

Day 25, Berta Caceres trial in Honduras: Assassins exposed

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- Below: "The assassins of Berta Caceres are exposed", by Edy Táborá



Las Revoluciones de Berta, Conversaciones on Claudia Korol

The assassins of Berta Caceres are exposed

by Edy Táborá, El Faro digital news, 22 abril 2021

Original: <https://elfaro.net/es/202104/columnas/25425/Los-asesinos-de-Berta-C%C3%A1ceres-al-descubierto.htm>

The trial against David Castillo, military intelligence officer and businessman accused of co-perpetration of the crime against Berta Cáceres, began on 5 April 2021. It was suspended two days later following new evidence proposed by the private prosecution, which represents

important advances in establishing the criminal responsibility of the intellectual authors of the crime.

At the time of the murder on 2 March 2016, Castillo was the president of the board of directors and general manager of Desarrollos Energéticos S.A. (DESA), a criminal structure disguised as a company that has used mechanisms of violence, corruption and impunity to advance its economic project.

DESA usurped Lenca indigenous territories, through corruption and illegal licensing, to build a hydroelectric dam in order to defraud the state of millions of dollars through an illegally negotiated power purchase agreement. DESA also implemented actions to criminalise members of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras (Copinh) - the organisation that Berta co-founded and led at the time of her murder - and used acts of violence, threats and intimidation that culminated in the activist's murder.

Since April 2013, Berta had been leading a successful campaign to stop the hydroelectric project alongside organised Copinh members from the Rio Blanco region, the communities directly affected. With international funding in jeopardy and the construction company pulling out due to the complaints they made, DESA executives decided in 2016 that it was time to stop it.

Impunity of the Atala Zablah family

David Castillo was captured three years ago for his role in the murder, but until now, the rest of the DESA executives - members of the powerful Atala Zablah family - have remained unpunished in the judicial proceedings.

With the conviction in November 2018 of other members of the criminal structure, including four hitmen, a senior active military officer and two DESA workers, the Sentencing Court acknowledged that DESA executives knew and consented to the assassination plot. However, none of them have even been questioned in the current proceedings.

The extent of their involvement is now even clearer and the Honduran state should feel compelled to take decisive action to end impunity in the case.

Included in the court file are thousands of pages of telecommunications data, among other evidence, that Castillo coordinated with the convicted assassins to carry out the assassination plan while playing a subordinate role to the company's executives. The new evidence presented clearly links Daniel Atala Midence, a member of the Atala Zablah Family, to a payment that would coincide with the delivery of money from David Castillo to the already convicted Douglas Bustillo, former DESA security manager.

Companies behind DESA & the wire transfer

Although DESA is the public face of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project, at least two other companies, registered in Panama and Honduras and controlled by Atala and Castillo, were involved in the project.

According to the new evidence presented, Daniel Atala authorised a payment of 1 million, 254 thousand dollars (U\$1,254,000) from the company Concretos del Caribe (CONCASA) to the company Potencia y Energía de Mesoamérica, S.A. (PEMSA) two days before the assassination of Berta Cáceres – which corresponds to a subsequent payment made to the assassination team.

CONCASA was incorporated as a company in Honduras by Castillo and a partner a few months after the creation of DESA in 2009. In late 2015, two months before Berta's murder, Castillo, as president of the Board of Directors and legal representative of CONCASA, granted a general power of attorney for the administration of CONCASA to Daniel Atala which presumably would have allowed him to authorise and carry out financial transactions from that point onwards.

In addition to his role at CONCASA, Daniel Atala was also the financial director of DESA at the time of the crime. The bank document offered in evidence shows that Daniel Atala used his DESA work email to make the transfer from CONCASA to PEMSА. It has not yet been publicly clarified where the CONCASA funds came from, to make such a transfer.

PEMSA is a company incorporated in Panama that Castillo chaired at the time of the crime. Since the DESA shareholders' meeting in November 2011, PEMSА has been a minority shareholder of DESA. The international transaction between CONCASA/Daniel Atala and DESA/David Castillo was done through Banco Bac Credomatic, which is chaired by Jacobo Atala Zablah, a board member of DESA and Las Jacarandas S.A. investments.

The 2018 trial determined that DESA's socio-environmental manager, Sergio Rodríguez, stopped being paid by DESA in 2016, the year of the murder, but was still being paid by PEMSА and CONCASA, even after he was captured for Berta's murder. The lines between these three companies may have been blurred in an attempt to limit each other's responsibilities.

In an attempt to maintain further impunity in the case, the Honduran state has not carried out any investigation related to the possible criminal nature of these companies or against those who control them.

New evidence shows that the bank transfer from Daniel Atala (CONCASA) to David Castillo (PEMSА) took place after an aborted attempted killing of Berta Cáceres between 5 and 6 February. At that time, a lone assassin informed his superior, an active military officer who coordinated directly with Bustillo, that he was unable to carry out the assassination due to lack of resources. He says he needs a gun, a car and other people to work with.

In preparation for the (March 3) assassination, less than a month later, Bustillo contacted Castillo to say, "I need to know what you are going to budget for the job, the means and logistics". Castillo met with Bustillo on 1 March to give him what they refer to, in the chats, a loan. The following day, the assassination group, which Bustillo coordinated remotely, travelled

from the north of Honduras to the town of La Esperanza to assassinate the leader Berta Cáceres.

In the following hours, Bustillo's movement from the central zone, where he had allegedly met with Castillo the day before to receive the funds, to the city of San Pedro Sula, was recorded, where telephone antennae show a possible meeting between the kill squad and military man, also convicted in 2018, Henry Hernández. The Public Prosecutor's Office has referred to this as a payment to the kill squad group for carrying out the assassination.

Daniel Atala's responsibility

More than forty thousand pages of telephone records, as well as chats, text messages, GPS and emails seized from the mobile phones of those involved, which form part of the criminal proceedings, give an account of the link between the Atala family and their employees, making the evidence presented irrefutable and conclusive, not only for the conviction of David Castillo, but as evidence against others who today enjoy impunity.

The private prosecution alleges that David Castillo was part of a criminal structure that carried out the actions to persecute, attack and finally kill Berta Cáceres. This criminal structure included the hit squad, and employees and executives of DESA where Castillo worked in a subordinate role. The evidence strengthens the already established connection between the intellectual authors and material authors of the assassination of Berta Cáceres, through private companies.

To date, the Honduran state has refused to investigate and prosecute the business structures used to provide the logistics necessary to carry out the assassination. Despite the fact that the private prosecution has filed two requests (with detailed information) for criminal charges against Daniel Atala, the Honduran Public Prosecutor's Office has not called him for questioning.

Now, as a witness, he has been summoned by the Sentencing Court in the oral and public trial against David Castillo to testify about the latter's actions. It will be the first time that the Honduran justice system has called a member of the Atala family to speak about the crime against Berta.

(Edy Tábor is a Honduran lawyer with the law firm Justicia para los Pueblos. He was co-counsel to Mexican environmentalist Gustavo Castro, who suffered an attack the night Berta Cáceres was assassinated.)

Background

A Rot in Honduras That Goes All the Way to the Top

By Hilary Goodfriend, May 27, 2020

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2020/05/berta-caceres-murder-honduras-nina-lakhani>

BOOK: Who killed Berta Cáceres? Behind the brutal murder of an environment crusader

By [Nina Lakhani](#), 2 June, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/02/who-killed-bertha-caceres-behind-the-brutal-of-an-environment-crusader>

Inside The Plot To Murder Honduran Activist Berta Cáceres

By Danielle Mackey, Chiara Eisner, December 21, 2019, The Intercept
<https://theintercept.com/2019/12/21/bertha-caceres-murder-plot-honduras/>

More information

- Karen Spring: <https://www.aquiabajo.com/> + <https://twitter.com/springki>
- Grahame Russell: grahame@rightsaction.org

Archives – COPINH & Berta Cáceres

Over 20 years of Rights Action archives related to work in support of COPINH: <https://rightsaction.org/archcopinh>

Films & videos: Berta Cáceres

The Life and Death of Berta Cáceres (2020)

In 2016, environmental activist Berta Cáceres was shot dead in her home in Honduras. This film by Trocaire features interviews with Berta's daughter, sister and mother.
<https://vimeo.com/390771524>

Berta Cáceres: In Her Own Words / En sus propias palabras

Based on a 2012 interview we did with the Honduran environmental activist and co-founder of the Council of Indigenous People's Organizations of Honduras (COPINH).
<https://skylight.is/2016/03/bertha-caceres-in-her-own-words>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjM81tYBew4>

Berta Cáceres, Goldman Environmental Prize (April 19, 2015)

In a country with growing socioeconomic inequality and human rights violations, Berta Cáceres rallied the indigenous Lenca people of Honduras and waged a grassroots campaign that successfully pressured the world's largest dam builder to pull out of the Agua Zarca Dam. She is the South & Central America winner of the 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize, the world's largest award for grassroots environmental activists.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zh9Sn9oJR94&feature=youtu.be>

Berta Cáceres acceptance speech, 2015 Goldman Prize ceremony (2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR1kwx8b0ms&feature=youtu.be%C2%A0>

Berta's Daughters Speak (2019)

Berta Cáceres was killed for defending the river on which Indigenous communities depend. Her daughters continue that struggle, despite the risks – as witnessed in this Amnesty International interview.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMdXkXR7U6k&feature=youtu.be>

Austra Berta Flores, mother of Berta Cáceres, speaks

Calling on international community to demand the full truth, so that those who paid and ordered the murder of her daughter be prosecuted.
<https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/ygf6fvlp19fg08znt7irav78jjp44lz1>

Assassination of Berta Caceres: repression, impunity, corruption & profitable businesses in Honduras (April 4, 2017)

Wide Angle interview with Grahame Russell about assassination of Berta Caceres; the U.S. and Canadian backed 2009 military coup; U.S. and Canadian business interests with the post-military coup regimes; why so many Hondurans flee to the U.S., year after year.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVMsJyMlIRw&t=83s&list=PLztbi9KA9roUoj_SKm_c ehOB_LWo9uTFW&index=25

Dos años después de su asesinato, Berta Cáceres no se murió, se multiplicó (Febrero 2018)

<https://www.franceameriquelatin.org/6370-2/>

Honduras: Blood and the Water (September 2016)

AlJazeera Faultlines 25 minute report on assassination of Indigenous, anti-imperialist, feminist, environmental activist Berta Caceres.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/faultlines/2016/09/honduras-blood-water-160920064355648.html>

Berta Vive (2016)

On March 2016, the assassination of Berta Cáceres shook the world. Gustavo Castro, Mexican environmental activist witnessed the crime and survived the horror of that night but was then trapped in Honduras. The defense against the construction of a dam at the Gualcarque River is the preface to this story. We follow Miriam Miranda, leader of the Garífuna people as well as a friend and comrade of Berta. Both women share the struggle for decolonization in a country that is being sold to transnational capital and where death is delivered in so many different ways.

<https://vimeo.com/229310580>

4 Years Seeking Justice (January 17, 2020)

Democracy Now interview with a daughter of assassinated Indigenous leader Berta Cáceres

https://www.democracynow.org/2020/1/17/bertha_caceres_laura_caceres_interview

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