

Rights Action
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As Canada Rushes to Finalize an Investor's Rights Agreement with the Military-backed Government of Honduras, Threats and Repression Continue Against Indigenous and Campesino Community Defenders

"Despite the threats, the struggle to defend Tolupan territory from mining, logging and hydroelectric dams continues. "This is to defend our natural resources," said Consuelo Soto"

Tolupan Land Defenders Subject To More Threats In Honduras

By Sandra Cuffe, April 3, 2014

<http://www.alainet.org/active/72712&lang=es>

Indigenous Tolupan land defenders from the San Francisco de Locomapa tribe have once again been the targets of threats, despite precautionary measures issued by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

On Thursday, March 27, Selvin Matute approached one of the land defenders and warned that if he continued to hear them making declarations on Radio Progreso, they would be dragged from their houses and their tongues would be cut off. Matute indicated that the warning was especially directed at Consuelo Soto, Celso Alberto Cabrera, Olvin Enamorado and Sergio Ávila.

"The threats continue," said Soto. "They've warned us that if we don't shut up, they'll shut us up."

Selvin Matute was identified by witnesses as one of two material authors in the murders of María Enriqueta Matute, Armando Fúnez Medina and Ricardo Soto Fúnez on August 25, 2013 in the community of San Francisco Campo, located in the municipality of Yoro, in northern Honduras. The violent attack ended a 13-day road blockade against antimony mining in the tribe's territory.

"I feel such sorrow about María Enriqueta Matute, who died in her kitchen," said Consuelo Soto. Soto had just left the action some five minutes before the murderers arrived looking for the local leaders. When they didn't find them, they killed Matute, a 71-year-old grandmother, Fúnez Medina and Soto Fúnez for supporting the protest against mining. "I demand justice," said Soto.

Due to the risk to their safety as a result of their leadership in the struggle, Soto, Cabrera, Enamorado, Firmo Matute, Ramón Matute, Wilibrán Chirinos, Ojer Ávila and José María Pineda left the Locomapa region on August 25.

On December 19, 2013, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued precautionary measures for 18 residents of Locomapa and their families, 38 people in total.

After six months in exile, seven of the eight people who had left the region returned to their communities on February 22, 2014. The Honduran government created a commission composed of various State institutions to carry out the precautionary measures, but the threatened residents claim they haven't seen results.

The Tolupan defenders denounce that the arrest warrant for the perpetrators hasn't been executed, and that their continued presence in the region provokes fear. They recognize that the four police officers assigned to the area only just recently received a motorcycle, but they maintain that the lack of resources demonstrates the State's lack of political will in pursuing justice.

"I was one of the people threatened. I didn't leave. I stayed here. But yes, I do have precautionary measures," said Sergio Ávila, President of the tribal Preventive Council. He said the police have yet to visit his community, Cabeza de Vaca #2. Ávila's agricultural crops are located approximately four kilometers outside of the community. "We're afraid to even go work in the fields," he said.

Despite the threats, the struggle to defend Tolupan territory from mining, logging and hydroelectric dams continues. "This is to defend our natural resources," said Consuelo Soto. She and the others who have been threatened are also members of the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice, MADJ.

The Tolupan land defenders from the San Francisco de Locomapa tribe call on the Honduran authorities to carry out the precautionary measures issued by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, but they also urgently demand the arrest of the perpetrators so that they face justice for the murders of three tribal members.

What To Do?

In Honduras, Repression, Violence, Impunity And Corruption Are Policy

Americans / Canadians: Keep on, keep on, keep on ... sending copies of this information, and your own letters, to your politicians (MPs, Congress members and Senators) and media. Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the last democratically elected government, Honduras has become the 'Murder Capital of the world'. Repression has reached the levels of the worst years of the 1980s.

Since 2009, the U.S. and Canadian governments have legitimized a succession of illegitimate and repressive regimes. North American companies and investors, and "development" banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank) have increased business activities in African palm production, sweatshops, "model cities", tourism and mining. The Honduran regime remains in power due in large part to its political, economic and military relations with the U.S. and Canada and the "development" banks. Across Honduras, community based organizations in the pro-democracy movement need considerably more human rights accompaniment, funding, media attention on the harms and violations and education and activism in Canada and the U.S.

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