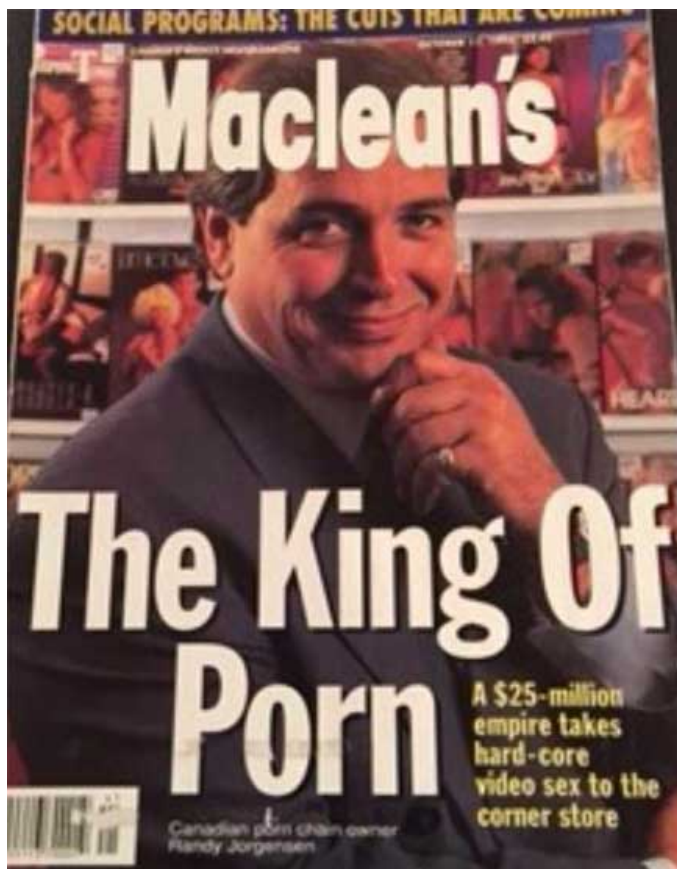


OFRANEH members denounced for defamation by Canadian tourism investors Patrick Daniel Forseth (Carivida Villas) and Randy Jorgensen (Life Vision Developments)

(Share: <http://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/ofraneh-denounced-for-defamation-by-forseth-and-jorgensen>)

"We are going to stand firm no matter what comes next and we will continue to denounce this Canadian mafia. We aren't alone. The population, our organization, our ancestors and history support our side"

~ Medalime David



(1993 photo, Randy Jorgensen, now a major tourism operator dealing with and benefitting from corrupt and repressive legal and political authorities in Honduras)

Winds of Persecution on Garifuna Lands

By [Giorgio Trucchi](#), 09/26/2017

(Translated by Lori Berenson)

<https://www.alainet.org/es/articulo/188265>

The proliferation of tourism and holiday-residential projects near Trujillo Bay on the Honduran Atlantic Coast, is causing high levels of tension between tourism entrepreneurs, mostly Canadian, and sectors of

the Garifuna communities in the area who denounce the pillage of community lands and the increasing criminalization of social protest and the defense of territories.

Denounced for Defamation

On July 31, 2017 the leaders and activists of the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH) Miriam Miranda, Medalime David, Neny Heidi Ávila and Lety Hernández (the latter three from the community of Guadalupe, municipality of Santa Fe), were notified of an accusation against them for the alleged crime of 'slander and defamation' laid by the Canadian businessman Patrick Daniel Forseth, general manager and legal representative of the CARIVIDA Limited Liability Company.

[More information, Patrick Daniel Forseth: http://www.garifunaweb.com/andy-jorgensen.html#Patrick_Forgeth]

According to this entrepreneur in tourism, the accused presumably gave statements to national and international media accusing him of several crimes, including that of appropriation of community lands by means of trickery, force and threats. According to Forseth's claims, the women would be responsible for damaging his reputation and the image of the company he represents.



(Photo: Giorgio Trucchi)

Corrupt Honduran legal system

Launching accusations against members of the Garifuna communities organized in OFRANEH is nothing new. Medalime David was detained last November with three other members of the Guadalupe Community - César Geovany Bernárdez, Celso Alberto Guillén y Cosme Avila - for participating alongside other young people from the community in taking back lands that held community tourism projects, but which were inexplicably sold to CARIVIDA in 2012.

Medalime David was violently taken prisoner by police officers and the navy, and was accused of usurpation. After a speedy trial, David was acquitted definitively, but not her fellow community members. Last May, César Geovany Bernárdez was arrested again for the same crime and is now subject to legal restrictions (alternative measures to imprisonment), which includes reporting regularly to the judge of Trujillo and not traveling abroad until the judicial process finalizes.

A History of Plundering ~ “Little Canada”

On several occasions, young people from the Guadalupe community have denounced that there has been an accelerated process of illegal sales of titled community lands over the last decade. In particular, they accuse Canadian businessmen, including Forseth and Randy Jorgensen –the last CEO of Life Vision Developments – for acting in collusion with national and international front-men, community members and public officials to usurp community lands for the purpose of building tourist resorts and vacation homes.

According to information found on their webpage, Life Vision Developments is presently the largest promoter of real estate in Trujillo, owning more than 600 hectares of land with an ocean view, where he develops housing projects for the purpose of tourism (examples: Campa Vista, Coroz Alta, Alta Vista, Florida) or sells of plots of land to foreigners. Banana Coast, Carivida Villas, Njoy Trujillo Beach Residences and Njoy Santa Fe Beach Residences, Marea Honduras are only some of the tourism investments that have emerged in an area that has been re-baptized as “little Canada”.

Criminalization of Protest

“Before we had enough time to clear up one accusation they brought another one against us. Now they are accusing us of slandering and defaming this foreign investor, but the only thing we did was simply tell the truth and defend what belongs to our community. Every claim presented in this new complaint is false. Once again we see how money moves everything and how in this country, being a defender, a woman and a member of an indigenous community can be grounds for criminalization and persecution,” Medalime David stated to Alba Sud.

The Garifuna community defender assured that the real sin they committed was that of not succumbing to bribes, not bowing down to them. “That is why they are bringing us to courts. That’s why I am going to have to face another trial. We are going to stand firm no matter what comes next and we will continue to denounce this Canadian mafia. We aren’t alone. The population, our organization, our ancestors and history support our side” the young woman emphasized.

As a result of the struggle for titles and demarcation of ancestral lands that had been carried out by OFRANEH and the Confederation of Autochthonous Peoples of Honduras (CONPAH), in 1998 the Honduran State gave titles to almost all of the lands of the Garifuna communities. That same year, a final title giving full control of almost 240 hectares was granted to the Guadalupe Community and registered in the Property Records office two years later. Backed by the law, the Guadalupe community urged municipal authorities to respect the final title, and abstain from carrying out new and illicit dismemberments or from granting full authority over any part of the communal lands.

According to OFRANEH, Honduran law is very clear in stating it is illegal to sell/purchase and register lands within a community land title. No person can authorize the sale of community lands. Nevertheless, this legislation was violated as proposals for large tourism investment started pouring in, with the understanding that no public official would interfere with this big business.

More persecution

On September 5, 2017 two officers from the Unit of Investigations the Police and one official from the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL) came to OFRANEH's headquarters in the Garifuna community of Sambo Creek. These officials attempted to give Miriam Miranda, General Coordinator of OFRANEH, a citation requiring that she appear before judicial authorities. When they failed to find her, the police officers threatened to search for and arrest her.

In addition to facing the lawsuit filed by Forseth, Miranda is also being called to appear before the court for another lawsuit that involves one of OFRANEH's community radios. In July, in Trujillo, CONATEL declared that Radio Waruguma was in rebellion, and threatened to shut it down.

The Garifuna organization assures that this and other attacks against their radios represent an overt violation of indigenous people's right to freedom of expression. This right is stated in the Inter American Convention on Human Rights and in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as in Convention 169 of the ILO.

"There is always a double standard for justice in Honduras. We sued Randy Jorgensen and judicial authorities delayed this process for two years and it still continues. But the opposite occurs when defenders or social protest are involved – that's when the justice system is surprisingly fast as well as uncompromising," explained Miranda.

For Miranda, those who invest in tourism are looking at the whole Trujillo area, and they exert strong pressure against the young men and women who refuse to sell out or be bribed. "The only thing we have done is denounce nationally and internationally the collusion that exists between local authorities and foreign capital, who then make accusations against for usurpation of our own territories. The defense of ancestral Garifuna lands and common goods are being criminalized and brought before the courts. As general coordinator and legal representative of OFRANEH, I am going to keep accompanying these processes of struggle and defense of what is belongs to us. We cannot allow the Honduran state to privilege the interests of foreign investors above the rights of the Garifuna people", stated Miriam Miranda.

Background

Lands To Die For: The Garifuna Struggle In Honduras

December 20, 2016, CCTV Americas

35 minute film about violent and corrupt challenges facing the Garifuna people, lead by the OFRANEH organization, in the context of the violence and repression, impunity and corruption that characterize the Honduran military, economic and political elites and their international partners.

<http://www.cctv-america.com/2016/12/20/lands-to-die-for-the-garifuna-struggle-in-honduras>

Miriam Miranda, OFRANEH leader, detained and threatened by Honduran police

On January 11, 2017, Miriam Miranda and three other members of OFRANEH (Fraternal Organization of Black and Garifuna Peoples) - Luís Gutiérrez, Oscar Gaboa, Luís Miranda - were illegally detained and threatened by police at a roadside stop in La Ceiba, along Honduras' north coast.

<http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ea011209a243050dfb66dff59&id=6d6627ffdb>

The Canadian porn king and the Caribbean paradise: Is a businessman taking advantage of lawlessness to scoop up land?

November 20, 2016, by Marina Jimenez

<https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2016/11/20/the-canadian-porn-king-and-the-caribbean-paradise.html>

The U.S. and Canada Have Blood on Their Hands in Honduras

October 22, 2016, by Grahame Russell

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/opinion/The-US-and-Canada-Have-Blood-on-Their-Hands-in-Honduras-20161022-0010.html>

Names/Addresses

Carivida Villas

www.carivida.com

info@carivida.com

(778) 242-8678

Carivida Club Café

Trujillo, Colón, Honduras

Life Vision Properties

<http://lifevisionproperties.com/>

90 Admiral Blvd. Mississauga, ON, Canada, L5T 2W1

1 (416) 900-6098

Ambassador Michael Gort, Embassy of Canada in Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua, Tel: (504) 2232-4551; Michael.gort@international.gc.ca; tglpa@international.gc.ca

More information

- OFRANEH (Organizacion Fraternal Negra Hondureña), garifuna@ofraneh.org, www.ofraneh.org, <http://www.ofraneh.wordpress.com>
- Rights Action, info@rightsaction.org

Tax-Deductible Donations (Canada & United States)

To support community, human rights and environmental defense organizations (like OFRANEH) in Honduras and Guatemala, working and struggling for justice and for fundamental change from the local to global levels, 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: <http://rightsaction.org/donate/>
