

Trial continues (in Honduras) against ‘intellectual author’ of assassination of Berta Caceres, as trial continues (in New York) against ‘intellectual author’ of Honduran “State-sponsored drug trafficking”

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(Olivia Zuniga Caceres, one of four children of the assassinated Berta Caceres, now member of congress for the LIBRE party, holding sign: “Drug-traffickers should be in jail, not in the Presidential Palace”)

As a ‘State-sponsored drug trafficking’ trial continues in New York City against Tony Hernandez, brother of the U.S. and Canadian-backed president Juan Orlando Hernandez (himself directly implicated in the drug trafficking), COPINH, family members of Berta Caceres & lawyers continue with their precedent-setting trial in Honduras against one of the “intellectual authors” of Berta’s March 2, 2016 assassination, a killing that has links with the highest levels of Honduras’ corrupt, repressive, narco-trafficking regime.

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SOA Watch (School of the Americas Watch) October 10, 2019

Today, October 10, 2019, there will be a hearing in the case against former Honduran military intelligence officer Roberto David Castillo Mejía for the murder of Indigenous and social movement leader Berta Cáceres. The outcome of this hearing will decide if Castillo – the only intellectual author

charged to date for Berta's murder – will face trial or not. Castillo is the President of the Board and CEO of the Honduran company DESA that was trying to build the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project on the Gualcarque River, which Cáceres opposed.

Major report: “Violence, Corruption and Impunity in Honduras Energy Sector”

Last month, School of the Americas Watch (SOAW), Guatemala Human Rights Commission, International Platform Against Impunity, Due Process of Law Foundation, and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights published an extensive report profiling Castillo, entitled 'Violence, Corruption, and Impunity in the Honduran Energy Industry': <http://www.soaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Violence-Corruption-Impunity-A-Profile-of-Roberto-David-Castillo.pdf>

The report describes evidence admitted in the 2018 trial against the first seven people convicted of the murder of Berta Cáceres, which provides significant information about how the murder of Cáceres was planned and executed. Telephone data and other evidence makes clear that U.S. military training School of the Americas (SOA) graduate Douglas Bustillo, a former employee of Castillo's as head of security for DESA, coordinated with former soldier Henry Hernández to carry out the murder and that their motive was financial; they were going to be paid.

Hernández was convicted for his role as ringleader of the group of hitmen that executed Cáceres' murder (March 2, 2016) and Bustillo was also convicted, having served in the role of intermediary. Fellow SOA graduate Army Major Mariano Díaz also participated in the coordination and was also convicted; one of his phone lines had been wiretapped by authorities during the murder planning because he was under investigation for drug trafficking and kidnapping.

The evidence suggests that during the murder planning, Bustillo was an intermediary who communicated with his former boss, Roberto David Castillo, and with Díaz and Hernández. For instance, on February 5, 2016, the first attempt to murder Cáceres took place. That day, Castillo sent a Whatsapp message to Bustillo reminding him to 'remember the accidents and the scene' (english translation of original Spanish message; citations and all footnotes are available in the [report](#)).

Bustillo met with Hernández in the Honduran city of Siguatepeque to prepare for the murder attempt, providing him with a gun and accessing pictures of Cáceres on his cell phone. Hernández then traveled to La Esperanza, apparently accompanied by an unidentified second person. However, later that night he reported to Díaz that they could not carry out the murder, indicating that there were a lot of people at Cáceres' home.

The next morning Hernández confirmed to Díaz they had been at the scene and concluded they would need a car and a different plan for the next attempt to carry out the murder. Hernández then spoke to Bustillo four times, after which Bustillo wrote a Whatsapp message to Castillo informing him the mission had been aborted and that he would wait for what Castillo had said because he had no more money for logistics. Bustillo repeated that he needed what Castillo was going to budget for logistics. Castillo replied, 'Copied, mission aborted' (english translation of original Spanish message; citations and details are footnoted in the [report](#)).

Whatsapp messages between Castillo and Bustillo indicate that on February 29, 2016, they coordinated a meeting for the next morning, March 1, 2016, so Castillo could provide Bustillo with money. On March 2, 2016, men who entered Berta Cáceres' home fatally shot her - and shot at and injured Gustavo Castro

- between 11:30-11:40 pm. Shortly after the murder was executed, Hernández sent a text message to Bustillo.

Hours later, according to phone company reports, Bustillo left Tegucigalpa and traveled north to the department of Cortes, communicating with Hernández en route, presumably to deliver the money promised to the hitmen. While in Cortes, Bustillo communicated with Castillo via phone call and text message.

The report “[Violence, Corruption, and Impunity in the Honduran Energy Industry](#)” also details phone and other evidence admitted in the 2018 trial that suggests a pattern of human rights abuses and corruption by Castillo and others at DESA, especially as they sought to neutralize Berta Cáceres and COPINH's opposition to the Agua Zarca Project.

Information extracted from the phones of Bustillo and Sergio Rodríguez, DESA's Social, Environmental, and Communications Manager, as well as wiretapped phone conversations, suggest that DESA executives and employees sought to monitor and neutralize Berta Cáceres and COPINH using paid informants. These informants claimed to be members of COPINH but secretly provided DESA with information about the plans and activities of Berta Cáceres and COPINH.

Evidence admitted in the trial also suggests that DESA executives, directors, and employees, including Castillo and those under his supervision, enlisted the support of Honduran security forces and justice operators. The evidence suggests they used their contacts with government officials to ensure police and military were deployed to the Agua Zarca Project area, and security forces were often at the disposition of DESA in its efforts to neutralize the opposition to the project. This includes the U.S. trained special police forces unit known as TIGRES.

Castillo is not only accused of the murder of Berta Cáceres but has also been indicted on charges of fraud and use of false documents related to the permits for the Agua Zarca Project. Castillo worked for the Honduran state energy company ENEE when it signed the contract with DESA to sell energy to the ENEE from the Agua Zarca Project. Additionally, Honduras' High Tribunal of Auditors found that Castillo had illegally received a double salary from the Armed Forces and the ENEE and that another company of his sold equipment to the Armed Forces at inflated prices. For more details, [read the full report here](#).

SOA Watch
225 E 26th St, Suite 7
Tucson, AZ 85713
www.soawatch.org

Support efforts to pass the “Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act (H.R. 1945)” in the U.S.:
<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/berta-cceres-human-rights-in-honduras-act>

More information

COPINH (Organization co-founded by Berta, now headed by Berta's daughter)
www.copinh.org, <https://bertavivecopinhsigue.copinh.org/>, copinhonduras.blogspot.com,
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- Common Frontiers Canada: www.commonfrontiers.ca;
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- NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with People of Guatemala): www.nisgua.org;
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- Alliance for Global Justice: www.afgj.org;
- CODEPINK: www.codepink.org;
- GHRC (Guatemalan Human Rights Commission): www.ghrc-usa.org;
- Mining Injustice Solidarity Network: <https://mininginjustice.org>;
- Mining Justice Alliance: <https://miningjusticealliance.wordpress.com>;
- Simcoe County Honduras Rights Monitor: <https://simcoecountyhondurasrightsmonitor.wordpress.com>;

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