

July 1, 2005

HONDURAS: ONGOING STRUGGLES FOR INDIGENOUS LAND RIGHTS; ONGOING REPRESSION

LAS GOLONDRINAS

The third violent eviction of the community of Las Golondrinas was carried out on June 29 by State authorities and 'security' forces, who detained 10 community leaders and members. They have since been released, but it is unlikely that the repression against this community, located in the municipality of Marcala, department of La Paz, Honduras, will end with their release. This was the third violent eviction of Las Golondrinas, less than a month after the previous eviction on June 7.

Las Golondrinas is only one of several communities affiliated with the Civic Council of Grassroots and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH)

whose community leaders are the targets of repression by both State security forces and authorities and other powerful landowners and business interests.

On June 5, Feliciano Pineda, a community leader from Montaña Verde, was brutally attacked and then jailed on the same false charges for which Marcelino Miranda and Leonardo Miranda have been political prisoners since their arrest and torture in January, 2003. The community of Planes, Montaña Verde is still struggling for their communal land title.

GARIFUNA PEOPLE

Likewise, on the north coast of Honduras, Garifuna community leaders are facing ongoing persecution for their communities' struggles to defend their lands, territory and resources from the tourist industry, landowners, drug traffickers, logging and industrial fishing, and other powerful interests.

On May 30, Gregoria Flores, the General Coordinator of OFRANEH (the Fraternal Black Organization of Honduras), was shot in the arm in the city of La Ceiba. Two months earlier, DGIC (Criminal Investigation) agents abusively and irregularly searched the home of long-time OFRANEH

activist

Miriam Miranda, supposedly looking for weapons. A long list of Garifuna community leaders have spent time in jail for their defense of ancestral community territory; many continue to face persecution.

Below you will find translations of:

- COPINH's June 29 communique regarding the eviction of Las Golondrinas
- a narrative of the June 7 eviction of Las Golondrinas, written by a community member
- the Garifuna People's National Lands and Territory Defense Council's June 28 declaration
- ... and some suggestions on how to take action.

Rights Action

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Civic Council of Grassroots and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, COPINH

DENOUNCES ANOTHER VIOLENT EVICTION OF THE COPINH-AFFILIATED LENCA COMMUNITY
LAS GOLONDRINAS AND THE DETENTION OF COMMUNITY LEADERS, AMONG THEM 7 WOMEN
AND 3 MEN.

To the national and international community, we denounce that today there was yet another violent eviction of the Indigenous Lenca Community of Las Golondrinas, in the municipality of Marcala, department of La Paz, in which State security forces beat local Indigenous Communal Council president Anacleta Dominguez as well as community member Paulino Rosales. Meanwhile, the presidents of the region were gathered in the sinister summit in Tegucigalpa to boost the implementation of the Plan Puebla Panama (PPP) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), together with International Financial Organisms such as the World Bank, Inter-

American
Development Bank (IDB) and the Central American Bank for Economic
Integration.

We have confirmed the detention of our compañeras Anacleta Dominguez,
Francisca Lorenzo, Maria Santos Dominguez, Mayra Rosales, Candida Ruth
Garcia, Mariela Paz, Reyna Lopez, and our compañeros Paulino Rosales,
Sabas
Lopez and Leonel Contreras.

This eviction of an indigenous community violates International Labour
Organization Covenant 169 and the Constitution of the Republic. The
eviction was ordered to favour the interests of a transport company
that has
been destroying the zone. The authorities have full knowledge of the
actions of this company, which now intends to strip the indigenous
Lenca
community of its lands.

We denounce the situation in which our jailed compañeras find
themselves –
in isolation and under great psychological stress. These new human
rights
violations occur in the prevalent climate of complete impunity. The
authorities of the 'justice' system of Honduras did not detain those
responsible for the violent attack against Feliciano Pineda, another
indigenous community leader affiliated with COPINH, who was brutally
beaten
and unjustly jailed a few weeks ago, demonstrating the twisted
application
of the law and the political repression in Honduras. COPINH denounces
the
police persecution, the corrupt judicial system and the government,
that
permit and are involved in the repression against indigenous
communities,
where more than 60 indigenous leaders have been killed without any
consequences or justice. These authorities are applying the
neoliberal
system of death, reflecting the true effects of their sinister summits
selling the country.

We ask movements in solidarity with our struggle send letters
denouncing the
situation to the Honduran judicial authorities, to the police, and if
possible to your respective diplomatic representatives in Honduras.

June 29, 2005.

With the ancestral force of Lempira, Iselaca and Etempica,

we raise our voices of Justice, Freedom and Peace.

The previous violent eviction of Las Golondrinas, on June 7, 2005, as written by Mayra Lisseth Rodriguez Rosales, a community member whose family has been the victim of repression:

The indigenous community "Union and Strength" of La Golondrina, Marcala, La Paz, is municipal land that was abandoned for over 25 years, according to an analysis by the National Agrarian Institute (INA) of Comayagua. On May 14, 2004, a group of people who rented homes, homeless, single mothers and others decided to recuperate the abandoned ancestral land, protected by ILO Covenant 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the Constitution of the Republic and other legislation. At that time, the land was said to belong to the Banco Atlantida.

The community had been established for 7 months when a construction materials transport company (Asociacion de transportistas y acarreo de materiales marcalinos, ASOTRAMM) entered the area due to the presence of sand and other materials used in cement and construction. The company wants to use heavy machinery, which will cause serious damage both to the environment and to the community in general. They made agreements to buy the property, despite the fact that they were made aware of the environmental damage and problematic status of the land. They proceeded to negotiate with the Bank, despite the lack of proper land documentation; they supposedly have only a supplementary title from 1944 which states that the land cost 44.75 Lempiras, although they never showed us a copy. Now they claim to have a proper title to the land, granted in March 2005, although we have no idea how they obtained this reported document. They have treated us with repression, threatening our community authorities with death.

This is what happened on Tuesday, June 7, 2005:
At around 7am the regional State Prosecutor, Public Defense representative,

Judge and a large number of police surrounded the entire zone and declared that they would give the community 3 hours before they would proceed with the eviction. When no one respected their order, they announced that they would give 1 hour. We were already surrounded by police and could not do anything. Not even 15 minutes went by before they said "take them away." They began forcibly detaining community members, handcuffing some, beating others, the children were crying, others they followed, taking away their work tools. When everyone had been thrown in one place, if anyone said anything they were immediately detained by the police (men, women, and minors), physically and psychologically mistreated like the worst criminals. The police were saying things like 'this son of a whore is going straight to jail,' 'theives,' 'if you're detained you better shut up,' 'you shouldn't speak, much less ask questions.' The majority of the police from Marcala and from the whole region treat people terribly.

A tractor entered the community and destroyed the houses and everything in them in a matter of minutes, when it had taken the community a year to construct them. There was no presence of a representative of human rights. Some of those who work in the judicial system are relatives of those interested in the land. The Public Defender has never understood our rights (to property, to a house, indigeous people's rights). DGIC (Criminal Investigation) agents have been engaged in repression for a long time. The municipal government closed its doors to us, they were never interested... Until now, nobody has looked for a solution.

So we ask: When will poverty ever be reduced when these kinds of things happen in our country, for the love of GOD? How can we make those who govern us understand, or at least imagine, what it's like to live in this poverty, or better yet, the extreme misery in which our communities live?

With much suffering in my soul I tell you that all of this might be able to give us more or less an idea of how to find our way out of this labrinth. How can we reach authorities who never listen to us? I would like to have the power to help, but I'm one of those who doesn't even have a job, just the need to figure out some basic ideas, to find strength in weakness...

God bless you all.

- Mayra Lisseth Rodriguez Rosales
a Lenca youth whose family has been the victim of repression

GARIFUNA PEOPLE'S NATIONAL
LANDS AND TERRITORY COUNCIL
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SAMBO CREEK DECLARATION

We, women and men, representatives of land defense committees from the communities of Sambo Creek, La Rosita, Irión Viejo, San Juan, Punta Gorda, Travesia, San JosÈ de la Punta, Ciriboya, Triunfo de la Cruz, Cusuna and Batalla, gathered to analyze and discuss the problematic situation currently facing the Garifuna population regarding land ownership, declare:

In the Garifuna people's cosmovision, our mother earth is an integral part of our life, granting us the sustenance and wisdom needed to conserve her.

In the 208 years that we have lived along the north coast of Honduras, the Garifuna people have carried out a rational management of our surroundings, to the point that 28 of the 48 communities are located within protected areas or their buffer zones. This is irrefutable proof of our capacity to maintain harmony between mother nature and our use of her.

The traditional knowledge of the Garifuna people takes into account the

importance of the conservation of ecosystems, on which we depend to sustain ourselves, through a rational use of resources. Unfortunately the agrarian problem of Honduras has driven campesino groups to occupy protected zones, including the appropriation of our ancestral lands.

From 1992 on, the Honduran State gave the green light for the occupation of the Sico and Paulaya river watersheds, clearing the way for waves of colonization into protected zones, all of which has provoked serious consequences for Serrania de Payas and the coastal zone of the municipality of Iriona.

A new threat endangering our people is the implementation of the Honduras Lands Administration Project (PATH, for its Spanish acronym), which by way of the Property Law (Ley de Propiedad) seeks to dissolve our community titles, placing at risk not only the future of our communities but the very survival of the Garifuna people.

Over the past few months, a climate of persecution against community leaders defending our territorial rights has been created, with public 'justice' system employees (of the Ministerio P'blico) and the DGIC (General Direction of Criminal Investigation) being used by landowners and business interests to intimidate community defenders.

Proof of this is the current persecution against our organization, OFRANEH (the Fraternal Black Organization of Honduras), reaching the extreme of an attempt against our Coordinator, an incident which has not been clarified, nor have those responsible been brought to justice.

But the worst part of all of this is perhaps the fact that not a single Garifuna NGO has pronounced itself on the threat we are facing as communities. As community leaders, we live with daily uncertainty and persecution. Many of us have suffered jail just for standing up to the rich and powerful who each day appropriate more of our lands.

We repudiate and condemn the municipalization process of our communities, a process which is only generating greater conflicts in our communities, the majority of which are exposed to the abuse of authority by the municipal governments.

As the Garífuna Peoples's National Lands and Territory Council, we declare our opposition to the implementation of PATH in Garífuna communities, we demand the revision of Property Law chapter III, and declare ourselves in permanent Struggle for the defense of our lands and territory.

In the Community of Sambo Creek, June 28, 2005.

Luís Fernández, Sambo Creek
Secundino Torres, Triunfo de la Cruz
Justina Flores, La Rosita
Kendy Alvarez, Punta Gorda
Ellis Mari, San Juan
Damián Suaso, San José de la Punta
Bernabé García González; Punta Gorda
Cesar Mariano, Travesia
Margarito Alvarez, Iriona Viejo
Wilfredo Guerrero, San Juan
Miguel Nuñez Colón, Sambo Creek
Mirque Castillo, Cusuna
Victoria Suazo, Iriona Viejo
Digna Filonila B. Sambula, Ciriboya
Beatriz Ramo, Triunfo de la Cruz
Perfecto Marin, Batalla

TAKE ACTION!

Write an email or send a letter to Honduran authorities and your diplomatic representatives, denouncing the latest eviction of Las Golondrinas and the ongoing persecution of community leaders and organizers affiliated with COPINH and OFRANEH, both actively working for land, resources, rights and community-based development in Honduras. Urgent action contacts are below.

Take action locally to raise awareness about and encourage involvement in these issues.

Consider participating in a delegation to meet with and learn from Rights Action's partner organizations in Central America.

Consider tax deductible donations for the community development work of COPINH, OFRANEH and other grassroots organizations engaged in important community work in Honduras.

Contact Rights Action: info@rightsaction.org, 416-654-2074, www.rightsaction.org

SEND MESSAGES OF CONCERN TO:

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