

# **Remembering Berta Caceres, Honduran human rights and environmental activist: ‘Why Did She Not Get Out?’**

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**Honduran human rights and environmental activist Berta Caceres was assassinated in her home, March 3, 2016.**

**For Honduras, the question is how long this dark nightmare of violence and repression will continue.**

Today we learned of the savage murder of Berta Caceres, the outstanding Indigenous people's leader from western Honduras. The first words I heard in response to the news were from another revolutionary woman here in Nicaragua "Esa mujer....por qué no salió de allí?" Why did she not get out of there?

Well, the answer to that is clear.

Berta Caceres would never run away from a just struggle, whatever the risks. For us then, trying to digest this dreadful news, we remembered the words of another beloved revolutionary woman leader of the Honduran popular movement, Margarita Murillo, murdered in August 2014. Margarita told us, "If Juan Orlando Hernandez becomes president he will wipe out all the revolutionary leaders in Honduras."

Prophetic words.

The radical Honduran "Los Necios" news briefing reported that a representative of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, or COPINH communicated Berta's murder in the town of La Esperanza, in the Honduran department of Intibucá at 1.00am this morning. The COPINH spokesperson reported that Berta had received repeated death threats as well as constant judicial and administrative harassment ever since the 2009 military coup in Honduras. Berta was an internationally recognized leader of the regional drive for Indigenous people's rights and human rights in general, as well as a key leader in the complex and volatile Honduran popular movement.

Here in Nicaragua we got to know Berta in the months following the 2009 U.S.-backed military coup. There is no doubt at all that the Honduran authorities are the ultimate authors of Berta's murder. The government of Juan Orlando Hernandez has acted consistently to destroy any semblance of State legitimacy, placing the country's security forces and its judicial and administrative authorities firmly at the service of the country's national business interests and international corporate interests.

Berta Caceres fought against that local and international corporate tyranny to the last.

We first got to know Berta in July 2009 at the time when President Manuel Zelaya was trying to re-

enter Honduras from Nicaragua at the Las Manos frontier crossing. With her COPINH comrades Berta had trekked across the hill country of the southern Honduran department of El Paraíso to reach Las Manos, braving attempts at repression by the Honduran police and army, including snipers posted along the border area who murdered several Honduran citizens at that time. As part of the solidarity effort organized by the Nicaraguan government and local people around the Northern town of Ocotal in those days we were able to help Berta and her COPINH comrades with food and accommodation.

What was so striking about Berta was that despite all the tremendous difficulties she was always highly resourceful in finding ways around otherwise apparently intractable problems. Another thing that was so impressive about her was the great affection and respect with which she was held both by her comrades in COPINH and all the other people we met in the days and weeks following the 2009 coup. Subsequent to the events in Las Manos that year, we hosted Berta on one of her visits to Nicaragua when COPINH and other organizations were trying to coordinate solidarity work in the region to help the radical Honduran resistance sustain its positions within the complex situation developing in Honduras. We were short of food around then and could only offer Berta a 5.00am breakfast of porridge oats and black coffee, which she and her comrades graciously accepted despite our embarrassment. People like that, people who don't stand on ceremony and drive directly to what needs to be done, people like that are truly exceptional, truly revolutionary.

So today people in Honduras wake up to a tremendous loss, but Berta herself would say not an irreplaceable loss, a terribly bitter loss indeed, but above all an inspirational loss, despite everything. Margarita Murillo used to quote the Bible from James 5, 1.4.6, "Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you."

Nothing could be more true than in the case of Berta Caceres who, like Margarita Murillo, never ceased to demand justice for victims of injustice both in Honduras and elsewhere.

For Honduras, the question is how long this dark nightmare of repression, of wholesale murder of vulnerable people claiming basic rights, and the deliberately targeted campaign of selective murder of revolutionary leaders will go on. More especially, how long will this war on women leaders devoted to promoting true democracy in Central America continue. Berta Caceres and Margarita Murillo were courageous women who devoted their whole lives to advancing the cause of rural workers and their families, indigenous peoples and all people ground down by the odious, murderous Honduran oligarchy supported by the government of the United States and its European Union allies. But more especially they advocated the true democracy that can only come with the genuine emancipation of women from all forms of cultural, social, economic and political repression. North American and European governments regularly spew out declarations in favor of the rights of women, the rights of Indigenous peoples and democracy and freedom in general. What foul, cynical hypocrites they are can never be emphasized or repeated enough. Yet, the U.S. government and the European Union governments support coup regimes in Latin America and the Caribbean. They consistently attack democratically elected governments in Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela. They will certainly emit ceremonious condemnations of the murder of Berta Caceres. But what their governments do betrays what their mealy mouthed spokespersons say. In the end only the rural and urban working families of the region organized in their respective popular movements will achieve their real liberation because only they are really going to defend their true interests.

All praise and honor to Berta Caceres and Margarita Murillo, true and steadfast women liberators of Latin America and the Caribbean!

## Tortilla Con Sal

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### P.S.

\* "Remembering Berta Caceres: 'Why Did She Not Get Out?'"'. TeleSur. Published 3 March 2016:  
"<http://www.telesur.tv/english/opinion/Remembering-Berta-Caceres-Why-Did-She-Not-Get-Out-20160303-0040.html>".

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