

Honduras: Investigate Murder of Transgender Activist

Authorities Should Act Against Increasing Violence

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(New York) - the Honduran authorities should fully investigate the murder of Cynthia Nicole, a leading Honduras transgender rights defender, and other attacks on the transgender community, Human Rights Watch said today. Nicole's killing is the latest in a series of violent attacks against transgender people in Honduras.

Unknown assailants murdered Nicole, 32, in the early hours of January 9, 2009. According to testimonies by other rights activists, three unknown men in a blue car shot Nicole in a drive-by shooting in Barrio Guaserique in Comayaguela, a town just outside the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa. The transgender rights activist received three shots in the chest and one in the head.

"Cynthia Nicole fought tirelessly to secure basic rights protections for transgender sex workers," said Juliana Cano Nieto, researcher with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights Program at Human Rights Watch. "The authorities need to find and prosecute the perpetrators of this and previous attacks against the trans community."

Nicole's murder comes as violence targeting Honduras's transgender community appears to be on the rise. In November and December 2008 there were attacks, two of which were fatal, against five other transgender people by unknown assailants. On November 20, an attacker killed Yasmin, a transgender sex worker and colleague of Nicole. The next day, on November 21, an attacker shot Bibi, another transgender sex worker, while she was working in the Obelisco, a park in the center of Comayaguela. On December 17, an attacker stabbed Noelia, a third transgender sex worker, 14 times. In addition to these attacks, on December 20, members of the police assaulted a transgender activist doing HIV/AIDS outreach work in Tegucigalpa.

In Nicole's case, police investigators state that they have found the assailant's abandoned car and bullet casings and are searching for the attackers. However, transgender activists claim that in other cases police and judiciary have not taken effective steps to find those responsible.

"Impunity compounds the violence," said Cano. "If authorities fail to investigate attacks, victims have no reason to report them - and are ready targets for reprisals."

As a leader in Colectivo Violeta - an organization working to defend the rights and health of transgender people since 1995 - Nicole had a long record of outreach work on rights with transgender sex workers in Tegucigalpa. She provided information about HIV/AIDS and human rights, and represented her community at various national conferences and before the media.

"The transgender community is terrified," said Indyra Mendoza, director of the Honduran lesbian and feminist organization Cattrachas. "But these attacks will not silence the community in Honduras, and we will continue to work to ensure that the rights of transgender people are recognized and protected."

Serious violence against transgender people in Honduras has been going on for years. Activists in the country have called this to the attention of domestic authorities, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and UN special rapporteurs, with no response from the Honduran government.

P.S.

* <http://www.hrw.org/news/2009/01/12/honduras-investigate-murder-transgender-activist>