

Rights Action
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Below, article: "Without Our Land, We Cease to Be a People: Defending Indigenous Territory and Resources in Honduras"

Historic racism and repression against the Indigenous Garifuna people of northern Honduras have worsened since the 2009 military coup. Since 1998, Rights Action has – with your support – proudly supported and worked with OFRANEH, the main Garifuna organization in Honduras.

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Without Our Land, We Cease to Be a People: Defending Indigenous Territory and Resources in Honduras

[Original, with links: <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/18265-without-our-land-we-cease-to-be-a-people-defending-indigenous-territory-and-resources-in-honduras#.UhEIN8ymKPs.email>]

18 August 2013, By Tory Field and Beverly Bell, Other Worlds (<http://otherworldsarepossible.org/>)



A Garífuna ceremony on lands stolen by organized crime networks in Honduras. (Photo: Courtesy of OFRANEH.)

Miriam Miranda is a leader of the Honduran Black Fraternal Organization (OFRANEH), which works with the 46 communities of the Afro-indigenous Garífuna of Honduras, to defend their territories, natural resources, identity, and rights. Miriam's narrative below is from an interview with Beverly Bell in Washington, D.C.

We live on the Atlantic coast of Honduras. We are a mix of African descendants and indigenous peoples who came about more than 200 years ago in the island of San Vicente. Without our land, we cease to be a people. Our lands and identities are critical to our lives, our waters, our forests, our culture, our global commons, our territories. For us, the struggle for our territories and our commons and our natural resources is of primary importance to preserve ourselves as a people.

The Garífuna people, for their way of being, were declared part of the Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2004. We don't know what that means exactly, but we suppose it implies that the state must take action to protect and preserve the Garífuna people's identity.

What we Garífuna face is largely the same things faced by people all over Latin America, and in fact the world. Also, the problems of the South are not a problem just for us, but of all of us and the whole planet.

TERRITORY, RESOURCES, CONFLICTS

If you map out the conflicts that are threatening our country, you'll see they reflect exactly where transnational capital is trying to take more resources from indigenous peoples. Maybe you believe that president Mel Zelaya was ousted in a coup d'état [in 2009] because he was a leftist. No. It was because [those with wealth] wanted to take land and resources, which they are now doing. Look at the search for so-called alternatives to oil - through mining, the mega-dams, the biofuels, the production of African palm oil. All these resources are being taken from indigenous areas. There is more pressure on us everyday for our territories, our resources, and our global commons.

In Honduras, they're taking land that we were using to grow beans and rice so they can grow African palm for bio-fuel. The intention is to stop the production of food that humans need so they can produce fuel that cars need. The more food scarcity that exists, the more expensive food will become. The mono-cultivation of some of these crops [for bio-fuel] requires thousands of millions of acres of land. [Food sovereignty](#) is being threatened everywhere.

NARCO-TRAFFICKING

Also we have a problem that is rarely spoken of: narco-trafficking. The Atlantic Coast of Honduras is the main trafficking route. A study showed that almost 90% of the drugs that are going to the North pass through Honduras. We're exactly in the way of the trafficking and we're so vulnerable. Honduras has one of the highest levels of crime and violence [per capita] of any country that is not actually at war. We have to fight not only for the permanence of our community, but also to not be kidnapped by traffickers.

TOURISM

Another of our main challenges is the tourism industry. We live almost on the sea, right on the beach. It's a blessing but recently it's also become a curse, because of course all those with power want to have a place on the beach. The Honduran government has started on some tourism mega-projects. The displacement of communities and the loss of cultures that come with the development of tourism [is increasing].

We have [occupied and claimed](#) ancestral lands that had been taken by others, such as Vallecito Limón. We are also using international human rights law in order to guard our territories. We have a claim against the government in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Washington regarding [Triunfo de la Cruz](#) [a beachside Garífuna community that whose communally owned lands have been taken]. We hope to have a decision in November or December. This will create an important precedent for all indigenous peoples, not just for the Garífuna. It'll define the responsibility of the state to protect territories and rights of indigenous peoples. This will only be the [fourth] case ever brought that will help establish policies and mechanisms to protect the territories and resources of indigenous peoples, and all of humanity, of course. [The other three are] [Sarayacu](#) in Ecuador, [Saramaca](#) in Suriname, and [Awás Tingni](#) in Nicaragua.

We are creating alliances with feminists in resistance, with other indigenous people, with campesinos, with groups like the [Mesoamerican Movement against the Extractive Mining Model](#). These alliances are very important, and we have to strengthen them more. Nothing can come from the top; all these alliances have to be built from the community level. We are the ones on the ground resisting and creating possibilities.

We have created our own media, a community radio station for the Garífuna. In response to mass media trying to block the protection of our indigenous territories, we have created alliances with the four other community radios, and have started – together with [COPINH](#) [Civic

Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras] a Mesoamerica Network of Community Radio.

WOMEN, CULTURE, COMMUNITY

I want to talk about the role of women defending life, culture, and territories, opposing a model of death that grows stronger each day. We are at the front of the avalanche of attacks. Everywhere throughout Honduras, like in all of Latin America, Africa, Asia, women are at the forefront of the struggles for the rights of women, against racial discrimination, for the defense of our commons and our survival. We're at the front not only with our bodies but also with our force, our ideas, our proposals. We don't only birth children, but ideas and actions as well.

The marvelous women comrades in Triunfo de la Cruz, Garífuna women, many of them elders, have incredible strength. They participate in meetings, in actions, tearing down walls that are built on the beach. They're sustaining the Garífuna youth so that they know who they are, without shame. They're producing the yucca that is our staple food.

GLOBAL ISSUES

If the problem is global, we have to have a global response. It's time for every human being in the global North to take up his or her responsibility in respect to the use of resources, responsibility relative to waste and to consumption. The standard of living that you all have in the US is unsustainable. You are the button-pushers. We [on the other end] have crises piled one after another. We are trying to resist and find every solution we can, but we ask ourselves: Hmm, are we the ones consuming all this energy? If those in the North are the consumers, why are we in Honduras paying? Why are we being displaced to generate energy for others? What are we supposed to do? Leave the planet to destruct, or make a change for future generations? They won't have land or water or air.

This is not pessimism, it's reality. The time has come.

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Please respond to the [urgent alert](#) from OFRANEH's close colleagues in the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), where three leaders face trumped-up charges over a five-month road occupation which has blocked an illegal dam from being built on Lenca indigenous land.

Thanks to Lauren Elliott for editing assistance.

You can order Harvesting Justice and find action items, resources, and a popular education curriculum on the [Harvesting Justice website](#). Harvesting Justice was created for the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, check out their work [here](#).

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[Beverly Bell](#) - Beverly Bell has worked for more than three decades as an advocate, organizer and writer in collaboration with social movements in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and the US. Her focus areas are just economies, democratic participation and gender justice. Beverly currently serves as associate fellow at the [Institute for Policy Studies](#) and coordinator of [Other Worlds](#). She is author of "Walking on Fire: Haitian Women Stories of Survival and Resistance" and of the forthcoming "Fault Lines: Views Across Haiti's Divide." She is also a member of Truthout's Board of Advisers.

[Tory Field](#) - Tory Field is an organizer and farmer living in Hadley, Massachusetts, and co-coordinates the Harvesting Justice project at Other Worlds. Together with her partner, she runs Next Barn Over Farm, a 30-acre CSA vegetable farm. In recent years she has been a community

organizer with Arise for Social Justice in Springfield, MA, and coordinator of a weekly program for incarcerated women and their daughters in Rhode Island.

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What To Do:

Repression And Violence In Honduras Do Not Just Happen – They Are Policy

The situation of repression and impunity continue unabated in Honduras. 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, Honduras has become the 'Murder Capital of the world'. State repression has 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 mining, sweatshops, tourism, etc, 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.

There are no signs that this repression, violence, corruption and impunity will decrease, even as a majority of Hondurans courageously support the LIBRE political party that will participate in the November 2013 presidential elections ... in a hope of putting an end to their nightmare.

Across Honduras, community based organizations in the pro-democracy movement need considerably more human rights accompaniment, media attention on the harms and violations, education and activism in Canada and the U.S., and funding.

Contact:

- Member Of Parliament:
<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>
- Congress: <http://www.house.gov/> to get info for your member of Congress, and call: 202-224-3121
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Credit-Card Donations can be made (in Canada and U.S.): <http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

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