

Honduran Coup: Before Her Murder, Berta Cáceres Singled Out Hillary Clinton for Criticism

Saturday 12 March 2016, by [GRANDIN Greg](#) (Date first published: 10 March 2016).

The presidential candidate has ignored criticism of her role in enabling the consolidation of the Honduran coup.

Before her murder on March 3, Berta Cáceres, a Honduran indigenous rights and environmental activist, named Hillary Clinton, holding her responsible for legitimating the 2009 coup. “We warned that this would be very dangerous,” she said, referring to Clinton’s effort to impose elections that would consolidate the power of murderers.

In a video interview, given in Buenos Aires in 2014, Cáceres says it was Clinton who helped legitimate and institutionalize the coup. In response to a question about the exhaustion of the opposition movement (to restore democracy), Cáceres says (around 6:10): “The same Hillary Clinton, in her book *Hard Choices*, practically said what was going to happen in Honduras. This demonstrates the bad legacy of North American influence in our country. The return of Mel Zelaya to the presidency (that is, to his constitutionally elected position) was turned into a secondary concern. There were going to be elections.” Clinton, in her position as secretary of state, pressured (as her emails show) other countries to agree to sideline the demands of Cáceres and others that Zelaya be returned to power. Instead, Clinton pushed for the election of what she calls in *Hard Choices* a “unity government.” But Cáceres says: “We warned that this would be very dangerous.... The elections took place under intense militarism, and enormous fraud.”

The Clinton-brokered election did indeed install and legitimate a militarized regime based on repression. In the interview, Cáceres says that Clinton’s coup-government, under pressure from Washington, passed terrorist and intelligence laws that criminalized political protest. Cáceres called it “counterinsurgency,” carried out on behalf of “international capital”—mostly resource extractors—that has terrorized the population, murdering political activists by the high hundreds. “Every day,” Cáceres said elsewhere, “people are killed.”

Interestingly, Hillary Clinton removed the most damning sentences regarding her role in legitimating the Honduran coup from the paperback edition of *Hard Choices*.

According to Belén Fernández, Clinton airbrushed out of her account exactly the passage Cáceres highlights for criticism: “We strategized on a plan to restore order in Honduras and ensure that free and fair elections could be held quickly and legitimately, which would render the question of Zelaya moot and give the Honduran people a chance to choose their own future” (see Fernández’s essay in Liza Featherstone’s excellent *False Choices: The Faux Feminism of Hillary Rodham Clinton*).

Aside from *Hard Choices*’ shape-shifting account of the crisis, Clinton has ignored criticism of her role in enabling the consolidation of the Honduran coup. That is, until Cáceres’s murder forced a

response. Last week, her campaign answered my *Nation* post on her broader responsibility for Cáceres's execution: "simply nonsense," a spokesperson said: "Hillary Clinton engaged in active diplomacy that resolved a constitutional crisis and paved the way for legitimate democratic elections."

We still don't have a clear idea of the events surrounding Cáceres's murder. There is one witness, Gustavo Castro, a Mexican national, activist, and journalist, who was with Cáceres when gunmen burst into her bedroom. Berta died in his arms. Castro was himself shot twice, but survived by playing dead.

The Honduran government—that "unity government" Clinton is proud of—has Castro in lockdown, refusing him contact with the outside world.

Since he is the only witness to a murder that will implicate many government allies, if not the government itself, Castro's life is clearly in danger. An international campaign to release Castro is being mounted by a number of high-profile groups, including Amnesty International and the American Jewish World Service. The organization Other Worlds worked closely with Cáceres and her Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras. Here's a link for how to take action to demand Castro's safe passage.

In the interview cited above, Cáceres was asked: "Facing this wave of assassinations, do you fear for your life?" She answered (at 14:15): "Yes, yes. Well, we are afraid. In Honduras, it isn't easy. It's a country where you see a brutal violence." The threats are constant, she said: legal intimidation, attempts on lives, rape, fear of being thrown in jail, assaults, and the smear campaigns carried out by the oligarchic media.

"But we are not going to be paralyzed," Cáceres said.

Greg Grandin

P.S.

* THE NATION. MARCH 10, 2016:

<http://www.thenation.com/article/chronicle-of-a-honduran-assassination-foretold/?nc=1>

* Greg Grandin teaches history at New York University and is the author of *Kissinger's Shadow*.