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Latino and Indigenous Leaders Call for an Investigation into the Assassination of Lenca Environment Activist Berta Cáceres, Justice for Those Responsible

Solidarity Statement Demands Increased Protection for Environmental and Human Rights Activists throughout the Americas.

Washington, D.C. -- Yesterday, March 3, 2016, Berta Cáceres, a Lenca environmental activist and indigenous leader in Honduras, was assassinated in her home while she slept. The prescient words she spoke upon receiving the Goldman Environmental Prize came true:

“The Lenca people are ancestral guardians of the rivers, in turn protected by the spirit of the young girls, who teach us that giving our lives in various ways for the protection of the rivers is giving our lives for the well-being of humanity and this planet.”

Berta Cáceres, 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize Winner

We express our condolences to her family, COPINH, and all those who knew her and loved her. We are deeply outraged for this senseless act and echo the words shared by so many indigenous peoples’ organizations, human rights leaders, and environmental organizations - there must be accountability and justice.

Berta Cáceres was honored and celebrated for her work in Honduras fighting for the right of self-determination of the Lenca people who were not consulted and did not consent to the Agua Zarca Dam projected for construction on the sacred Gualcarque River. Her leadership and advocacy helped pressure the International Finance Corporation to withdraw from funding the project in 2013.

Even though the Government of Honduras has made numerous commitments to uphold the rights of indigenous peoples including endorsing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ratifying the International Labor Organization Convention 169, the safety of indigenous leaders has been increasingly threatened.

According to UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz said, “A fundamental problem faced by indigenous peoples is the lack of full recognition, protection and enjoyment of their rights to ancestral lands, territories and natural resources.” As a result of her country visit in November 2015, she expressed further concern, “about indigenous peoples’ vulnerability to human rights violations and impunity...there is a dire need for effective legal, administrative or other mechanisms to enable indigenous peoples to present complaints for violations of their territorial, cultural and basic human rights and to obtain redress.”

We strongly condemn the brutal actions of those that wish to intimidate and put fear in individuals and communities that are standing up and fighting to protect their land, water and their way of life. To this end we call on the government of Honduras to:

1. Ensure necessary measures are taken to guarantee the safety and protection of all members of COPINH and Berta Cáceres' family.
2. Immediately stop the use of intimidation and violence against indigenous peoples protecting their lands, territories, and natural resources.
3. Seriously address indigenous peoples’ rights to their lands, territories, and natural resources and to “finalize the *saneamiento* process and to strengthen governance systems.”
4. Honor its commitments to uphold and respect human rights generally and indigenous peoples’ rights specifically as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the ILO Convention 169, and the American Convention on Human Rights.
5. Hold accountable the fiduciary leadership of the corporate interests who are financing public infrastructure projects detrimental to the health and well-being of those living in their footprint.
6. Immediately investigate the perpetrators of this crime and hold those responsible accountable to the fullest extent of the law.

The fact that an internationally recognized leader, as Berta was, is not safe from an assassin's bullet is a telling indicator of a repressive effort to silence those that would speak out in support of a harmonious relationship with the natural resources that sustain their lives. The murder of Berta is undoubtedly meant to silence her brave voice, but it will only serve to strengthen and sharpen the voices of current and future advocates that stand alongside her.