

A Daughter Takes Up Her Slain Mother's Activism

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Why So Much Attention On This Case?

By Grahame Russell

<http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=246ebc02a7>

Since the U.S. and Canadian backed military coup in 2009 in Honduras, hundreds of Hondurans have been killed for political reasons. The most repressive region has, in fact, been the Aguan region in the north, where the World Bank is invested in African palm production with the largest, most powerful landowners in the country.

None of these political killings has been solved. None has received international attention ... until the assassination of Berta Caceres and failed assassination attempt against her colleague Gustavo Castro.

The political murder of Berta Caceres is brutally and simply one more in a systemic pattern of repression carried out by the US and Canadian backed regimes since the 2009 coup.

A major issue that needs attention is that the military and economic power of the Honduran regime comes directly from its relations with the US and Canada, with the World Bank and other global economic actors.

At a bare minimum, we - in the US and Canada - must support the demands of Berta Caceres' family and Honduran civil society for the establishment of an international investigatory commission to participate directly in the criminal investigation.

But we must also make this an issue of political and legal accountability in the US and Canada: demanding Congressional, Senate and Parliamentary inquiries into how and why the US and Canada supported the 2009 military coup and have maintained beneficial economic, political and military relations with repressive regimes since then, turning a blind eye to the violence and repression, corruption and impunity ..., in fact enabling the political murders of hundreds of people, like Berta Caceres.

Repression in Honduras will not stop, until sufficient pressure is brought to hold the US and Canada accountable. If we can't achieve real justice in this one case then the regime – and its international backers - win again.

- **What to do:** See below

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By [Darryl Fears](#), Washington Post, April 8, 2016

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/a-daughter-takes-up-her-slain-mothers-activism/2016/04/08/7ea3dc0a-fd08-11e5-80e4-c381214de1a3_story.html?postshare=3651460180912545&tid=ss_fb



Bertha Zúniga Cáceres, the 26-year-old daughter of the slain environmental activist Berta Cáceres Flores, reflects after testifying Tuesday at the Organization of American States in Washington. (Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post)

The wispy young woman with raven-black hair and expressive brown eyes was introduced to the small crowd as Bertha Zúniga Cáceres, but hardly anyone in her tight circle calls her that. She is known by the Spanish diminutive “Bertita,” an homage to her internationally famous mother, environmental activist Berta Cáceres Flores.

On a windy afternoon in Washington this week, the 26-year-old Zúniga boldly continued the work that many think led to her mother's recent slaying by gunmen in Honduras. Zúniga faced the gathering at the red-brick entrance of the Organization of American States, lifted a bullhorn and denounced her government for creating a climate that makes Honduras one of the deadliest countries in the world for people trying to protect forests, rivers and other resources.

At least 100 activists were murdered between 2010, a year after an elected president was ousted by a coup, and 2014, according to the international watchdog group Global Network. Cáceres, a winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize who fought the government's removal of indigenous people from river communities to pave the way for a massive hydroelectric dam project, was shot March 3 after years of receiving death threats.

Though still in mourning, her daughter flew to Washington to testify before the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights about deadly abuse in Honduras. She also joined the Center for Justice and International Law and other groups in asking the OAS to appoint a panel of independent experts to investigate the murder of her mother and other activists. There have been few arrests in the cases.



Environmental activists gather in front of the Organization of American States in memory of Berta Cáceres Flores, who was killed in rural Honduras on March 3. (Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post)

“What we want to find out is who were these assassins,” Zúniga said, her voice booming across two city blocks. “Not the trigger men. We want to know who the intellectual assassins are” — meaning the others, possibly including government and military officials, who had a role in the planning.

That call to action is reminiscent of her mother’s fierce activism, and some worry that Bertita, who is suspending graduate studies to carry on her mother’s work, might also suffer her fate.

“We’re all very concerned for her safety, especially since the same security measures are in place for the rest of the family that were there for Berta,” said her cousin, Silvio Carrillo. Zúniga is the second of four children, “and all of them are speaking out. They’re fearless, just like their mother.”

Zúniga hand-delivered a request to OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, asking him to convene an expert panel to investigate the murders. A similar panel probed the disappearance of protesters three years ago in Mexico and produced a stinging report that thoroughly contradicted the government’s account of how the busload of students vanished. It also implicated police and military officials who were not mentioned in the original account.



Environmental activists concerned about violence in Honduras gather outside the World Bank. (Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post)

Zúniga's appearance at the OAS did not have the result she had hoped for. Neither did activists' push for the U.S. State Department to pressure the Honduran government for an independent investigation by a panel of legal experts from other parts of the world.

Almagro opted to assist a Honduran prosecutor in probing possible government corruption. The OAS plans to deploy international judges and technical experts as part of its newly created Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras.

"The purpose of the mission is to investigate corruption and put people in jail," said Sergio Jellinek, a spokesman for the secretary general. "If there is an angle related to Berta's case, they will tackle it."

Mark Toner, deputy spokesman for the State Department, said the agency has strongly condemned Cáceres's murder and extended condolences to the family and people "who have lost a dedicated defender of the environment and human rights." But, he said, department officials cannot tell the Honduran government how to proceed.



The watchdog group Global Witness ranked Honduras, where Berta Cáceres Flores was killed, as one of the most deadly countries for environmental activism in Latin America. (Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post)

“The U.S. government has no jurisdiction to investigate a homicide in Honduras,” Toner said in a statement Friday. “Several U.S. advisors with extensive experience in criminal investigations and prosecutions are providing technical assistance to the Honduran investigators and prosecutors. We are not aware of any international organization that has the legal authority and technical capacity to conduct an independent homicide investigation in Honduras.”

The Honduran Embassy in Washington did not respond to requests for comment, but sources at the OAS, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because discussions with Honduras are sensitive, said that the government there favored review by the new mission rather than any involvement by the human rights commission.

Speaking through an interpreter, Zúniga called the responses by the OAS and State Department disappointing. That sentiment was echoed by family members and several activists groups that say they have little confidence in the Honduran prosecutors or the mission, which obviously has no investigative track record.

Honduran officials vowed to protect Cáceres, they said, but failed to keep her safe. Now the same government is promising to protect her elderly mother and four children while undertaking an investigation into a homicide that so far has yielded no arrests.

Carrillo, a U.S. citizen who accompanied his cousin during her time in Washington, said the organization that Cáceres led at the time of her death, the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), has stepped in “to fill in the security gaps. The police? Why should we trust them?”

Cáceres won the Goldman Prize for the role she played in getting a Chinese company to abandon the dam in 2013, but a Costa Rican firm took over, and the work continues. A Dutch

bank suspended its financing because of the recent violence, but that has not stopped construction, either. A completion date has not been set.

Late in the week, Zúniga boarded a red-eye flight back to Honduras and a future, at least for now, as an activist. She said she knows violence often comes with the job.

"We're not going to deny that we are afraid," Zúniga said. "But one of the biggest lessons my mom had was not to stop. My biggest fear was that they would kill her, and that has happened. This is an attack against everyone who stands against these actions. We feel a need to make this a calling."

Pressure Needed in U.S. and Canada

Here, a Letter to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry; and a Letter to Canadian Government Officials: <http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=29af29c555>

Please re-send the article above and these letters to your elected politicians, pressuring them to publicly support the key demands:

- The establishment of the independent international judicial commission to directly join the criminal investigation into the assassination of Berta Caceres and attempted assassination of Gustavo Castro;
- The establishment of Congressional, Senate and Parliamentary inquiries into the role that the U.S. and Canada played in supporting the 2009 military coup and legitimizing and doing business with the post-coup regimes since then.

Funds Needed for Family of Berta Caceres and COPINH

Since the assassination of Berta Caceres on March 3, 2016, Rights Action has channeled over \$23,000 to her family and to COPINH, that are at the forefront of efforts to ensure that justice is done, even as family and COPINH members are receiving threats, even as the corrupted regime is trying to 'criminalize' members of COPINH for the killing of Berta.

Tax Deductible Donations in the U.S. or Canada: Make checks to "Rights Action" (write Berta/COPINH on memo line) 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)

Articles

- Berta Caceres' Acceptance Speech, 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize. To view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR1kwx8b0ms>

- Murdered for Activism in Honduras, by Silvio Carrillo (Berta's nephew), March 11, 2016, New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/12/opinion/international/murdered-for-activism-in-honduras.html?emc=edit_tnt_20160311&nlid=45556342&ntemail0=y
- Berta Caceres: Who She Is & What She Lived For, by Grahame Russell, March 3, 2016: <http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=026d1728a3>
- Fight With Joy: Remembering Bertha Cáceres, by Sandra Cuffe, March 7, 2016: <https://intercontinentalcry.org/fight-joy-remembering-bertha-caceres/>
- Eulogy For Berta Isabel Cáceres Flores, by Bev Bell, March 9, 2016: <http://otherworldsarepossible.org/bertha-lives-life-and-legacy-bertha-caceres>
- Blood Flows Where Canadian Capital Goes, by Tyler Shipley, 03/6/2016: <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/analysis/blood-flows-where-canadian-capital-goes-371189471.html>
- Berta Cáceres, the Murdered Honduran Activist, Did Not Die. She Multiplied, by Karen Spring, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/karen-spring/bertha-caceres-murder_b_9500088.html
- Death Squads Are Back In Honduras, Activists Tell Congress, by Alex Emmons, <https://theintercept.com/2016/04/12/death-squads-are-back-in-honduras-honduran-activists-tell-congress/>

More Information

- www.BertaCaceres.org (established by Berta's family)
- Honduras Solidarity Network: <http://www.hondurassolidarity.org/>
- Other Worlds: <http://otherworldsarepossible.org/>
- Common Frontiers: <http://www.commonfrontiers.ca/>
- School of the Americas Watch: <http://www.soaw.org/about-the-soawhinsec/what-is-the-soawhinsec>
- Witness For Peace: <http://www.witnessforpeace.org/>

“Berta Caceres did not die, she multiplied.” Thank-you for your multiplying commitment and activism. Please share this information far’n’wide.

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