

March 7th, 2016

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry
Washington DC

Dear Secretary of State:

We, the undersigned Latin American experts, are writing to protest the political assassination of Berta Cáceres on March 3, 2015. Cáceres led the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations (COPINH) and she won the prestigious Goldman Prize Award in 2015 for her work in the protection of the rights and environment of Indigenous people. Cáceres was an effective and well-loved environmental justice leader, Indigenous rights organizer and racial justice pioneer in Honduras. Due to her work against corporate interests, she received numerous death threats for years. Though she was under precautionary protective measures she was not under police protection at the time of her murder. The murder of Berta Cáceres, therefore, represents an assassination of great magnitude in a beleaguered country. Her loss to the Indigenous movement in Honduras is akin to the loss of Martin Luther King Jr. to the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

We are deeply concerned that the US government condones and supports the current Honduran government by sending financial and technical support to strengthen the Honduran military and police, institutions that have been responsible for human rights violations since the coup d'état of 2009. By all accounts, the 2009 coup collapsed the judicial system and the rule of law. The country has one of the highest rates of homicides, feminicides, and of LGBTI murders in the world. In spite of this egregious situation, the US government continues to fund a government that has unapologetically disregarded the right to life of its citizens. Berta Cáceres has become the 101st environmental justice organizer to be killed in Honduras since 2010, demonstrating the blatant disregard and danger facing environmental justice organizers.

According Human Rights observers on the ground and the Mexican organization Otros Mundos, the life of the sole witness of Berta's murder, Gustavo Castro Soto, a Mexican citizen and human rights worker, is in danger. Human rights workers in Honduras believe that he was also the target of assassination. The Honduran police are interrogating him for long periods of time refusing him breaks, food and water. The Honduran government is refusing to allow him to return to his country and will hold him for 30 days. We fear for his life and join the international community in calling for the protection and immediate release of Gustavo Castro Soto.

We urge the members of Congress and the US government to immediately suspend support to the government of Juan Orlando Hernandez. We ask the US government to introduce sanctions against the Honduran government, until it allows the entry of an independent international team of investigators to solve the crime against Berta Cáceres.

We join the *International Coalition for Human Rights in the Americas* in calling for the following actions:

1. *WE DEMAND that the government of Honduras:*

- Conduct a timely, transparent and diligent investigation of the assassination of Berta Cáceres.
- Ensure the speedy identification of the intellectual and material actors of the crime.
- Allow the participation of international human rights experts in support of the investigations, particularly in examination of the threats against Berta Cáceres as a human rights defender.
- Protect the life of Mexican Human Rights worker, Gustavo Castro Soto, the only witness of the attack on Berta Cáceres, and permit his safe exit from the country.

- Implement the Law of Protection for Human Rights workers, Journalists, Social Communicators and Justice workers.
 - Adopt strategies and effective prevention plans to end persecution of Human Rights workers, including providing a budget and administrative support to the creation of an agency responsible for their protection.
2. *WE REQUEST the Inter-American Court of Human Rights:*
- Supervise the investigation of Berta Cáceres' murder and to make sure that it is conducted impartially and independently with the participation of international human rights experts.
 - Pursue the punctual investigation on behalf of the Honduran government and provide investigation recommendations in hopes that they will guarantee the life and integrity of investigators and defenders of Human Rights in their territory.
3. *WE DEMAND that the Mission of Support Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH):*
- Ensure the investigation of the murder of Berta Cáceres includes international experts and is realized with diligence independently and impartially.
4. *WE DEMAND that US Congress and the US State Department:*
- Cease aid to Honduras through the Alliance for Progress in the Northern Triangle until the Honduran government addresses its poor Human Rights records, demonstrates capacity to prosecute perpetrators, and guarantees the rights of all people, especially Indigenous and Afrodescendant and LGBTI people, women and children.

CC: Juan Orlando Hernandez, Presidente de la Republica de Honduras
 Inter-American Court of Human Rights
 US Embassy in Honduras, Washington DC
 Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
 Senator Bernie Sanders
 Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores de la Republica Honduras
 COPINH

Scholars:

Suyapa Portillo, PhD
 Pitzer College

Alicia Estrada, PhD
 California State University, Northridge

Breny Mendoza, PhD.
 California State University, Northridge

Leisy Abrego, PhD
 University of California, Los Angeles

Gloria Chacon, PhD
 University of California, San Diego

