

Statements and call to action after the assassination in Honduras of Bertha Cáceres, General Coordinator of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations

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On thursday morning 3 march at 01.00 is in her home Beatrice Caceras, the brave leader of the indigenous people murderd. She was the coordinator of the Council of Indigenous People of Honduras (COPINH). She was a key leader in a Lenca struggle against the Agua Zarca Dam, a controversial development project in the community of Rio Blanco that was put in motion without consent from local communities. In 2015 she received the Goldman Prize for this work. She stood also in the forefront of the struggle against the military coup of 2009. Despite death and rape threats and being seperated from her children she continued her fight to the last. As so many brave women and men in the most threatened parts of the world are doing.

And now she is death, murdered by the local and international corporate tyranny and their croonies.

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Statement and call to action from La Via Campesina In response to the assassination of our sister in in struggle: Bertha Cáceres

The international peasant movement La Via Campesina denounces to the national and international public that on this day, 3 March 2016 in the early hours of dawn, our dear sister in struggle, BERTHA CÁCERES, General Coordinator of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) was assassinated.

The assassination of BERTHA CÁCERES took place in her home, while she was resting, which drastically increases the risk to women and men defenders, to the indigenous peoples who resist in communities, and to members of popular and social movement organizations who have taken up our legitimate struggle.

On numerous occasions, BERTHA CÁCERES had publicly denounced ill-intentioned actions and threats both by the current government regarding concessions of natural resources, and by the foreign transnational corporations involved in the construction of dams and the capture of resources that belong to indigenous peoples.

BERTHA CÁCERES was assigned precautionary measures demanding that the State of Honduras protect her physical integrity.

That same State of Honduras took measures to persecute BERTHA CÁCERES for her struggle against foreign companies that destroy natural resources.

The whole world recognized the courage and contribution of BERTHA CÁCERES in her struggle for human rights, when she was honored with the prestigious international Goldman Prize for the defense of natural resources in the country.

We recognize the historic struggle of BERTHA CÁCERES, side by side with our peoples, to claim the right to land, her struggle for the defense of our sovereignty, for comprehensive agrarian reform, for the food security of our peoples.

It is fitting to highlight that on 9 April 2014, parliament member and General Coordinator of La Via Campesina Honduras, Rafael Alegría, introduced in National Congress a proposed law for Comprehensive Agrarian Reform with Gender Equity for Food Sovereignty and Rural Development, to seek solutions through the political channels to the problems that peasants and indigenous peoples face today in Honduras. To this day, this proposal has not been taken into account by the Board of Directors of the National Congress.

For this reason, La Via Campesina Honduras denounces the government of Honduras and the transnational companies that extract and exploit our country's natural resources.

As an international movement of peasants, we demand that the State of Honduras punish those responsible for this vile assassination, and we call to all international organizations that defend human rights to join this demand.

La Via Campesina makes a call to organize protest actions in the embassies of Honduras around the world to demand clarity in this crime, and to protect defenders of land and territory, and of human rights in Honduras.

We express our solidarity and extend our condolences to the family of Bertha Cáceres, to the Lenca people, and to the people of Honduras who suffer her irreparable loss.

TEGUCIGALPA M.D.C. 3 MARCH 2016

GLOBALIZE STRUGGLE, GLOBALIZE HOPE

BERTHA CÁCERES ¡VIVE!

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

La Via Campesina

Focus on the Global South Joins Condemnation of Berta Cáceres' Murder; Calls for Immediate Justice



"Let us wake up! Let us wake up, humankind! We're out of time. We must shake our conscience free of the rapacious capitalism, racism, and patriarchy that will only assure our own self-destruction. The Gualcarque River has called upon us, as have other gravely threatened rivers. We must answer their call. Our Mother Earth – militarized, fenced-in, poisoned, a place where basic rights are systematically violated – demands that we take action. Let us build societies that are able to coexist in a dignified way, in a way that protects life. Let us come together and remain hopeful as we defend and care for the blood of this Earth and of its spirits." –Berta Cáceres, on receiving the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2015, the world's largest award for grassroots environmentalists who protect the natural environment

BANGKOK, 04 March 2016 – Together with indigenous peoples and human rights defenders, climate and environment activists, the Honduran and international civil society community, friends, colleagues and family of Berta Cáceres, Focus on the Global South condemns in the strongest possible terms the murder of Berta. We call upon the Honduras government to immediately investigate what happened and bring to justice the perpetrators of this heinous crime against a world renowned and beloved leader and defender of indigenous peoples.

We extend our deepest condolences to Berta's, family and community. Your loss is incomparable and is also the loss of all of us in the world who stand for justice, peace and Mother Earth.

With Berta's death, a crucial voice—a woman's voice—was silenced, even as on March 8, International Women's Day, women and men all over the world shall go to the streets, join hands, make their voices heard in marking the continuing struggles against rights violations and all forms of marginalization and discrimination.

The number of human rights defenders killed continues to rise as community struggles against hydropower and other infrastructure projects, mining, agribusiness, logging, and eviction intensify. Over 116 human rights defenders were killed in 2014 alone and 40 percent of the victims were indigenous people. Killings in 17 countries were recorded in Central and South America and Southeast Asia, with Brazil as the worst-hit with 29 people killed, followed by Colombia with 25, the Philippines with 15 and Honduras with 12.[i]

The 2015 Global Witness report, *How Many More?* also noted that killings of land and environmental

activists in 2014 reached an average of more than two a week – an increase of 20% from 2013. Honduras alone suffered 111 killings between 2002 and 2014. Environment and land defenders also face repeated threats to their lives, physical violence, intimidation, criminalization, and restrictions on their freedoms.

At the time of her death, Berta was the General Coordinator of the Council of Indigenous and Popular Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), a social and political organization supporting the indigenous and popular movements in Honduras. Berta spent her life fighting for and defending indigenous peoples rights to their lands and territories. As a key leader in the Lenca struggle against the Agua Zarca Dam, a controversial development project in the community of Rio Blanco that was put in motion without consent from local communities, Berta filed complaints with the Honduran government and organized peaceful protests against the dam in the nation's capital of Tegucigalpa. The Agua Zarca dam concession was sold to the Honduran company DESA (Desarrollos Energeticos SA). Sinohydro Corporation, a Chinese giant and the world's largest hydropower construction company, was contracted to build the dam.

The Lenca people denounced the dam and were threatened with smear campaigns, imprisonment and murder, but nobody had heard their voices until they set up a roadblock to take back control of their lands. As Berta's visibility increased, she became a target for project proponents and backers. Even after the successful campaign to halt the construction of the dam, the community continued to face systematic harassment. One of Berta's colleagues, Rio Blanco community leader Tomas Garcia, was assassinated in 2013 but Berta and the Lenca community stood strong.

For leading this peaceful campaign to stop one of the world's largest dam builders which would have cut off the ethnic Lenca people from water, food and medicine, Berta Cáceres was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2015.

Berta Cáceres was killed, but her life shall transcend this tragedy, as communities, activists, and organizations in different parts of the world vow to remember her as a symbol of community resistance and an inspiration to people in Honduras and around the world. We shall all continue to uphold the values and principles she stood for, as we call upon:

Governments to immediately address and put an end to the systematic targeting of rights defenders all over the world, many of them women and indigenous peoples;

The international community to hold governments and corporations accountable for devastating entire communities and territories for profits, and for the increasing and intensifying attacks on environment and human rights defenders; and

Human rights groups, people's movements and all civil society groups to join us and the rest of the world in urgently demanding justice for Berta Cáceres and all the other cases of extrajudicial killings and criminalization of dissent.

Focus on the Global South

[i] Global Witness. (2015). How Many More? London, United Kingdom: Global Witness Limited. Retrieved from https://www.globalwitness.org/documents/17882/how_many_more_pages.pdf

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<http://focusweb.org/content/focus-global-south-joins-condemnation-berta-c-ceres-murder-calls-immediate-justice>

