

At Least 8 Campesinos Killed in Two Months as Violence Escalates in Honduras' Bajo Aguan Region

By Annie Bird, Rights Action

On September 29, Miriam Enelda Fiallo and her husband German Castro, president of the Prieta cooperative in the Aguan, were driving in a pickup when a gunman opened fire on them with an automatic weapon. As she died, Miriam told her husband she loved him and asked him to take care of their children. German is struggling to stay alive with both lungs perforated.

15 Women hiding in palm trees from Miguel Facusse's security guards, who opened fire against them at 8am today (October 11, 2011), and also killed campesino Santos Seferino Zelaya

URGENT ACTION

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Local Aguan based human rights activists denounce that at 8am Honduras time [10 am EST] campesinos were conducting agricultural activities on the La Aurora cooperative lands, in dispute with Dinant palm oil company, owned by Miguel Facusse, when security forces opened fire on them, instantly killing Santos Serfino Zelaya, the other campesinos escaped.

A group of 15 women were in another area of the farm spreading salt when they were confronted by security

guards and Xatruch [police and military] forces. When the women tried to speak to them the armed men opened fire, the women have been hiding three hours in the palm trees.

In recent weeks, a new wave of violence has been directed against the MUCA (United Movement of Aguan Campesinos) campesino communities on the right bank of the Aguan river, since Miguel Facusse declared he would not honor an agreement to sell lands back to the campesinos he had illegally acquired in the 1990s, following the August 14 incident described in the article below.

PLEASE CALL

the "Xatruch" security forces in Tocoa immediately to demand that the security forces leave the Aurora Farm to allow the women to find to safety.

[011 504] 2444-3101 / 2444-3102 / 2444-3103 / 2444-3104 / 2444-3105

PLEASE CALL

the US Embassy Human Rights Official, in the US Embassy in Honduras, and demand that he speak with Xatruch forces and ask if the US military currently is training or equipping Xatruch or 15th Battalion forces or has troops in the region.

Nathan Anderson – [011-504] 2236-9320, 2238-5114,

AndersonTN2@state.gov

A week later, on October 5, two members of MUCA (Unified Campesino Movement of the Aguan), Alfredo Matamoros and Jarel Sanchez, were gravely wounded by shots fired on their passing car from the San Isidro palm plantation controlled by Dinant Corporation.

Jarel Sanchez is in critical condition, and it was reported gunmen came to look for him in the hospital, the same hospital where German Castro struggled to stay alive. To prevent their murder in the hospital both men had to be moved in ambulances by human rights activists.

[FUND-RAISING APPEAL: Rights Action has sent emergency response funds for the families of Miriam and German, and Alfredo & Jarel. MORE FUNDS ARE NEEDED. To donate, see below.]

XATRUCH MILITARY-POLICE "SECURITY" FORCE

Over the past two months violence has escalated significantly in the Bajo Aguan región of Honduras as it has become the site of a military occupation by Honduran combined police and military forces, a joint task force Xatruch reportedly earlier deployed by Honduras to support US operations in Iraq.

Xatruch's arrival overlapped with the final days of a 33 day training course for the Honduran military battalion based in the Bajo Aguan about non-conventional warfare given by US Army Rangers.

Since the Xatruch Force entered the region on August 17, at least ten campesinos have been killed in death squad style killings, and at least three more gravely injured, two of those in critical condition. In addition, five people were massacred after their pick-up truck pulled out of a campesino camp on August 15, violence that apparently may have been intended for campesinos.

Many others have suffered torture, kidnapping attempts, beatings and other violations.

The Xatruch occupation was reportedly spurred by an incident on August 14 that involved the killing of five palm plantation security guards and one campesino, followed by a tremendous

campaign of press reports and public officials' statements that varied between implicating campesinos in the killings and claiming that the killings were unrelated to land conflicts but were the work of an armed movement.

Unreported in press are reports from local sources that the August 14 killings of security guards were carried out by soldiers that arrived during an eviction of campesinos by security guards. On September 16 a policeman was killed in another still not clarified incident.

Government officials and palm oil businessmen claim the incidents were ambushes, intended given the pattern of killings over the past two years and how similar situations have developed in places like Colombia, however some fear that the incidents may even be false flag operations intended to criminalize campesinos and justify militarization.

While press reports implicate and criminalize campesinos in these incidents, and barely report on the death squad style killings of campesinos, the police detective unit in charge of investigating the killings has been implicated in abuses.

Though conflicts between campesinos and African palm oil businessmen date back to the mid 1990's when campesinos report that businessmen illegally took control of the campesinos' farms, death squads came into the picture after the June 2009 military coup, to date apparently killing over 50 campesinos.

PARTIAL LIST
of Recent Campesino Killings & Other Serious Acts of Repression
Since the Xatruch II Operation Arrived in the Bajo Aguan
Region

On August 21 Arnoldo Portillo, a member of the 5 de Enero Empresa Cooperative was found murdered by machete strikes and gunfire

On August 21, 2011 Pedro Salgado, the president of the 5 de Enero Cooperative, and his wife Irene Licona, were murdered by machete strikes and gunfire

On September 2, 2011 in the exit from the Las Maraños community Olvin David González Godoy, a member of the Empresa Campesina 21 de junio was shot and killed by several gunmen

On September 19, 2011 Bernabe Cruz, 16 years old, was taken by Xatruch forces during an attack on the Rigores community, he was tortured by his captors and then released

On September 29, German Castro, president of the Prieta cooperative, and his wife Miriam Enelda Fiallo were traveling in a truck when attacked with automatic gunfire, Enelda Fiallo was killed at the moment and German is in critical condition

On October 2, 2011 Carlos Humberto Martínez, a member of the La Lempira cooperative and the Movimiento Unificado Campesino del Aguan, MUCA was shot to death at approximately 5 am close to his fields

On October 4, Marco Tulio Paredes, a leader of the Movimiento Unificado Campesino (MUCA) from the community of Rigores was surrounded by Xatruch troops who attempted to kidnap and threatened to kill him. On September 15, 2011 Paredes had been cited in a New York Times article advocating land reform

On October 5, 2011 Alfredo Matamoros, treasurer of the La Aurora cooperative and Jarel Sánchez, both members of the Movimiento Unificado Campesino del Aguan, MUCA were gravely wounded when their car was shot at from gunmen inside a palm plantation the men's car was passing

On October 6, 2011, Walter Nelin Sabillon Yanes of Rigores community reported being detained and tortured with electric shocks and a plastic bag over his head to induce near suffocation by Xatruch forces

DELEGATION

to the Aguan and Polochic Valleys – January 7 to 14, 2012

Mining, Biofuels & Militarization in Guatemala & Honduras: US Military Aid & Canadian-American Economic Interests

Over the past five years, Guatemala and Honduras have seen a surge of investment in sugar cane and African palm plantations spurred by international financing mechanisms that are promoting biofuel production. In a similar way, mining companies are taking advantage of benefits provided by free trade agreements to use highly destructive extraction techniques which endanger communities and destroy watersheds.

This has generated extreme land conflicts, mass evictions of indigenous and campesino communities, destruction of food production, undermining food sovereignty. The response has been militarization with police, military and private security contractors, generating the highest levels of human rights abuses that the region has seen for decades.

Fenix nickel mine in El Estor, Guatemala, Cerro Blanco gold mine in Asuncion Mita, Chabil Utzaj sugar cane company in the Panzos, Goldcorp gold concessions, are just a few of the projects that campesinos and indigenous communities are resisting, while in the wake of the June 28, 2011 military coup in Honduras, the United States is promoting the remilitarization of Central America through the Central American Regional Security Initiative.

The delegation will be led by Annie Bird, Co Director of Rights Action, and will visit communities and movements in Honduras and Guatemala.

OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATIONS

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“ACCOMPANIMENT AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY DELEGATION”

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Coordinator Chuck Kaufman, Karen Spring (long-time Honduras
human rights accompanier with Rights Action) and Tanya
Kerssen (food policy analyst from Food First). For an
application, send an email to AFGJ@AFGJ.org

GUATEMALA, MARCH 10-17, 2012

“DAMS, MINING & AFRICAN PALM PRODUCTION * versus *
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE &
HUMAN RIGHTS”

Sponsored by Rights Action, join Grahame Russell (Rights Action
co-director). For more information: info@rightsaction.org, 860-
352-2448

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