

Threats & Repression in Honduras: COPINH Struggles Against Privatization of Rivers & Privatized Hydro-electric Dam Projects With International Investors

Below:

- COPINH Statement
- Urgent Action, from Honduras Solidarity Network

What to do, How to support: See below

<http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=d67d425588>

COPINH Denounces: “DESA Agua Zarca” Relaunches Illegal Hydroelectric Project That Violates Rights & Life Of Lenca People & Territories

(Translated for Rights Action by Lori Berenson, lhbere@gmail.com)

The Honduran government continues to allow and is an accomplice to the violation of the human rights of the Lenca People in Río Blanco and northern Intibucá. They support DESA's second attempt to construct the DESA Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Project (Desarrollos Energeticos - Hidroelectrica Agua Zarca) on the Gualcarque River which is a natural, cultural and economic heritage, as well as the habitat of the Lenca People.

DESA-Agua Zarca's most recent attempt is based on the same illegal concession that violated the Lenca People's right to Free, Prior and Informed Consultation and Consent, as well as Convention 169 of the ILO, the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and is therefore began as illegitimate and illegal.

Funders & Investors

We condemn those institutions that support this project of death, which makes them violators of the historic collective and individual rights of the Lenca People, including:

- Netherland's Development Fund FMO-Dutch Bank, providing US\$15 million
- Finnish Fund for Industrial Cooperation Ltd., FINNFUND, of Finland, US\$5 million
- Central American Bank for Economic Integration, US\$24 million

- German companies Siemens and Voith Hydro
- CASTOR (Castillo Torres) Cerros de Comayagua Construction Company
- FICOHSA Bank of Honduras
- Atalia Family Business Group in Honduras
- Government of United States, through USAID- MARKET Project
- And SERNA which continues to be a lackey of companies like DESA, and has refused to give COPINH information on the more than 40 hydroelectric projects that affect and violate the rights of the Lenca People, including the Hydroelectric Dam Agua Zarca.

Post Military Coup Privatization Bonanza

We must remember that the illegitimate Congress of Honduras, in the year 2010, issued dozens of river concessions across Honduras, which has meant the privatization of the commons and natural resources. Among these was the concession on the Gualcarque River, initially given to the DESA Company for 20 years.

Illegal and Illegitimate

Repeatedly, and in multiple ways, we have proven the barbarity and illegitimacy of this project, from the violation of national and international law to the falsification of signatures, to repression and the assassination of several members of COPINH for opposing the DESA hydroelectric project.

As in 2013, this project continues to maintain, and now with much more support, including a military and paramilitary structure masked as security guards. The project has the National Police at their disposition, particularly those who work in the “Operación Libertad” commanded from Tegucigalpa, to which public funds, logistic, communications, police personnel have been assigned. They have the assistance of the Military Police and the Military “Tiger” Commandos, which are structured, financed and trained by the United States.

If that weren’t enough, DESA and the mayor’s office of San Francisco de Ojuera, led by Mr. Raúl Pineda, a nationalist mayor, hired another 50 armed activists from the National Party who are employed by the Mayor’s office and the company (paying them 200 Lempiras each day [less than US\$10] plus food), with the support of the mayor’s office.

DESA-Agua Zarca hired paramilitary guards who are recognized for the commission of crimes such as assassinations, and who have constantly threatened community leaders and women community workers from COPINH, and they continue to walk around armed.

These paramilitary guards have even been detained for illegal weapon possession, as can be seen in the detentions of one of them on December 28, 2015. However, that man enjoyed impunity and the powerful influence of the DESA Company ensured his release by a prosecutor and a judge from Intibucá, who overtly supported him throughout the proceedings, ... ignoring his criminal record including assassination in the case of Bernardo Pérez.

DESA-Agua Zarca is destroying the Gualcarque river's natural course, sacred to the Lenca People. They are destroying unique ecosystems, biodiversity and wildlife in the area, as well as agricultural lands used to grow food, natural medicine, and the forests that have already been flattened by these companies.

DESA-Agua Zarca claims that it redesigned the project, however we want to denounce that they established that the Agua Zarca Hydroelectric Project would be constructed to use the waters of the same Gualcarque River, a river which is part of the territory of the Lenca People, and which we have supported for years through struggles against privatization.

On November 7, 2015, employees and former employees of DESA-Agua Zarca and the Blue Energy company (that took over and destroyed the Cangel River, a similarly important river originating in the Puca Opalaca mountain range) carried out a disrespectful and threatening action against the COPINH delegation that accompanied the UN Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples. They even retained the international delegation and the Special Rapporteur Ms Taulis Corpuz herself for a few minutes.

The same way that in 2013 the mayor's office from Intibucá served as a front for DESA Agua Zarca, the Mayor's office from San Francisco de Ojuera is doing likewise today. This was clear in a visit made to the Rio Blanco community in which the Lenca People clearly rejected this project that will destroy the Gualcarque River, its functions and ecosystems. In this meeting, the mayor Raúl Pineda and his team were received respectfully and kindly. However, when indigenous representatives mobilized to the municipal office in San Francisco Ojuera on November 30, 2015, this municipal corporation, its employees and thugs from the National Party, received us with threats, machetes, weapons, accusations and racist insults of disdain and hatred towards the women from COPINH, due to the fact they are indigenous, rebellious women, and towards their leadership. They went to the ridiculous extreme of digging trenches in the main road to block the passage of the buses we travelled in (which they did using DESA Agua Zarca machinery).

There is a permanent threat against the life and the physical and emotional integrity of the courageous people of Rio Blanco and even against the solidarity movement, those accompanying us and human rights observers, journalists, as well as Honduran and foreign activist women and men.

We denounce that DESA seeks not only to take control of and destroy the Gualcarque River but also is moving into the Rio Blanco, that feeds the Rio Gualcarque, and into the Rio Guinse, with a complex of dams that will affect San Francisco de Opalaca, Intibucá and Santa Barbara.

We fervently reject the dirty defamation campaign that tries to discredit the historic struggle of COPINH, and criminalize our organization. This campaign has become a tool of humiliation for the communities. They are displayed as trophies, giving them a few royalties as they take away their true, sovereign development with a future of dignity and of life, all with the complicity of

the United States Agency for International Development, USAID, and its Mercado Project with its facade of “development, employment, clean energy and social responsibility.”

DESA uses militarism and military intelligence to implement strategies that seek to break the will of the Lempa people, provoking divisionism. It uses terror to impose all types of repressive structures, while presenting this to national and international public opinion as if this were just a “little fight” among the poor, while they continue to deny the rights and the existence of the Lenca People. They belittle the COPINH, using “educated” and “respectful” language, with advice and publicity teams to carry out manipulative media campaigns to raise their profile and achieve their objective of acquiring millions of Lempiras in profits.

COPINH reaffirms its reason to exist as a Lenca organization that supports decolonization, peace with justice, and the struggle against privatization and plundering. COPINH reaffirms the legacy of dignity and Lempira rebelliousness and its emancipatory efforts, for the self-determination and sovereignty of peoples.

COPINH appeals to the support of the national and international solidarity movement to carry out actions to help to stop this policy, denouncing the actions and policies of aggression against us, as well as the strategies used by the companies to take control over and privatize the commons and natural resources, systematically violating the human rights of the Lenca People.

We encourage you to make denouncements at the following entities:

- FMO-Holland: Anna van Saksenlaan 71, 2593 HW Den Haag, The Netherlands, Telephone: +31 70 314 9696
- Finnfund- Finlandia: Finnish Fund For Industrial Cooperation Ltd. (FINNFUND), Uudenmaankatu 16 B, P.O. Box 391, FI-00121 Helsinki, Finland; www.finnfund.fi; Telephone +358 9 348 434; fax +358 9 3484 3346
- USAID Honduras: James Watson, tel. 00504-236-9320; USAID Washington, DC: Julie Ciccarone, Email: jciccarone@usaid.gov

Rivers Cannot Be Sold. They Are Taken Care Of And Defended!
(COPINH)

Urgent Action

From: Karen Spring <spring.kj@gmail.com>

Date: Sat, Feb 20, 2016

Subject: Calls Needed Now for COPINH and Rio Blanco!!

UPDATE on COPINH situation - CALLS NEEDED!!

Victor Fernandez, COPINH's lawyer, sends this report at 9:05pm Honduras, after hearing from Berta Caceres (COPINH coordinator):

"COPINH cars and buses were damaged as the police and military observed the vandalizers [people working with the municipality of San Francisco de Ojuera; and people working with DESA), without protecting or assisting them. Right now, they are walking [the buses and cars were stopped and preventing from continuing, thus forcing COPINH, residents of Rio Blanco and International observers to walk at least 5 hours] and are very worried because they still have not passed by San Francisco de Ojuera where there are many armed individuals with an aggressive attitude towards COPINH. The police patrols have abandoned them despite the known risks they face.

"Given these risks, they [COPINH] asks that security be provided to them given that many patrols are in the area taking care of the property of the company."

The following police were on site and involved in the reported harassment: Commissioner Sanchez from Santa Barbara and an Official named Phillips.

These are the events that have unfolded as a result of a walk organized by COPINH that began this morning. The community was walking to the Gualcarque river where DESA-Agua Zarca is constructing a hydroelectric dam project.

Please read below and call these numbers to express your concern with the harassment and illegal detention of residents of the community of Rio Blanco and COPINH happening right now!! There are international observers present at the scene as well!!

Call Numbers Below And Demand:

1. Request the immediate stop to all harassment of the community of Rio Blanco and members of COPINH.
2. Remind the following individuals that Berta Caceres of Copinh has protective measures from the Inter-American commission of human rights.
3. Demand respect for the rights of indigenous people who were not consulted regarding the construction of a hydroelectric project on the gualcarque River.

Honduran Ministry of Security, Julian Pacheco: 011-504-9456-3699

Sagrario Prudott, lawyer for human rights, Ministry of Security: 011-504-3293-2312 and 011-504-3152-8878; email: sprudott@yahoo.com

More info

COPINH

Escuchen a COPINH, en vivo: <http://www.guarajambala1.caster.fm/>

web: copinh.org / blog: copinhonduras.blogspot.com / fb: Copinh Intibucá / twitter: @COPINHHONDURAS / Copinh mailing list: Copinh@listas.codigosur.org; <http://listas.codigosur.org/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/copinh>

- Grahame Russell, Rights Action, grahame@rightsaction.org
- Karen Spring, Honduras Solidarity Network, spring.kj@gmail.com

Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & United States)

Help us continue to support COPINH (that we have supported since 1998) and other grassroots organizations in Honduras struggling for a just society and State. Make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

- U.S.: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887
- Canada: (Box 552) 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

Credit-Card Donations

- Canada: <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/rights-action/>
- U.S.: <http://www.rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations> (click on NetworkForGood)

Donations of stock? Write to: grahame@rightsaction.org

Delegation to Honduras, June 4-12, 2016

"Connecting the Dots from the Global to the Local: Understanding the Environmental, Human Rights, Poverty and Impunity Crisis in Honduras". Rights Action and the Mir Centre for Peace at Selkirk College invite you to join this educational seminar trip to Honduras.

- Cara-Lee Malange, Mir Peace Centre, CMalange@selkirk.ca
- Grahame Russell, Rights Action, grahame@rightsaction.org

More Info: info@rightsaction.org

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