WITH THE HONDURAN PEOPLE AND THEIR RESISTANCE

INTERNATIONALIST SOLIDARITY AND PEOPLES’ RIGHTS

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PHOTOGRAPH: LUIS MÉNDEZ
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Prologue

Two phenomena have marked Latin America and the Caribbean in the 21st Century. The first is neoliberalism/fascism – terrorism, fanaticism, extractivism, destruction of nature, extreme poverty, migration, femicide, forced disappearances, patriarchal violence, and violence against sexual diversity. The second phenomenon is the struggle for life, for the historical dignity of peoples and of Mother Earth based on self-determination and sovereignty in all realms – territory, culture, energy, food, health, and political decisions. An important component of this latter phenomenon is internationalist solidarity and love – embodied in beautiful moral and real acts in defence of the human, political, and just rights of nations. Historically, the imperialist, colonialist, and neo-colonial policies of capitalism have used ideological and media weapons against dependent and subjugated peoples who suffer the disastrous consequences of a war whose battlefield is the entire arms trade.

Against this monstrous irrationality stands the struggle for peace and respect for human rights waged by peoples through international and national solidarity.

Honduras in a country under the military occupation of the United States of America. On 28 June 2009, the upper leadership of the Honduran Armed Forces carried out a coup d'état, a manoeuvre orchestrated by the Pentagon and the national and international oligarchy against the government of President Manuel Zelaya.

There were no legal or ethical justifications for the coup; on the contrary, it marked the beginning and continuity of a corrupt military-police State that imprisoned people and violated human rights, regularly described as a “narco-State” in permanent state of emergency.

Over the 12 years that followed the coup, the country witnessed a proliferation of drug trafficking, massacres, torture, femicide, fraudulent elections, selling off the country to transnational corporations, one of the highest murder rates in the world, and an impunity rate above 90%. Despite this shameful situation, especially the violations of peoples’ rights and their human rights, the governments that followed the coup received the support of Uncle Sam’s State Department and the Pentagon’s Southern Command. The military-police impunity and the lack of formal accusation of the head of State for drug trafficking while in office were resoundingly obvious.

Margarita Murillo was a peasant leader, defender of the right to community life, she was murdered on 27 August 2014 and the crime continues in impunity.

Among the most emblematic environmental defenders was Berta Cáceres, a senior leader of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras (COPINH for its acronym in Spanish), winner of the Goldman Prize. She was murdered on 3 March 2016 for her defence of rivers and Mother Earth; the masterminds of the crime remain unpunished.

Over the past decade, members of the Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras (OFRANEH for its acronym in Spanish) have been subjected to continuous death threats by the police, military, and drug traffickers, particularly their leader, Miriam Miranda, and her leadership team. The forced displacement of communities from areas near the ports of Tela, Trujillo, and Castilla as well as from the areas of Aguán and Vallecito are evidence of the constant attacks.

1. This report was written by Lyda Forero, based on a compilation of documents produced by Friends of the Earth Latin America and the Caribbean (ATALC for its acronym in Spanish) and Friends of the Earth International (FOEI), in close coordination with Movimiento Madre Tierra / FOE Honduras. With this report, the Internationalist Solidarity System (ISS) seeks to contribute to peoples’ struggles in Honduras and to recognise the transformative participation of social movements during this new democratic period in the Mesoamerican country.
In the early morning of 18 June 2020, during the curfew decreed by the Honduran State related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the president of the Garífuna community at Triunfo de la Cruz – Albert Sneider Centeno Thomas – was disappeared along with Milton Joel Martínez Álvarez, Suamy Aparicio Mejía García, and Gerardo Misael Tróchez Calix. To date, the former government and police bodies have yet to provide answers to inquiries from national and international entities regarding their existence, which would serve to formally designate the men as forcibly disappeared.

We also received information from the Tocoa community in Colón stating that the Military Police, the Preventative Police, hired assassins, and private security guards spread terror and cruelly attacked the residents of Guadalupe Carney, Guapinol, and La Confianza, seeking to block community actions to self-organise.

These communities have become environmental and human rights defenders by defending water and struggling against mineral extraction, hydroelectric dams, and oil palm companies supported by the World Bank. As a result, they have suffered killings, torture, and other violations of their rights.

The immediate response of the Southern Command to the crisis in the military-police State was to send 300 United States marines, who arrived as a police strike was taking place during the former government. We must fight against the military occupation carried out by the United States, coordinated with an oligarchy that betrays the interests of the people. We must raise our voice and critical consciousness against the neo-colonisation linked to a Latin American right wing in decadence. We must lift up the idea of strength, to stop imperialist relations and global capitalism from dominating our consciousness of emancipation and liberation.

We publicly recognise the acts of national and international solidarity during and after the military coup in Honduras, and in response to the events that began in 2014.

Karin Nansen – in her role as Chair of Friends of the Earth International (FOEI) from 2016-2020 – and Silvia Quiroa – FOEI Vice-Chair and member of the Executive Committee of Friends of the Earth Latin America and the Caribbean (ATALC) – actively promoted solidarity with Honduras in response to the extreme situation exposed by the killings of Margarita Murillo and Berta Cáceres; the forced disappearances of Garífuna members of OFRANEH; the killing of more than 100 environmentalists; the killing of Keyla Martínez (a nursing student who died on 7 February 2021 while detained in a police jail in Intibucá, prior to the election of Xiomara Castro, and whose death remains in impunity); and the threats to Olivia Zúñiga (daughter of Berta Cáceres) for expressing solidarity in relation to the death of Keyla Martínez.

Xiomara Castro was elected the country’s first woman president on 28 November 2021, representing the Libertad y Refundación party (Freedom and Refoundation – LIBRE in Spanish). This victory has reverberated through the popular grassroots arena and among those who fight for human and environmental rights. It has spread hope about a new path towards the realisation of civil, political, economic, and social rights, and for a greater opening for dialogue in order to overcome the multi-dimensional institutional, moral, and economic crisis created by illegitimate governments dominated by oligarchy and capitalist powers, and that left the national coffers empty.

The lessons learned from this experience of internationalist solidarity have been very valuable. These efforts were made possible by FOEI and ATALC – notably Karin Nansen, Silvia Quiroa, Loreto de Amunátegui, Natalia Salvático, and Danilo Urrea – as well as representatives from the following organisations: World March of Women, Grassroots International, FIAN International, La Via Campesina, Jubilee South Americas, and the Continental Platform for Democracy and against Neoliberalism, among many others.

Highlights of the Internationalist Solidarity System (ISS) include: rapid responses regardless of the time of day – also at night, weekends, and holidays; effective organised responses to serious cases; advocacy to achieve efficient responses from international agencies, European parliamentarians, and diplomatic bodies; strengthening local groups; formal communications to government officials and human rights institutions. Importantly, the ISS provided organisational support to the Garífuna committee for the investigation and search for the disappeared of Triunfo de la Cruz (known as SUNLA) and for national and international online events convened by OFRANEH.

These activities served as indirect pressure to ensure the protection of people who have been targeted by the State’s repressive entities. We also believe that these actions helped to pressure the
United States regarding the situation in Honduras, especially since the solidarity groups included sisters and brothers in the United States, as well as in Europe and Latin America.

The role of parliamentarians and ambassadors contributed to placing greater emphasis on the cases of Margarita Murillo and Berta Cáceres. Raising visibility about the situation of Garifuna leaders was also crucial, since – as mentioned above – not only was there a case of forced disappearance, there is constant persecution and attacks, especially against Garifuna women, and the lives of Miriam Miranda and the women and men leaders of OFRANEH are at risk.

With ATALC’s encouragement, environmental and working-class organisations have deepened their collaboration, particularly between the Unitary Confederation of Honduran Workers (CUTH for its acronym in Spanish) and Movimiento Madre Tierra / FOE Honduras. This has contributed to the struggle of the working class and the ability of Xiomara Castro’s government to repeal the perverse law approved by the previous regime that violated the labour code.

Additionally, ATALC’s Annual General Meeting was held in Tegucigalpa in August 2022. ATALC is also advocating for President Xiomara Castro to support the UN’s Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights, with the aim of adopting the treaty.

We reiterate our recognition of the significant value of the international solidarity shown by our sisters and brothers from all the organisations and movements mentioned above. It has meant a substantial support for the advancement of the democratic process in Honduras.

The struggle for the unity and historical dignity of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean expressed itself against all forms of blockades imposed on Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Haiti, and at the time Ecuador – inhumane acts that violate peoples’ self-determination.

We also condemn the former government of Colombia’s inclusion of that country in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and we are against all forms of war, fascism, the use of nuclear bombs, and any use of biological weapons that endanger world peace.

Long live love and solidarity with the people of Honduras and the defence of the historical dignity of the peoples of Latin America!

Juan Almendares

1. Coup d’état and institutional violence

The coup d’état in Honduras in 2009 – the second coup that took place in the region since the beginning of the 21st Century – further entrenched the neoliberal model, bringing with it loss of rights for the general population and assigning more rights and power to transnational corporations (TNCs). The consequences for grassroots organisations in Honduras were brutal, including repression and criminalisation carried out by governments that imposed anti-democratic coup-related violence over 12 years.

ATALC identified several common trends in the region that serve as a framework for analysing the situation in Honduras, outlined here as an overall umbrella of reflections.

The majority of regulatory frameworks and laws were established in deeply anti-democratic scenarios that denied social participation and

2. Juan Almendares is part of Movimiento Madre Tierra / FOE Honduras and former Dean at the Honduran National Autonomous
the rights of peoples, in contexts of militarisation and the criminalisation and persecution of social movements. These anti-democratic processes have affected some sectors of the population more than others – peasants, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendent people, the working classes, and women were among those most excluded and persecuted. In this context:

- TNCs are leading a strong offensive to control territories. They have exercised lobbying and political pressure, pushing governments aligned with the neoliberal model to broaden the agricultural frontier and expand monoculture plantations, as well as to advance hugely destructive energy-mining mega-projects.

- Facilitated by trade and investment liberalisation treaties, neoliberalism and transnational corporate power have materialised in governmental programs to reform the State, public policies, and regulations. This has multiple impacts on territories and peoples.

- All situations analysed by ATALC have surfaced direct impacts on women, with a marked emphasis on the lack of access to land and means to sustain livelihoods. Violence against women is of particular concern, especially as it has become more severe due to militarisation and regulatory changes that undermine women’s rights.

- Dispossession, forced displacements, and the precariousness of life in rural areas have intensified due to policy and regulatory changes, as has violence and persecution. Land tenure and territorial conflicts go hand in hand with the criminalisation of defenders.³

1.1 The institutional dimension of violence in Honduras after the 2009 coup

A coup d’état took place in Honduras on 28 June 2009, with the direct participation of military personnel trained at the School of the Americas. The democratically elected president, Manuel Zelaya, was kidnapped by military forces, transported to the United States military base Soto Cano (Palmerola), and later moved to Costa Rica.

A de facto government was installed that declared an immediate state of emergency and curfew (thereby justifying violence, torture, and the death penalty), spreading State terrorism throughout the population. So began a period of systematic violence against organised peoples, committed by the State or with its approval.

The coup led to a 12-year period that saw violations of constitutional rights and the rule of a corrupt police-military State linked to drug trafficking that persecuted the population.⁴ During this dark period, it was clear that the military structure did not defend territorial sovereignty. Instead, it served transnational economic interests linked to the energy-mining extractive industry that used corruption and mining concessions to legalise and enable the sale of territories, thus facilitating mining exploitations in protected areas and near water sources, with resulting damage to essential ecosystems, river watersheds, and forest biodiversity.⁵

Meanwhile, faced with opposition from peasant and indigenous communities – Garífunas, Misquita, Lencas, Tolupanes, Tawahkas, Pech, Mayas, Chorti – and from defenders of peoples’ rights and their human rights, the State responded by intensifying criminalisation, persecution, torture, imprisonment, and cruel treatment, using State forces or offering protection and impunity to those who committed these acts of violence.

In its 2015 report - How Many More?⁷ -, Global Witness asserts that Honduras was the most dangerous place in the world to be an environmental activist, and that defenders of Indigenous Peoples’ rights were particularly at risk.

Between 2002 and 2014, 111 activists were killed in Honduras, with a sharp increase starting in 2010, after the coup. The report also noted that

3. Resisting the Growing Power of Transnational Corporations in Latin America and the Caribbean: Compilation and Summary of National Assessments. ATALC. 2021. Available at: Resisting the Growing Power of Transnational Corporations in Latin America and the Caribbean - Friends of the Earth International (foei.org)

4. Has Honduras become a ‘narco-state’? - BBC News

5. Exclusive: A Pandora’s Box of Corruption in Honduras | Pulitzer Center

6. Pandemic, poverty and corruption, the greatest challenges for Xiomara Castro in Honduras - Zyri

“[o]pposition to hydroelectric dams developed without consulting affected communities have provoked extensive threats and violence against environmental and land defenders in Honduras. Many of the projects have links to the country’s most powerful political and economic players. In the political uncertainty following the 2009 military coup, a controversial law was passed that allowed the government to sell off the country’s rivers and other water sources to the highest bidders. A year later the right-wing Nationalist party government approved 47 hydropower concessions, allegedly granting highly favourable terms through a closed tendering process and without consulting local communities.”

Thus, during the 12 years that followed the coup, the Honduran State failed to fulfil its role as guarantor of the Constitution or of basic rights. It also failed to promote transparent and democratic electoral processes. Poverty and inequality grew significantly starting in 2009, and in the following two years more than 100% of all real income gains went to the richest 10% of Hondurans.

1.2 Violence against women in an authoritarian context – 2009-2021

Latin America and the Caribbean is known for “the important struggles led by women, and yet the region continues under patriarchal control. Gender-based violence – understood as a structural problem of discipline and control over women and gender non-conforming people – intensifies in times of pandemic and economic crisis, the same moments during which women paradoxically lead the frontlines of support and care for vulnerable and affected sectors, and they lead the resistance to the neoliberal onslaught. Femicides show the worst face of this reality.”

A report published by ATALC – Ser mujer, disidencia, defensora del territorio en América Latina y el Caribe [“To Be a Woman and Gender Non-conforming Defender of Territory in Latin America and the Caribbean”] – describes femicide as the most extreme form of violence against women. Femicides continue to affect thousands of women and girls, despite growing recognition, pressure, and rejection of the phenomenon by mass movements of women.

From a structural perspective, capitalism necessarily depends on the control of women’s bodies, sexuality, and territories. Capital accumulation and securing permanent profit rates require the degradation and invisibility of women’s work. This is only possible if the reproductive work traditionally assigned to women remains unpaid, and if a system of values enables this lack of payment by ignoring the reality that it is work. The logic of capital accumulation is thus superimposed on the logic of the sustainability of life.

The situation in Honduras is no different to other countries in the region. On the contrary, it demonstrates how exacerbating conditions make the situation of violence against women even more severe. In the words of a member of Movimiento Madre Tierra / FOE Honduras, “in Central America, the pandemic not only intensified health and social problems, it also brought back a more serious problem in the democratic system. In order to address the emergency, various Central American countries opted to reintroduce the militarisation of society and suspend constitutional guarantees, relegating public health to the background. Paradoxically, in this context of capitalist economy and strong security, a less visible but much more urgent pandemic worsened throughout the months of compulsory confinement: Violence against women... in Honduras between January and May 2020 alone, more than 40,000 attacks against women were reported – one woman is physically assaulted every hour.”

According to official figures of the Honduran State, between January and July 2020 (in the midst of the pandemic), 58,688 women called 911 asking for help and lodging complaints of domestic, intra-family, and sexual violence. Honduras does not have public policies or institutions that accompany and support these victims.

8. Cited in The legacy of Berta Cáceres - Friends of the Earth International (foei.org)
10. Honduras: La violencia de género como un arma de represión. Own translation. Available in Spanish at: Honduras: La violencia de género como un arma de represión – Amigos de la Tierra de América Latina y el Caribe (atalc.org)
12. Ibid.
According to the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA/CEPAL), in 2021, the highest rates of femicide or feminicide in the region were registered in Honduras (4.6 cases per 100,000 women).\(^{13}\)

Juan Almendares of Movimiento Madre Tierra / FOE Honduras explains, “it is estimated that a femicide is committed in the country at least every 24 hours, with a 90% rate of impunity. We can say that the verticality of authoritarianism has grown in relation to the horizontality of solidarity.”\(^{14}\)

As discussed earlier, since the coup d’état in Honduras, successive national governments have exercised or enabled violence against peoples’ organisations, particularly – and more cruelly – against women. This shows that violence against women in Honduras was not only domestic; it was institutional. Reports of violence and extrajudicial killings of women by military and police forces were common and, here too, impunity reigns. Claims of suicide were frequently used as a means of cover-up, sustaining networks of loyalties between femicidal forces operating within law and order.

In many instances, these situations of violence against women were connected to their criminalisation because of their actions in defence of territories against transnational corporate projects that destroy nature or expel people from the socially constructed spaces that they have traditionally inhabited and cared for.

The dispossession and contamination of territories carried out by TNCs occur simultaneously with the intensification of patriarchal violence and the exacerbation of gender inequalities through the following mechanisms:

- Dismantling local economies
- Privatisation of the commons
- Overload of care work
- Loss of economic autonomy
- Loss of food sovereignty
- Sexual and intra-family violence
- Infringement of the right to health
- Obstacles to public participation
- Creation of prostitution and human trafficking networks
- Infringement of the right to land
- Loss of cultural identity
- Attacks and criminalisation

1.2.1 Attacks against women leaders, women on the frontlines of care opposed to transnational extractive projects / Femicides in La Esperanza: Berta Cáceres, Keyla Martínez.

Among the numerous victims of patriarchal violence in Honduras, Berta Cáceres is recognised internationally as a symbol of defence of territories against TNCs and their actions against communities and peoples. Berta struggled to defend indigenous territories against the construction of the Agua Zarca hydroelectric project in the West of the country.

In the same region where Berta was murdered in 2016, another femicide took place in 2021 – the killing of Keyla Martínez Rodríguez during the period of confinement due to the pandemic. These two examples confirm the systematic dimension of violence against women, particularly when they oppose transnational projects in their territories. This type of violence has been sheltered by institutionalised impunity. As defenders of water and health, Berta and Keyla represent the centrality of life; they were victims of a project of death that eliminated them.

Berta Cáceres was killed for struggling against the Agua Zarca hydroelectric dam that threatened a river considered sacred by her community. Over the years, the community struggle faced military repression and intimidation, as well as the killings of five activists. The company responsible for building the dam was proven to be directly involved in these murders, as confirmed by the 2018 court decision.

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13. Femicide or feminicide | Gender Equality Observatory (cepal.org)
14. Honduras: La violencia de género como un arma de represión. Own translation. Available in Spanish at Honduras: La violencia de género como un arma de represión – Amigos de la Tierra de América Latina y el Caribe (atalc.org)
condemning David Castillo, president of Desarrollos Energéticos S.A. (DESA), the construction company building the dam.

On 2 March 2016, armed hitmen forcefully entered Berta’s home, shot three times, and fled. At the time of her assassination, the Lenca indigenous leader – recognised internationally as a defender of environmental and human rights in Honduras – was leading the struggle against the Agua Zarca project, which sought to build a hydroelectric dam on the Gualcarque River using international funds. The river is sacred to the Lenca Peoples, and the construction of the dam threatened to dry it up and put the community’s livelihoods at risk. The COPINH leader had received a jail sentence for opposing the project, and she had been threatened, surveilled, and persecuted numerous times.15

Keyla Martínez Rodríguez was murdered in a police station in La Esperanza, Intibucá, after an unlawful arrest when she was on her way to the frontline of care, charged with violating curfew and disorderly conduct in public – two offences that cost the young nursing student her life in a country that has no death penalty.

According to Juan Almendares, “it is a patriarchal policy against women who have a deeply social individuality – such as Keyla Martínez, who had completed technical studies in auxiliary nursing and was about to graduate as a professional nurse. She was highly regarded in the student community and in her hospital work.”16

There were 6 months of total impunity, with negligence from the court system, manipulation of evidence, and harassment of the victim’s family by the police. Demonstrations were held in several cities around the country to demand a proper investigation of the crime, to which police responded with repression. After several months of delays, the Ministry of Interior arrested Jarol Perdomo Sarmiento, one of the police officers implicated in the killing.

Femicides in Honduras are a direct attack on people on the frontlines, not only in the struggle against the pandemic and environmental destruction, but also in the momentous struggle for a system change that includes a just and feminist transition, grassroots political organisation, and in collective, horizontal, and democratic political processes.17

1.3 Systematic acts against defenders of territory and in support of TNCs promoting energy-mining extraction.

From the 2009 coup until 2021, successive Honduran governments granted concessions for approximately 200 hydroelectric and mining projects. Many of the decisions to grant concessions were made without consulting indigenous, peasant, and afro-descendent communities, in clear violation of International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169 on Free and Prior Informed Consent. Agua Zarca is one such project, which also presented itself as a false solution for “clean energy”.18

In alliance with national capital and supported by neoliberal governments, TNCs are driving the majority of the projects. The TNCs are backed by national laws and multiple international instruments (such as profit-sharing agreements, free trade agreements, and bilateral treaties), thus ensuring continuous impunity for violations of peoples’ rights and territorial and environmental rights. This is why this institutional structure is characterised as the architecture of impunity. Authoritarian governments regularly acted as facilitators of corporate interests, even mobilising the police and the military to silence opposition to the projects.

The sources of violence are both in the TNC’s actions on territories and in the militarisation that was installed for decades in the Mesoamerican country. Military power spread through all State and public structures and spaces, serving as a guarantor of the processes that destroy peoples and territories. The defenders of territory confronted the destruction and found themselves directly threatened.

15. Death by impunity: Berta Cáceres and Agua Zarca - Friends of the Earth International (foei.org)
16. Honduras: La violencia de género como un arma de represión. Own translation. Available in Spanish at Honduras: La violencia de género como un arma de represión – Amigos de la Tierra de América Latina y el Caribe (atalc.org)
17. Ibid.
Global Witness states that worldwide, each week at least two people are killed for taking a stand against environmental destruction. In 2017, the organisation documented 201 killings of activists all over the world for speaking out against the ecological debacle and land grabbing perpetrated by governments and corporations, and for exposing corrupt and unjust practices related to the acts. The real number of killings is likely much higher. The majority of activists were killed in conflicts created by hydroelectric, mining, and agribusiness projects, and many were indigenous people.

According to Global Witness, Latin America saw the majority of defenders of territory and environment killed in 2017. In the region, “nowhere are you more likely to be killed for standing up to companies that grab land and trash the environment than in Honduras.”

2. TNCs and exploitation of territories. A few emblematic cases.

2.1 Tourism.

In Punta Izopo National Park municipality of Tela on the Northern coast of Honduras, local residents have denounced the INDURA hotel complex and tourism project for seizing land and expelling local residents. Moreover, there have been reports of illegal land possession by real estate development companies MACERICA and IDETRISA, which are developing the Marbella and Playa Escondida projects.

These are territories traditionally inhabited by the Garífuna Indigenous Peoples, who derive their livelihoods from fishing and agricultural activities. The Garífuna have managed their territories for centuries – lands that now attract investors in tourism who disregard the balance with nature and the peoples who live there. None of these corporate-driven projects held consultations with the Garífuna Peoples, which is an obligation under the Right to Free and Prior Informed Consent established by the above-mentioned ILO Convention 169, which Honduras ratified in 1995.

As FOEI and others have documented, the Garífuna indigenous community has suffered systematic attacks during the authoritarian governments that followed the coup, and that lost power in 2021. These attacks were committed by banana and oil palm corporations, among others, and by corporations driving residential and tourism enterprises. OFRANEH’s democratic and legitimate exercise of territorial defence, and their permanent denunciation of violations of peoples’ rights and their human rights, made the organisation’s members targets of numerous attacks. People who oppose the neoliberal model of privatisation and commodification of territories and the natural resources that enable community subsistence were repeatedly threatened, persecuted, murdered, and kidnapped.

The attacks increased significantly after the 2015 decision by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordering the return of land and payment of reparations to the community of Triunfo de la Cruz. The complaint before the Inter-American Court was filed in 2003 and admitted on 14 March 2006. On 8 October 2015, the Inter-American Court issued a ruling against the State of Honduras for violations of the territorial and collective rights of the Triunfo de la Cruz community. The ruling establishes the State’s responsibility and obligation to guarantee the rights of the community, grant collective property title, repair the damages caused, and ensure adequate mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of such acts.

Far from being enforced, OFRANEH denounces that the Court’s sentence was systematically ignored by the coup governments; instead, the Garífuna community of Triunfo de la Cruz has suffered killings, harassment, and the 2020 kidnapping of four leaders who remain disappeared to this day.

After people claiming to be from the State security forces detained the four leaders, OFRANEH demanded that the Honduran government of right-wing President Juan Orlando Hernández investigate the disappearance of their community members in
In full view of an outraged international community, transnational corporate power, in alliance with local right-wing coup forces, once again attacked local communities in an effort to forcefully impose a project, in this case a tourism project, dispossessing them of their traditional territories.

2.1 Hydroelectric projects.

The energy sector in Honduras, particularly the electricity sub-sector, has undergone great transformations in the last three decades. Regulations created in 1994 allowed any company—public or private—to be involved in the generation, distribution, and sale of energy. This enabled the entry of foreign investment into the sector and consolidated the transformation, with a growth of around 60% in installed capacity between 2010 and 2020. This growth did not necessarily result in increased access to energy for Honduran people, nor in improved conditions for local communities. On the contrary, energy-related social and environmental conflicts multiplied in this period.

According to Juan Pablo Soler, “there were 113 companies identified in the Honduras electricity sector that respond to the interests of no more than a dozen families and corporate groups... These findings reveal the oligopoly that has consolidated in the Honduras electricity sector, for which the 2009 coup d’état was certainly instrumental. Chronologically speaking, we see that following the coup came the restructuring of the sector with the issuance of Decree 404 in 2013. This led to the incorporation of numerous companies; although they give the impression that there is free market competition, in reality there are just a few families and actors that control the entire chain in the electricity sector. In other words, the same family or economic group controls the transmission, generation, distribution, and sale of energy.”

Communities that fight against hydroelectric mega-projects in Honduras have made multiple complaints. Over the past three years, the Lenca Indigenous Council of Reitoca (CILRF for its acronym in Spanish) has been struggling against the construction of Petaćón hydroelectric plant in the Francisco Morazán department.

The Petaćón project is driven by the company Promotora de Generación de Energía Limpia S.A. (PROGELSA) with funding from Italian Sorgente Holding Company, which is in turn financed by the Norwegian Investment Fund for developing countries (Norfund).
According to the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, PROGELSA has been denounced internationally 13 times for human rights violations.25

The community was not consulted about the dam; they are opposed to the project as it threatens the river, which is the only source of water in a dry corridor. Local residents have controlled the territory in the upper part of the village since 2018, setting up a camp to prevent the construction of the hydroelectric dam. Police and military agents have repressed the communities several times in response to their resistance.26

In the early hours of Thursday 5 August 2021, police violently entered the indigenous community of Reitoca, spraying tear gas, beating and threatening the residents. Despite the confinement measures in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the police entered the community and detained five community leaders under false accusations27 – a clear act of criminalisation and repression against defenders of territory. The activists were eventually freed, but they were charged with trespassing and causing damages to the company during an action carried out in 2018, thus being criminalised for their struggles. On 20 June 2022, the trial was postponed for lack of merits.28

ATALC has accompanied the struggles of the Lenca communities and has condemned these acts of violence against local residents who exercise their “legitimate right to defend their territory without hesitation and who prevent the privatisation of water, thereby contributing to the protection of forests, air, and water, sacred elements for Indigenous Peoples and for humanity as a whole.”29

2.2 Economic Development and Employment Zones.

The Economic Development and Employment Zones (ZEDES for its acronym in Spanish) – also known as “model cities” – were designed as concessions of territories to enable industrial and financial exploitation. The owners of the concessions achieved almost absolute control of the territory, establishing laws, authorities, and administrative structures.

“The State disappeared from the ZEDEs, maintaining a minimal presence to manage elections and have access for the armed forces, to such degree that the Constitution is only applicable in relation to these arenas. Real control is held by the Committee for the Adoption of Best Practices (CAMP for its acronym in Spanish), set up by former President of Honduras Porfirio Lobo Sosa in Executive Agreement 003-2014 and taken up by Congress through Legislative Decree DL-368-2013. The Committee was made up of 22 people, only three of whom were Honduran.”30

ZEDEs could be established in 35% of Honduran territory, in areas with low population density, generally inhabited by indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. In June 2021, the United Nations called on the Honduran State to review the compatibility of the ZEDEs with its obligations to respect and guarantee the exercise of human rights. In its statement, the international body acknowledged the need to respect the right to Free and Prior Informed Consent, which the ZEDE regulations were infringing.31

25. Promotora de Generación de Energía limpia S.A (PROGELSA) - Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (business-humanrights.org)
26. Reprimen a pobladores de Reitoca que resisten la instalación de hidroeléctrica - Amigos de la Tierra Internacional (foei.org)
27. Special Report: How a bloody land feud in Honduras is stoking migrant flight to U.S | Reuters
28. Honduras: Empresa PROGELSA y el Ministerio público postergan juicio de defensores lencas hasta enero 2023 - Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (business-humanrights.org)
29. Reprimen a pobladores de Reitoca que resisten la instalación de hidroeléctrica - Amigos de la Tierra Internacional (foei.org) Own translation
30. Extractivismo y resistencia comunitaria en Honduras | Transnational Institute (tni.org) Own Translation
31. Las ZEDE podrían suponer serios riesgos para la garantía de los derechos humanos por parte del Estado de Honduras | Naciones Unidas en Honduras
The model cities’ disregard for rights and the State’s international role has led to socio-environmental conflicts. One example is the arrest of community leader Malvin Norales, defender of the ancestral territories of the Garífuna community of Puerto Castilla and member of OFRANEH’s coordination body. Norales was accused of usurpation in an attempt at “neutralising the possible reactions against the building of the ZEDE”, stated OFRANEH in an interview with Radio Mundo Real.\(^{32}\)

Responding to all the legal inconsistencies and rights violations associated with the scheme, the new Honduran parliament repealed the ZEDE regulations in April 2022.\(^{33}\)

3. Elections and violence

Presidential elections in Honduras took place on 28 November 2021. The electoral process was marked by violence against opponents of the outgoing government,\(^{34}\) and by accusations of corruption and drug trafficking – even against the president, who was later extradited to the US on those charges.\(^{35}\)

3.1 Escalation of institutional violence facing the risk of losing control of the State to a popular government.

Peoples’ organised resistance in Honduras since the coup d’état have suffered the biggest consequences of the authoritarian regime installed in 2009. Despite the coup, repression, and criminalisation, social organisations remained steadfast in their defence of social, environmental, economic, and gender justice. These organisations succeeded in building a united front to prevent the electoral fraud that they denounced four years earlier\(^{36}\) from repeating in 2021.

This was the reason for the escalation of institutional violence a year prior to the election, with the killing of 31 people in addition to attempted killings and threats to the opposition.\(^{37}\) One such condemnable incident was the murder of Félix Vásquez, a Lenca indigenous leader who was Secretary General of the Union of Rural Workers (UTC for its acronym in Spanish) in the department of La Paz and a pre-candidate for Congress for the LIBRE party in the November 2021 national elections.

As reported by Radio Mundo Real, the Lenca Indigenous and Peasant Environmental Coordination in the department of La Paz, the Coalition against Impunity (CCI for its acronym in Spanish), and the Justice for the Peoples Law Firm (BJP for its acronym in Spanish) denounced, “The State is responsible for the murder of Félix Vásquez and for the criminalisation of land defenders Víctor Vásquez and José Santos Vigil.”\(^{38}\)

Vásquez and Santos Vigil were unjustly accused by the alleged landowners of three crimes. The statement by the organisations was read at the Honduran Ministry of Interior, and it made clear that these were not isolated cases. “The indigenous and peasant organisations of La Paz that struggle for access to land and defence of territory are constant targets of military, police, and paramilitary forces located in the area. These forces are charged with defending the interests of extractivist groups and landowners who have historically dispossessed the communities of their main means of subsistence: land, water, and forests.”\(^{39}\)

In the months leading up to the election in which Xiomara Castro’s government was victorious, the Honduran Ministry of Interior escalated the political persecution and criminalisation of defenders of territories and peoples, prosecuting several leaders and charging them with the crime of “forced displacement”, as denounced by Radio Mundo Real.

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32. Honduras on full alert - Friends of the Earth International (foei.org)
33. Honduran economic zones in 'limbo' after government repeal | AP News
34. UN Human Rights Office Warns Of Political Violence in Honduras | News | teleSUR English
35. Juan Orlando Hernández: Honduras’ Supreme Court approves extradition of former president to the US | CNN
36. Severe repression against Honduran people resisting against Dictatorship and electoral fraud - Friends of the Earth International (foei.org)
37. Indigenous environmental defender killed in latest Honduras attack | Environment | The Guardian
38. Cited by Radio Mundo Real from a statement published by the Lenca Indigenous and Peasant Environmental Coordination in the La Paz Department, the Coalition against Impunity (CCI for its acronym in Spanish) and the Justice for the Peoples Law Firm (BJP for its acronym in Spanish). Own Translation. Available at: HONDURAS: Organizaciones indígenas y campesinas exigen justicia y alto a la persecución política de sus líderes - Amigos de la Tierra Internacional (foei.org)
39. Ibid. Own Translation.
According to the statement issued on 27 December by the social and peasant organisations, “this crime was introduced to confront the criminal phenomenon of violence committed by organised crime, and by companies and landowners who use violence against people in neighbourhoods and communities in order to displace them and appropriate their property. However, as we denounced in relation to the New Penal Code, the Judiciary has found in this concept an opening to criminalise those who struggle to defend the land from such violence.”

In response to the severity of the situation, ATALC expressed internationalist solidarity with a call to the then right-wing government in Honduras. The statement pointed out that “these atrocities are taking place in a context of profound territorial exploitation, where defenders of territories are prosecuted and transnational companies violate the rights of peoples and undermine territorial and environmental rights, backed by a government that uses the State’s armed forces to silence opposition and processes of resistance and defence against dispossession... We call on the government of Honduras to stop the violence against the Honduran people and we condemn the repression unleashed by the police and the armed forces against defenders of the rights of peoples and their territories. We add our voices to the internationalist solidarity with women, peasants, Indigenous and Garífuna Peoples, with the peasants of Guapinol, the Tocoa Committee for the Commons and the Agrarian Platform, and we remain alert to the upcoming events in November, inviting more organisations to speak out against this anti-democratic electoral process.”

3.1 Attack against Olivia Cáceres.

As discussed earlier, institutional violence in Honduras has a patriarchal dimension and directly attacks women. Similarly, the violence prior to the 2021 elections targeted women in resistance, for example in the attack against Olivia Zúniga Cáceres, congresswoman for the LIBRE party and daughter of indigenous leader Berta Cáceres. Olivia publicly denounced the death of Keyla Martínez and led a protest that prompted the police to open an investigation into the student’s killing. Despite having precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Olivia was assaulted in her home and the assailants attempted to suffocate her.

Confronted with demands about the attack, the State institutions once again used patriarchal arguments, affirming that it was an internal family problem, ignoring the political motivations behind the assault and the systematic nature of violence against women activists and defenders of territory.

4. We salute the Honduran people and their transformation process

ATALC commends the courageous struggle of the Honduran people for reconquering democracy 12 years after a coup d'état that destroyed the lives of men and women who reclaimed their rights and territories with the conviction of defending peoples’ and human dignity. This compilation of a few of the conflicts that the people of Honduras have faced also serves as an ethical and historical record of the violations of peoples’ rights and their human rights caused by the criminal actions of transnational corporations and right-wing governments subservient to imperialist interests. They have combined all forms of oppression and colonialism, exploitation of the working class and of women’s bodies, patriarchy and racism.

We recognise that Xiomara Castro’s rise to the presidency is an achievement of the Honduran people, their organisations and social movements.
We admire the proposals for social and political transformation that seek to vindicate the rights of the working class with the repeal of the hourly employment law, as well as the pursuit of social and environmental justice with the declaration, for example, of energy as a fundamental right. These are some of the actions that the new government is undertaking to confront the power of the ruling classes and transnational corporations that seek at all costs – with violence and impunity as allies – to maintain their privileges obtained from the exploitation of the working class and natural resources.

We recognise that transformation in Honduras will contribute significantly to changing the correlation of forces in the region, and that pathways for change are now also opening up with the victory of progressive governments in Chile and Colombia; we will also work to ensure that the fascism of Jair Bolsonaro is defeated in October in Brazil. We are confident that the electoral victories achieved will enable social and popular participation in decision-making regarding matters that shape our peoples’ lives, and that social movements will have an active participation and determination in the future of our countries and the region.

5. Internationalist solidarity for peoples’ rights

As a result of the work of Honduran and Latin American organisations and movements for more than a decade and in extremely complex and often painful situations, we have been able to learn the value of internationalist solidarity and of accompanying the struggles in Honduras and in other countries in the region. From our capacities, we have maintained a permanent monitoring of territorial conflicts and violations of peoples’ rights, always aiming to contribute to dissemination, denunciation, and support in order to prevent impunity and systematic violence from continuing to reign.

In recent years, we have sought to contribute to putting pressure on authoritarian neoliberal governments that are accomplices of barbarism, letting them know that we are vigilant of their actions and omissions that put the life and dignity of peoples at risk. We have undertaken this task through the Internationalist Solidarity System, in spaces for joint coordination – such as the International Committee of Solidarity with Honduras44 and the Continental Platform for Democracy and against Neoliberalism45, - and with various allied organisations from different parts of the region and around the world. At this time of progress against the neoliberal offensive, we know that we cannot lower our guard. This is exactly when we need to contribute all our internationalist solidarity towards the construction of peoples’ emancipatory projects, initiatives, and paradigms; to share our experience, knowledge, and wisdoms for the construction of environmental, social, economic, and gender justice; and to defend democracy and regional integration based peoples’ sovereignty.

We renew our call for internationalist solidarity with the Honduran people, this time to accompany them on the path for transformation, and to follow their example of tenacity and struggle.

44. The Committee was convened to demand the return of the Garífuna leaders kidnapped in Triunfo de la Cruz. It was made up of World March of Women, Grassroots International, FIAN International, La Via Campesina, and Jubilee South Americas.
45. The organisations that make up the Continental Platform for Democracy and against Neoliberalism are: ATALC, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA); the World March of Women (WMW); the Latin American Coordination of Peasant Organisations (CLOC - La Vía Campesina for its acronym in Spanish), Capítulo Cubano de Organizaciones Socia-les, Jubilee South Americas, ALBA Movimientos, the Movement of Peoples Affected by Dams in Latin America (MAR for its acronym in Spanish), and Grassroots Global Justice (GGJ).
Latin America and the Caribbean
Internationalist Solidarity System
Friends of the Earth International
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