

Honourable Stéphane Dion, P.C., M.P., Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C., M.P., Minister of International Development  
Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., Minister of International Trade  
Mr. Michael Gort, Ambassador of Canada to Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua

CC: Her Excellency Sofía Lastenia Cerrato Rodríguez, Ambassador of Honduras to Canada

CC: His Excellency Agustín García-López Loaeza, Ambassador of Mexico to Canada

March 18, 2016

Dear Ministers Dion, Bibeau and Freeland and Ambassador Gort:

The undersigned organizations write to express their horror to learn that Nelson Garcia, another leader of Berta Cáceres' organization, the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) was murdered on March 14.

In the wake of Berta's murder, which generated shock and dismay around the world, it is deeply distressing that the people behind these murders feel so unencumbered and so empowered as to continue killing COPINH leadership and terrorizing members of Berta's organization.

Over one hundred and twenty national and regional organizations and institutions from Canada<sup>i</sup> have called on the Canadian government to condemn the murder of Berta Cáceres and to urge the Honduran government to support an independent, international investigation of the killing. Goldman prize-winner Marilyn Baptiste from the Xení Gwet'in First Nations in British Columbia also sent a message<sup>ii</sup> calling for a full and independent investigation, noting that the Lenca people have not given their free, prior and informed consent for the dam projects, including the Agua Zarca dam project, on the Gualcarque River with which they share a spiritual bond. We note with concern that one of the companies that promotes having a project along this river is the Canadian firm Hydrosys.<sup>iii</sup>

In response to the assassinations of Berta Cáceres and Nelson García, the Netherlands Development Finance Company (FMO)<sup>iv</sup> and the Finnish Fund for Industrial Cooperation Ltd.<sup>v</sup> have suspended funding assistance in Honduras, including to the Agua Zarca project.

Late Tuesday, the Honduras Solidarity Network reported that COPINH leader Nelson Garcia was murdered by two unknown individuals in the community of Río Chiquito, department of Cortés. Nelson was on his way to his mother-in-law's house to eat after helping a group of families who were evicted from the area known as Río Lindo in the community of Río Chiquito by police, military police, soldiers and a special investigative unit (DGIC). Though these families built houses on this land two years ago, their homes and crops were destroyed using tractors and heavy machinery during the eviction. Immediately following Nelson's murder, police

reportedly called it a common crime, similar to how Honduran authorities tried to dismiss Berta's murder as a crime of passion or a failed robbery immediately following her assassination.

It is shocking that Nelson was murdered less than two weeks after Berta was killed, despite condemnation of her murder by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR),<sup>vi</sup> which has also issued precautionary measures to ensure the physical integrity and well-being of the members of COPINH and Berta's family.

The IACHR has also issued precautionary measures for Gustavo Castro, the principal witness to Berta's murder who continues to be prevented from returning home to Mexico, despite the Mexican Embassy having formally requested that his migratory alert be lifted on March 10th. Mexico and Honduras have a treaty for mutual cooperation in criminal investigations that would allow Gustavo to continue participating in the ongoing investigation into Berta's murder from Mexico. There is no reason for him to remain in Honduras away from his family and his important work as a human rights defender.

We recognize that the Canadian Embassy to Honduras issued a statement on March 3<sup>rd</sup> condemning Berta's murder, calling for a full and expedited investigation and the protection of human rights defenders.<sup>vii</sup> However, it is imperative that the Canadian government continue pressing publicly, and using every other means available, for Honduran authorities to:

- Guarantee the security of all of the members of COPINH, Berta's family and Gustavo Castro through full implementation of the IACHR precautionary measures;
- Incorporate a group of independent international investigators who have the trust of Berta's family and COPINH into the ongoing investigation into Berta's assassination through an agreement with the IACHR. This should also be expanded to include the threats, criminalization and murder of other members of COPINH including Nelson Garcia;
- Lift the measure that currently impedes Gustavo Castro's safe and immediate return to Mexico;
- Immediately and definitively revoke the Energy Development Company's (DESA) concession for the Agua Zarca project, granted without the Lenca peoples' free, prior and informed consent; suspend, review and annul all other hydroelectric and mining concessions on Lenca territory granted without the Lenca people's free, prior and informed consent; demilitarize Lenca territory; and respect the Lenca people's autonomy.

Furthermore, given the Canadian government's legal obligations to respect and promote human rights around the world, we urge you to reverse the egregious policy that the government has taken toward Honduras to date.<sup>viii</sup> Following the military-backed coup in June 2009, the Canadian government helped undermine efforts for the return of a democratically-elected government in Honduras and was quick to support and do business with repressive post-coup administrations. As

Honduras became the most dangerous country for communities defending their land and water, Canada pushed for a new mining law<sup>ixx</sup> and passed a free trade agreement with Honduras that favours Canadian investments, despite the serious implications for human rights and the environment.<sup>xi</sup>

Since the coup, over 100 environment defenders have been murdered with Berta's assassination becoming the most widely known.<sup>xii</sup> Many journalists and others engaged in important social struggles have also been killed.

In light of this, we call on the Canadian government to:

- Cut off Canadian public funding to the Honduran government and security forces through the Anti-Crime Capacity Building Program (ACCBP) and the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START);
- Given the lack of free, prior and informed consent of the Lenca Indigenous people, suspend all Canadian government and public support – including funding, investment insurance, government and embassy services of any kind – that HydroSys and any other related investors in projects along the Gualcarque River might be receiving;
- Ensure that no Canadian overseas development aid, other financing or services are used to support infrastructure or mega-projects that do not have the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples whose lands and rights will be affected, in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO Convention 169 as minimum standards. While violence is used to silence Indigenous people who exercise their right to oppose projects that will affect their lands and rights, conditions do not exist to guarantee free, prior and informed consent.
- Investigate the Canadian government's role in Honduras during and since the 2009 military-backed coup by expanding the parliamentary committee study on Honduras, ensuring broad public participation.

We urge the Canadian government to act on its commitment to advance human rights, justice and security while protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**SIGNED:**

Above Ground

Alliance internationale des femmes/International Women's Alliance (IWA)

Alternatives

Americas Policy Group (Canadian Council for International Co-operation)

Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI)

Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network (ARSN)

BC CASA/Cafe Justicia

BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)  
BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF)  
Canadian Union of Postal Workers/Syndicat des travailleurs et travailleuses des postes (CUPW-STTP)  
Centre international de solidarité ouvrière (CISO)  
Centre de recherche en éducation et formation relatives à l'environnement et à l'écocitoyenneté, de l'UQAM  
Cercle des Premières Nations de l'UQAM  
Clayoquot Action  
CoDevelopment Canada  
Comité de Apoyo al Pueblo Mapuche de Montréal  
Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine (CDHAL)  
Comité 8 mars des Femmes de diverses origines/ March 8 Committee Women of Diverse Origins  
Common Frontiers  
Confédération des syndicats nationaux - CSN  
Coordination du Québec de la Marche mondiale des femmes  
Council of Canadians  
Développement et Paix/Development and Peace  
Education In Action, Ottawa  
L'Entraide missionnaire  
Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ)  
Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)  
Friends of the Earth Canada  
Groupe de recherche sur les espaces publics et les innovations politiques de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (GREPIP-UQÀM)  
Horizons of Friendship  
Inter Pares  
Lawyer Rights Watch Canada (LRWC)  
Ligue internationale de lutte des peuples/International League of People's Struggle (ILPS) in Canada

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives  
KAIROS Halifax  
Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN)  
Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network  
Mer et Monde  
Mining Injustice Solidarity Network, Toronto  
Mining Justice Action Committee, Victoria  
Mining Justice Alliance, Vancouver  
MiningWatch Canada  
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)  
People's Health Movement Canada/Mouvement populaire pour la santé au Canada  
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)  
Québec Solidaire  
Réseau québécois des groupes écologistes (RQGE)  
Réseau québécois sur l'intégration continentale (RQIC)  
Projet Accompagnement Solidarité Colombie (PASC)  
Rights Action  
Sierra Club BC  
Solidarité Laurentides Amériques centrale (SLAM)  
Stop The Institute, Vancouver  
Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UNBCIC)  
Union Paysanne  
The United Church of Canada  
United for Mining Justice  
United Steelworkers  
University of British Columbia (UBC) Social Justice Centre  
Victoria Central America Support Committee

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<sup>i</sup> <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/comfront/2016/03/assassination-berta-c%C3%A1ceres-sparks-outrage>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.nationalobserver.com/2016/03/15/news/canadian-winner-goldman-prize-demands-investigation-murder-berta-c%C3%A1ceres>

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- iii <https://www.google.ca/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=Hydrosys+Honduras>
- iv <https://www.fmo.nl/k/n1771/news/view/28133/20819/fmo-suspends-all-activities-in-honduras-effective-immediately.html>
- v [http://www.development-today.com/magazine/Frontpage/finnfund\\_suspends\\_disbursements\\_to\\_honduran\\_dam\\_project](http://www.development-today.com/magazine/Frontpage/finnfund_suspends_disbursements_to_honduran_dam_project)
- vi [http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media\\_center/PReleases/2016/024.asp](http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2016/024.asp)
- vii [http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/costa\\_rica/highlights-faits/2016/2016-03-03a.aspx?lang=eng](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/costa_rica/highlights-faits/2016/2016-03-03a.aspx?lang=eng)
- viii <http://www.coha.org/canadas-controversial-engagement-in-honduras/>
- ix [http://miningwatch.ca/sites/default/files/Canada\\_and\\_Honduras\\_mining\\_law-June%202012.pdf](http://miningwatch.ca/sites/default/files/Canada_and_Honduras_mining_law-June%202012.pdf)
- x [https://www.devp.org/files/IMCE/files/blogue/honduras\\_ndp\\_letter.pdf](https://www.devp.org/files/IMCE/files/blogue/honduras_ndp_letter.pdf)
- xi [http://www.ccic.ca/files/en/working\\_groups/Canada\\_Honduras\\_FTA\\_HR\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.ccic.ca/files/en/working_groups/Canada_Honduras_FTA_HR_Report_2014.pdf)
- xii <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/how-many-more/>