

## **Honduras: Digging up the executed in The Aguán Region**

by Defensores en Línea, 24 April 2013

<http://upside-down-world.org/main/honduras-archives-46/4253-honduras-exhumations-in-the-aguan-in-search-of-the-truth>

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TEGUCIGALPA – National and international media gathered in the Committee of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared in Honduras (COFADEH) office for the announcement of the exhumation of human remains found in the Paso Aguán plantation, in the jurisdiction of Trujillo, Colón.

An archaeologist and a forensic anthropologist, both Guatemalan nationals and members of the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG), will be in charge of the exhumation. Their names will be revealed once they are sworn in by judicial authorities on Wednesday, April 24, 2013.

COFADEH General Coordinator Bertha Oliva announced that the exhumation process will begin this Thursday, April 25, “to see if we can identify some of the compañeros reported missing.”

The initiative arose as a result of reports by the Unified Campesino Movement of the Aguán (MUCA) on April 3, when the discovery of a body in what appears to be a clandestine cemetery in the Paso Aguán plantation, in the community of Panamá, was reported. The body of Gregorio Chávez, a campesino, was found in the location in question last year. After finding Chávez's body, campesinos retook control of the area, which had been occupied by security guards working for landowner Miguel Facussé. The site is being

protected in accordance with a scientific protocol that is required to carry out the exhumation and to satisfy the relatives of the disappeared, said Oliva.

“We turned to the Office of the Public Prosecutor to request custody of the site where the body was discovered and we found a family that is almost convinced that the body is that of their disappeared family member,” said the human rights defender. “It is extremely important for people to see that Guatemalan forensic experts (whose names will be revealed as soon as they are sworn in by judicial authorities in Trujillo on April 24) have been contacted, that Honduran authorities are to be present to permit the activities, and that the family members are to accompany the whole process to verify whether the body is that of their disappeared relative.”

Responding to allegations being circulated by some media outlets that campesinos in the Aguán are untrustworthy and belong to armed groups, Oliva stated that “the campesino population has shown an impressive militancy in its protection of the clandestine cemetery site. It is a great sacrifice, and it shows the desire for a stop to all of the abuses committed against people speaking up for land rights.”

“This isn’t going to be an exhumation to destroy evidence. It’s going to be an exhumation to find answers, to raise awareness. The people and the communities have hope for this process,” emphasized the COFADEH General Coordinator.

#### OFFICE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROSECUTOR ACCOMPANIES THE PROCESS

The Special Prosecutor for Human Rights, Gérman Enamorado, explained that the first phase of the exhumation involves the removal of human remains that may correspond to a single person, but that it is only an expectation, since it is possible that there are remains of more people. “This is the first part of the work: the formal removal of the human remains so that we have

evidence that can be taken away while maintaining chain of custody. Then comes the very painstaking scientific work of identifying to whom the remains correspond, and if we go even further, to be able to locate those responsible for cutting short the life of this person or that of others," he said.

Enamorado said that that State needs to exert sovereignty and that it does not just mean dispatching police or military detachments, which in many cases has led to situations in which civilians are subject to abuse.

On behalf of MUCA, General Secretary Yoni Rivas stressed that,

*"we have been denouncing the crime wave that we are experiencing in the Bajo Aguán – persecution, jailing and now disappearances of campesinos, just because the justice system works to protect the interests of the big landowners."*

*"Today we are publicizing the exhumation in a legal and proper way and we don't want this to be another exhumation like the one in Ahuás (in the Moskitia), where a lot of evidence could have disappeared. We have hope that this one will result in finding the culprits, that there will be a real investigation. We hope that there is justice in this case and more than a hundred other cases, because they are linked to land ownership. The State of Honduras does not have a policy oriented towards campesinos having access to land," said Rivas.*

*"We want it to be known that the armed groups under the command of the landowners in the Aguán region are capable even of disappearing people. On July 6, 2012, the body of our compañero Gregorio Chávez was found. Today we highlight what Miguel Facussé said on November 15, 2010, when he publicly admitted that his armed men had murdered five campesinos in the Tumblador sector. I think that if the Office of the Public Prosecutor were really looking*

*for the culprits, Mister Facussé would be behind bars already, because he is the intellectual author of almost a hundred crimes in the region."*

The last person to speak at the press conference was Rosa Ena Lara, the sister of campesino José Antonio López Lara. She said that her reason for being present was to demand justice for her brother's death, since April 29 will mark one year since his disappearance. Lara explained that they turned to COFADEH to denounce her brother's disappearance. We are happy with the exhumation process, she said, because we have had so much uncertainty.

Lara hopes to recover her brother's body and be able to give him a Christian burial. "We want justice, not only for my brother, because many people have been disappeared and as family members we are very concerned because we have not seen a response from anyone to find the people responsible," she said.

On that note, there is no doubt that in the Aguán region they not only murder, not only rape women, not only torture people they have illegally detained, but that they also commit the ignominious crime of forced disappearance. I want those who have committed this crime to know that there is no statute of limitations for these actions and that we will seek justice in whatever terrain may be necessary, said Oliva.

The human rights violations that have occurred in the Aguán region are a serious concern for the international community. At least five people have been disappeared, all of them campesinos, including campesino leader Gregorio Chávez on July 2, 2012. His lifeless body was found three days later in part of the Paso Aguán plantation. At that time, landowner Miguel Facussé's guards prevented Chavez' relatives and friends from investigating the trail of blood left when his body was dragged to the office of the Panamá co-operative, located in the Paso Aguán plantation.

- On May 15, 2011, in the same sector, Francisco Pascual López, 37, was disappeared while he was pasturing cattle. A child who was accompanying him heard two gunshots and told his father, but no body was found.
- On April 29, 2012, José Antonio López Lara, 46, was disappeared while fishing in the Ilanga river, known as las Mancas, approximately 200 meters from where the clandestine grave was found in the community of Panamá.
- In February 2012, when Antonio Gómez, 55, had only been working in the Panamá plantation for a week, he left home for work and no one heard from him again. He had previously been a member of the Nueva Vida de Rigores movement.
- Meanwhile, Lito Rivera, 35, worked in the Panamá farmers' association as a watchman. He left his niece's home for work at 2pm on January 30, 2012, disappeared, and was not heard from again.

Regarding the disappearances, MUCA denounced that they occurred while security guards employed by landowner Miguel Facussé were guarding the premises of the Paso Aguán plantation. Campesinos have since re-occupied the land and have proceeded to guard the perimeter of the area revealed to contain a clandestine cemetery.

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The PROAH team is accompanying human rights defenders in this process. (Proyecto de Acompañamiento internacional en Honduras) <http://proah.wordpress.com>,  
<http://hondurasaccompanimentproject.wordpress.com>

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## **AMERICAN / CANADIAN CONNECTION**

Please send copies of this information, and your own letters, to your Canadian and American politicians (MPs, Congress members and Senators) and to your own media. Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the democratically elected government of President Zelaya, Honduras has become the 'Murder Capital of the

world'. State repression has again reached the levels of the worst years of the 1980s. Since the coup, the U.S. and Canadian governments have 'legitimized the illegitimate' post-coup regime. North American companies and investors have increased their business activities in Honduras since the coup. In no small part, this repressive regime remains in power due to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada.

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- Delegation to Honduras, July 13-21, 2013: Struggle for democracy, human rights & the environment ~versus~ Military-backed regime, & global companies & investors

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