

Rights Action  
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### **American & Canadian Companies Damming the Poor of Honduras**

American and Canadian companies are partnering with the repressive Honduran regime, and some of the wealthiest, most violent members of the economic elites, to evict indigenous Lenca campesinos and build illegal hydro-electric dams in western Honduras.



(Berta Caceres, a campesino/ Lenca community leader, targeted for death threats and illegal detentions by the Honduran regime, seen here with Mel Zelaya, the former President of Honduras ousted in the U.S./ Canadian backed military coup in 2009.)

Since the U.S. and Canadian backed military coup in Honduras, North American companies and investors (in the areas of mining, hydro dams, African palm, bananas, tourism, privatized “model cities”) have expanded their operations in Honduras in partnership with the repressive, undemocratic regime and wealth landowners.

- What to do/ How to support: See below

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### **Honduras: Indigenous Communities Resist Dams in the Face of Threats and Violence**

by Brigitte Gynther, 08 March 2015

[http://upsidedownworld.org/main/honduras-archives-46/5233-honduras-indigenous-communities-resist-dams-in-the-face-of-threats-and-violence?utm\\_content=buffera0434&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](http://upsidedownworld.org/main/honduras-archives-46/5233-honduras-indigenous-communities-resist-dams-in-the-face-of-threats-and-violence?utm_content=buffera0434&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

On the evening Jan. 27, a bus of Indigenous Lenca community leaders returning from Rio Blanco, Honduras, the site of an almost two-year Lenca blockade and struggle against the construction of the “Agua Zarca” dam, was waived to a stop by the police.

The bus was blocked from proceeding by burning tires and people in the street. They were told they would not be able to proceed until Berta Caceres, the General Coordinator of COPINH, appeared. COPINH leaders on the bus explained that Berta was still in Rio Blanco and could be contacted there, just 30 minutes away. No, they were told, we will wait for Berta to come here and the bus cannot advance until she appears.

Two policemen got on the bus to look for Berta. Meanwhile, back in Rio Blanco, Berta received information that if she went to the site, she would be kidnapped, beaten, “screwed,” and more.

The next day, Berta visited members of the Rio Blanco communities working their corn and bean harvest at the edge of the Gualcarque River, on fertile ancestral land that dam company DESA had tried to take over for construction. The community has recuperated this land and returned it to its function of growing the food the families of Rio Blanco depend on.

In October 2014, 15-year-old Maycol Rodriguez, one of the community members involved in planting corn on land claimed by DESA, disappeared, last seen near these fields. After days of searching, he was found dead, drowned in the Gualcarque River.

This is the latest in a series of deaths of those resisting the Agua Zarca Dam, which the Lenca people have blocked from being constructed for 22 months now.

Then the Lenca people of Rio Blanco learned of another dam planned in the area, this time on the Canjel River. The Canjel River Hydroelectric Project is already under construction near the border of Santa Barbara and Intibucá.

Blue Energy – a brand new dam company owned by U.S. investor Peter Ochs of a Kansas-based private equity firm, Capital III – together with Canadian dam company Hydrosys Consultants, have begun building the Canjel Dam. The proposed dam is small, yet is being built in violation of ILO Convention 169, as the Lenca communities in the northern part of Intibucá, including Rio Blanco, were never consulted.

When Blue Energy filed paperwork with Honduras' Environmental Ministry, they listed the project as being located in the Municipality of Intibucá. However, when the Environmental Ministry requested the company provide documentation of authorization to construct the dam in Intibucá, Blue Energy responded by simply claiming the dam was now in Santa Barbara.

In this way, they avoided consulting the Indigenous people of Intibucá, who they probably feared would be critical of the dam. However, this change of location on paper does not necessarily mean change in real life.

In December 2014, Rio Blanco community members walked the borders of the Rio Blanco territory and found the dam being constructed; the Indigenous elders of Rio Blanco report the dam is partly in Lenca territory, in Intibucá.

Additionally, maps the company submitted to the Environmental Ministry clearly locate the diversion dam and river diversion for intake into the dam in the northern part of Intibucá.

With Rio Blanco communities of the northern part of Intibucá opposed to this dam and never having even been consulted about its construction, COPINH publicly opposed construction of the dam.

And so Berta Caceres – co-founder and co-leader of COPINH - has found herself mired in threats related to the Canjel Dam. She was told that a man had been hired by those associated with the Canjel Dam to kidnap her and that he and others would be waiting her when she went through Agua Caliente to get to/from Rio Blanco.

Indeed, Agua Caliente was where the bus of COPINH members was detained, with the police searching for Berta. She was not there then, but the next day, Berta did leave Rio Blanco, together with a team of U.S. journalists who had been filming there. When they got to Agua Caliente, there was a large chain across the road with six police, two military soldiers, a representative of the General Directorate for Criminal Investigation, and numerous others.

The police explained they were looking for Berta Caceres and the group was blocked from proceeding by the chain. The journalists called the U.S. Embassy and began filming everything, enabling the group to eventually pass. But Berta continued to receive information that she was wanted dead for her opposition to the Canjel dam.

With the Canjel Dam already under construction, one must wonder, why the threats against Berta Caceres and COPINH? The reality is that much more is at stake than just the small Canjel Dam. In fact, there are so many dam projects planned for the area it seems as if every river the Lenca people have carefully stewarded for generations will soon be dammed.

In September 2014, COPINH filed denouncements with the Special Prosecutor for Indigenous Peoples against government officials for failing to consult the Lenca people for 40 dam projects.

Capital III, the U.S. private equity firm behind the Canjel Dam, is planning to finance 4 dams in Honduras, three of which COPINH has denounced. One of the larger ones, the Zompopero Hydroelectric Project, impacts three Honduran states and is a \$50 million dollar project for which Capital III reports it will be looking for funding in 2015.

Additionally, Hydrosys Consultants, the Canadian company in charge of the construction, permits, and engineering of the Canjel Dam, is involved in at least 5 dams in Honduras.

The Canjel Dam is not the only one facing opposition from the Lenca people. The Lenca people of San Francisco de Opalaca, founders of COPINH, have – since at least 2007 – blocked the construction of another dam Hydrosys seeks to build, the Gualcarque Hydroelectric Project. Hydrosys has been contracted by Rio Power S.A., owned by Fredy Nasser, a member of the wealthy, powerful elite that dominate Honduran business and politics, and who were behind the 2009 military coup in Honduras that unleashed the current wave of state-violence and repression.

Nasser is the son-in-law of Miguel Facusse, Honduras' wealthiest man whose company in the Lower Aguan Valley has been associated with repression and murders related to land grabs; well over 100 small farmers have been murdered in the region.

For almost a decade the people of San Francisco de Opalaca have rejected Nasser's attempts to privatize and profit from their natural resources. There have been at least 6 Municipal Town Hall meetings in which the Lenca people of Opalaca have roundly rejected the Gualcarque dam.

The Municipal government officially rejected its construction and finally, tired of Nasser's company not listening, a Municipal Assembly prohibited Nasser's company from setting foot in the municipality. Despite numerous Municipal Agreements prohibiting the Gualcarque Dam, the Canadian company Hydrosys declares on their website that they will begin construction in 2015.

As the threats against Berta Caceres and other members of COPINH mount, and with repression and assassinations the order of the day in Honduras, one must wonder how much more violence will be used to force dams on communities that do not want them.

Are Capital III, Hydrosys and the other international companies and investors aware of the repression used to make way for dams in Honduras? Are threats and violence part of the so-called sustainability these companies seek to create?

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### **What To Do?**

- **Rights Action quarterly newsletter, March 2015:** <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Rights-Action-Newsletter---Making-The-Connections-Think-Locally--Act-Globally---Act-Locally--Think-Globally.html?soid=1103480765269&aid=5aFxpJODU4>

### **Honduras: A Country Of Repression, Impunity And Global Business Opportunities**

The extremely high levels of repression and violence in Honduras are not a "Honduran problem" – they are also a U.S. and Canadian problem. Since the June 2009 military coup, that ousted the last democratically elected government, Honduras has become the 'Murder Capital of the world' and the 'Repression Capital of the Americas'.

Since 2009, the U.S. and Canadian governments have supported and legitimized a succession of illegitimate, repressive regimes. North American companies and investors, and "development" banks (World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank) have increased business activities in: African palm production, maquiladora sweatshops, privatized "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 – struggling for fundamental reform to the Honduran State and society - need considerably more human rights accompaniment, funding, media attention on the harms and violations and education and activism in Canada and the U.S.

### **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
- Senate: <http://www.senate.gov/> to get contact for your Senator, and call: 202-224-3121

### **Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & United States)**

To support community organizations working for locally-controlled development, the environment, human rights, real democracy and the rule of law in Honduras and Guatemala, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8
- USA: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091
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- Stock donations: [info@rightsaction.org](mailto:info@rightsaction.org)

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