

via fax 011+504 2290 5088 <b>Excmo. Sr. Porfirio Lobo Sosa</b> President of Honduras	via fax 011+504 2221 5667 <b>Sr. Oscar Chinchilla Banegas</b> Attorney General of Honduras
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September 24, 2013

Dear Sir:

We are writing to express grave concern for the freedom, safety and well-being of **Bertha Cáceres, Tomás Gómez and Aureliano Molina**, who are being punished by the criminal justice system for their activities as human rights defenders. They have been active in the Lenca indigenous people's protest of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam project in Río Blanco, Intibucá Department, by a Honduran-Chinese collaboration, DESA-SINOHYDRO.

At a courthouse in Intibucá on September 20, surrounded by 2000 Lenca supporters and 700 police and military—some with metal shields, tear gas bombs, and batons—Judge Alicia Lizeth Naigh Reyes ordered Berta Cáceres to prison while she awaits trial. Aureliano Molina and Tomás Membreño were released on parole, required to check in every 15 days.

Bertha Cáceres is the general coordinator of the Consejo Civico de Organizaciones Populares e Indigenas de Honduras (COPINH). Tomás Gómez and Aureliano Molina are also members of COPINH, community leaders, human rights defenders and work for community radio stations La Voz Lenca and Guarajanbala. All three face criminal charges for the alleged crimes of usurpation, coercion and damages against DESA-SINOHYDRO. They are also accused of inciting others to commit these crimes.

COPINH members have been active since 1993, fighting for higher standards of living for the Lenca people and defending rights to territory, natural resources and the environment. They rightfully assert that Honduras, as signatory to ILO Convention 169, has the responsibility to consult and to obtain the free, prior and informed consent from indigenous peoples before undertaking measures affecting their lands and natural resources. Lenca residents of Río Blanco began a peaceful protest against dam construction in April. In May, Bertha Cáceres and Tomás Gómez were charged with carrying an unlicensed gun, which, Cáceres asserts, was planted by the soldiers who searched their vehicle at an army checkpoint. In July, the army opened fire against demonstrators, killing indigenous leader Tomás García and wounding his teenage son.

We call for the immediate release of political prisoner Bertha Cáceres. We strongly urge the Honduran government to cease all unfounded criminal proceedings against Ms. Cáceres, Tomás Gómez and Aureliano Molina in light of their legitimate role as human rights defenders.

Sincerely,

Brian J. Stefan Szittai  
Co-Coordinator

copies: Jorge Ramon Hernandez Alcerro, Honduran Amabassador to the US ~ via fax 202 966 9751  
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US Senators Brown & Portman ~ via email  
US Representatives Fudge, Gibbs, Johnson, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Renacci, Ryan ~ via email

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**The following people hereby urge you to take action on this matter as indicated in this letter:**