

David Castillo gets 22 years in jail for role in 2016 assassination of Berta Caceres Honduran Indigenous land & rights defender, anti-imperialist & anti-capitalist activist

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/david-castillo-gets-22-years-in-jail-for-assassination-of-berta-caceres>

“This is an important advance but the masterminds of the crime are still enjoying impunity thanks to their political and economic power. As victims of this crime, we, her family, members of Copinh and the Lenca people, will continue demanding justice from the Honduran state.”

(Laura Zúñiga Cáceres, daughter of Berta)



Berta’s family members and COPINH demand justice for role of the Atala Zablah family, alleged ‘intellectual authors’ and financiers of the hit squad that David Castillo coordinated to carry out Berta’s assassination.

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Honduras man is jailed for 22 years for role in assassination of Indigenous environmentalist in 2016

By [Nina Lakhani](#), The Guardian, 20 Jun 2022

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/20/honduras-man-who-planned-bertha-caceress-jailed-for-22-years>

A US-trained former Honduran army intelligence officer who was the president of an internationally financed energy company has been sentenced to 22 years and six months for the assassination of the Indigenous environmentalist [Berta Cáceres](#).

Cáceres, winner of the Goldman prize for environmental defenders, was [shot dead by hired hitmen on 2 March 2016, two days before her 45th birthday](#), after years of threats linked to her opposition of the 22-megawatt Agua Zarca dam on the Gualcarque River.

On Monday, Roberto David Castillo – the former head of the hydroelectric dam company Desarrollos Energéticos, or Desa – was sentenced for his role in ordering and planning the murder.

The sentence was handed down [almost a year after Castillo was found guilty](#), and falls short of the 25-year maximum – a decision condemned by Cáceres’s supporters outside the high court in Tegucigalpa. Castillo will be required to carry out public works coordinated by the prison service as part of his sentence and is responsible for any future civil claims brought by the victims, the court ruled.

Cáceres, the coordinator of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of [Honduras](#) (Copinh), was best known for defending indigenous Lenca territory and natural resources, but she was also a respected political analyst, women’s rights defender and anti-capitalist campaigner.

Her youngest daughter, Laura Zúñiga Cáceres, welcomed the sentencing as another step in the fight for justice. “This is an important advance but the masterminds of the crime are still enjoying impunity thanks to their political and economic power. As victims of this crime, we, her family, members of Copinh and the Lenca people will continue demanding justice from the Honduran state.”

Castillo is the eighth person to be sentenced for killing Cáceres. The court has ruled she was murdered for leading the campaign to stop construction of the dam, which led to delays and financial losses for the dam company controlled by members a powerful clan.

Castillo used paid informants as well as his military contacts and skills to monitor Cáceres over years, information which was fed back to the company executives. He coordinated, planned and obtained the money to pay for [the assassination of the internationally acclaimed leader](#), which was carried out by seven men convicted in December 2018.

Castillo's sentence is significantly lower than the other seven convicts, who received jail terms between 30 and 50 years, due to recent changes in the criminal code.

Outside the court, supporters gathered around a spiritual offering and demanded that authorities continue investigating until those who ordered, paid for, enabled and benefited from the murder are exposed and brought to justice.

"David Castillo is just one link in the chain of command that ordered the murder of the Copinh leader," the group said. "The struggle of the Lenca people for justice will not cease."

During last year's 49-day trial, Daniel Atala Midence, Desa's financial manager, was summoned to give evidence due to his role in running operations with Castillo – which included authorising payments to informants used to monitor Cáceres.

But Atala Midence was excused at the last minute after state prosecutors revealed that he was under investigation for the murder. No further information has been released but upon sentencing Castillo, the court ordered that the case files be kept under wraps as the investigation remains open.

Daniel Atala's father and two uncles, the Atala Zablah brothers, who are part of one of the country's most powerful economic and political families, are the majority shareholders in the dam company. There is no suggestion from prosecutors that they were involved in the assassination.

The project on the Gualcarque River, considered sacred by the Lenca people, was sanctioned even though it had not complied with national and international environmental and community requirements.

Castillo also faces charges of fraud in a separate case involving the dam licence, which is scheduled to begin in July. The Desa board member, Jacobo Atala Zablah, will be required to testify.

[The US military trained him. Then he helped murder Berta Cáceres](#)

(Nina Lakhani is author of [Who Killed Berta Cáceres? Dams, Death Squads, and an Indigenous Defender's Battle for the Planet](#))

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