

Blanca Saraí Izaguirre Lozano
National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH)
Tegucigalpa, Honduras

March 21, 2025

Dear Commissioner Izaguirre Lozano:

We address you to express our grave concern regarding the process of **criminalization and dispossession faced by the English-speaking Afro-Honduran community in Diamond Rock**, municipality of Santos Guardiola, Islas de la Bahía Department. Those impacted include members of the McLaughlin family.

For many years, the Afro-Honduran and Garífuna residents of Diamond Rock have been victims of harassment, threats, and persecution, which has generated a climate of fear and uncertainty in the community. At the root of the controversy is ancestral land of the residents of Diamond Rock, which was legally granted to them in 1965. For the past twenty years, the powerful Cooper-McNab family has been illegally occupying land belonging to the McLaughlin family, in violation of their land and cultural rights. The McLaughlin family, with support from other residents of Diamond Rock, has repeatedly filed complaints against the Cooper-McNab family for the crime of land usurpation. This year, in an exercise of their right to self-determination, the McLaughlin family began the process of reoccupying their ancestral territory. On January 5, they decided to lift the gates, remove the wooden fence, clear the entrance and recover their property.

We join with the Honduran Black Fraternal Organization (OFRANEH) and the community of Diamond Rock to denounce unjust criminal charges presented by Public Prosecutor Yescenia Canizales. On January 28, the Public Prosecutor's Office filed a prosecutorial request (case number 015-2025) seeking arrest warrants and judicial detention orders against 13 residents of Diamond Rock, including members of the McLaughlin family. They are being accused of arson, robbery with violence, and property damage within the very ancestral land of the McLaughlin family. This misuse of the powers of the Public Prosecutor is an abuse of criminal law.

We strongly urge you to:

- recognize the McLaughlin family as defenders of the rights of the English-speaking Black community of Diamond Rock;
- review the baseless criminal charges against the McLaughlin family and other residents of Diamond Rock
- remind the national government and the Public Prosecutor's Office that the International Court of Human Rights has ruled in favor of Garífuna communities in Honduras in the past, with the aim to ensure the non-repetition of violations of their ancestral territorial rights

Sincerely,



Brian J. Stefan Szittai
Co-coordinators



Christine Stonebraker Martínez

copies: Javier Efraín Bú Soto, Ambassador of Honduras in Washington, DC ~ via email and US mail
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): Andrea Pochak (Rapporteur for Honduras) ~ via email and US mail
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): Gloria Monique de Mees (Rapporteur on the Rights of Afro-descendants) ~ via email and US mail
Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH): Isabel Albaladejo Escribano (Representative to Honduras) ~ via email
Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OACNUDH): Alice Shackelford (UN Resident Coordinator in Honduras) ~ via email
US Embassy in Tegucigalpa: Laura F. Dogu (ambassador) and Joe Duran, Human Rights Officer ~ via email
US State Department: Honduras Desk Officer (Washington, DC)
US Senators from Ohio: Husted and Moreno ~ via email
US Representatives from Ohio: Beatty, Brown, Jordan, Joyce, Kaptur, Latta, Miller, Rulli, Sykes ~ via email

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