefully confiscated. Eugenio, who was not aware of the previous night's

action, responded that it was the people of Intibuc. and the CRRP who were

demanding a halt to destructive logging practices and not COPINH. The man

responded that it was COPINH "and you are going to pay for it" ("¿y vos me la vas a pagarí), adding insults.

Efraín Sorto Sorto, a coordinator of land issues, entered the room and was

asked if he worked with COPINH. When he responded yes, he was told "you're

going to pay for it too." A third COPINH member, Edin Adan Díaz, entered and

was told the same thing.

The man left and as he walked away down the street, he repeatedly shouted "I'm going to get the three of you" (ëa los tres los voy a quebrarí) and "I'm going to kill the three of you" (ëa los tres los voy a matarí).

The threats have been denounced to the Direction of Criminal Investigation (DGIC), the Public Prosecutor's Office, and to the National Human Rights Commission (CONADEH).

- Over the past weeks, there have been numerous death threats and acts of harassment against CRRP organization leaders, including: Bertha Caceres, Salvador Z'ñiga, Silvestre Bautista, Jorge Fidel Ramos and Justo Sorto, all active coordinators of COPINH; Noel Pinel, President of the National Federation of Potato Producers (FENAPA), and other FENAPA leaders; Father Lucio Amaya, Father Celso Sánchez, local Catholic Church leaders; among others. These have included harassment at home, intimidatory visits, and death threats.

- Noel Pinel, FENAPA President, has also been the victim of persecution in the "justice" system. He is being charged with aggravated robbery for an action of the CRRP, which on April 30th confiscated 500 sacks of genetically modified low quality potato seed being imported by Norberth Barth, Consul of Holland, in direct violation of the agreements of the Roundtable on the Potato, between the Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock and producers. The criminal charge, instigated by Guillermo Raude and Saul Martínez, is clearly an act of political persecution for Noel's active role in the CRRP, as a single individual cannot possibly be held responsible for the actions of a group which carried out the action to demand that the agreements of the Roundtable be respected. What is more, it was national police agents who stopped the truck and demanded to see the contents, which the driver

originally assured was melons.

Please take the time to send your messages of concern to Honduran government authorities, along with diplomatic representatives in and from your country.

A sample letter and contact information is included below.

EDUCATIONAL DELEGATION: To participate in an educational delegation to learn more about these and other issues (July 16-26, August 14-22, and Fall 2004), or to learn about or support COPINH and other grassroots organizations working for social and environmental justice in Honduras, contact Rights Action: info@rightsaction.org, 416-654-2074, www.rightsaction.org

TO MAKE TAX-CHARITABLE DONATIONS for the community development work of COPINH:

- donate on-line in the USA: www.rightsaction.org

- CFC # 9914

- Make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to UNITED STATES: 1830

Connecticut Av, NW, Washington DC, 20009; CANADA: 509 St. Clair Ave W, box73527, Toronto ON, M6C-1C0.

SAMPLE LETTER:

May 24, 2004

[Salutation]

While I applaud the Honduran government's decision to choose dialogue to resolve the just demands of the citizens of Intibuc., I am extremely concerned about the numerous incidents of repression against organization leaders involved in the Regional Coordination of Popular Resistance (CRRP).

I have been informed that these incidents include death threats, acts of intimidation and harassment, and a case of an unjustified criminal charge.

On May 20, at 9am, an unknown man, reportedly linked to the logging

industry, entered the office of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) in Intibuc., Intibuc.. He proceeded to accuse those present of robbing his wood, and made death threats against EUGENIO MEJÓA, COPINH Secretary, EFRAÓN SORTO SORTO, coordinator of land issues, and EDIN ADAN DÓA, COPINH member. He told them that they would pay, and shouted death threats as he left the office and walked down the street:
"I'm going to kill the three of you" (ëa los tres los voy a matarí). I have been informed that the incident has been reported to the DGIC, the Public Prosecutor's Office and CONADEH, but that no action has yet been taken in this case.

Many organization leaders involved in the CRRP have also received death threats and been the victims of acts of intimidation and harassment. These include BERTHA CÍCERES, SALVADOR Z/NIGA, SILVESTRE BAUTISTA, JORGE FIDEL RAMOS and JUSTO SORTO, all active coordinators of COPINH; NOEL PINEL, President of the National Federation of Potato Producers (FENAPA), among other leaders of the organization; FATHER LUCIO AMAYA, and FATHER CELSO SINCHEZ, local leaders of the Catholic Church; among others.

I have also been informed that NOEL PINEL is being charged with aggravated robbery for an action taken on April 30th by the CRRP, which confiscated potato seed being imported in direct violation of the agreements of the Roundtable on the Potato, between producers and national government authorities of the Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock (SAG). This act of criminal persecution is unjustified, as the action was taken by the CRRP to demand the respect of the Roundtable's agreements, and therefore cannot be the responsibility of a single person, in this case the well-respected engineer and President of FENAPA, Noel Pinel.

I find the situation is very worrisome, especially the numerous death threats against COPINH and other organization leaders. I urge you to conduct an impartial and exhaustive investigation into these threats to the security and well-being of respected community and organization leaders, and that acts of persecution against members of the CRRP be criminally investigated and that the law be applied to those found responsible. I also ask that the charge against Noel Pinel be dismissed, as it is unjustified.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you about the progress made in these cases.

Sincerely,
[your name]

Please send copies to:

- COPINH, copinhonduras@yahoo.es
- Ricardo Maduro, President of the Republic - fax (504) 221-4552
- Dr. Ramón Custodio, National Human Rights Commissioner - fax (504) 232-6894, custodioloopez@conadeh.hn
- HONDURAS EMBASSY IN CANADA, T: 613-233-8900, F: 613-232-0193, E: embhonca@magma.ca
- HONDURAN MISSION TO UNITED NATIONS: 866 UN Plaza Suite 417 New York, NY, 10017, T: 212-752-3370, e: m.suazo@worldnet.att.net
- CANADIAN AMBASSADOR FOR HONDURAS, Louise Leger, 3d Floor, Bulevar San Juan Bosco, Colonia Payaqui, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, t: (011 504) 232 4551, f: (011 504) 239 7767, tglpa@dfait-maeci.gc.ca
- USA AMBASSADOR TO HONDURAS, Larry Palmer, 011 [504] 236-9320 / 238-5114, Fax. (504) 236-9037
- Mario M. Canahuati, HONDURAN AMBASSADOR TO THE USA - fax (202) 966-9751, embassy@hondurasembassy.org
