



Open Letter to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President Ms Federica Mogherini

Dear Vice-President/High Representative,

We are deeply shocked by the murder of Berta Cáceres, courageous ecologist and prominent land rights activist from the indigenous Lenka community, which occurred in the early hours of March the 3rd 2016, in her own house in the province of La Esperanza, Honduras.

Berta Cáceres was co-founder of COPINH (Council of Indigenous People of Honduras) in 1993. Over more than two decades she has been fighting against land grabbing, illegal logging and mega-projects, such as the Agua Zarca hydropower plant. She was honoured many times for her relentless and peaceful fight, which finally led to the Goldman Environmental Award received in 2015.

Her murder was not unexpected. Following countless threats, she had been granted protection measures by the Inter American Commission on Human Rights. These, however, were not adequately implemented by the Honduran Government. Yet, despite continued threats, she never gave up.

Her fight against the Agua Zarca project was successful, as the IFC (International Financing Corporation) and the Chinese investor Sinahydro, ended the contract in 2013. However, the project continues with European investors, despite the strong resistance of local communities, who see themselves displaced and their livelihoods destroyed.

Berta Cáceres was a very well-known person, not only in Latin America, but also in other continents. She has visited the European Parliament to make the voice of her Lenka people heard. European diplomats and MEPs have met her in Honduras on many occasions, as well, also as a measure of protection. It will be decisive for the whole country and all who know her, that the murder of this outstanding land rights' defender does not remain in impunity. Therefore, we ask for a vigorous condemnation by the European Union of this crime. The European Union must no longer silently accept that Honduras, the country with the highest murder rate per capita in the world, which is underpinned and incentivized by an almost total impunity.

Berta Cáceres' murderers have to be found. The material and intellectual authors of the assassination have to go to Court and receive punishment. The Association Agreement, which links the European Union with Central America demands from all partners a clear commitment to the Rule of Law and to human rights. Impunity is an infringement of this commitment, and consequences need to be drawn.

The only eye-witness of the murder, Gustavo Soto, a Mexican citizen, needs vigorous protection, as his life is at risk. The EEAS has to quickly offer its support so that this happens.

But also Berta Cáceres' struggle must be continued. Mega-projects, such as Agua Zarca, need to be stopped, and European private or public funds withdrawn, if they go against the will and the needs of local populations.

A few days before the International Women's Day, 8th of March, the European Union should honour this extraordinary woman and commit to her justified aims in favour land rights, indigenous rights and a peaceful future.

Sincerely,

Ernest Urtasun, MEP

Molly Scott Cato, MEP

Josep Maria Terricabras, MEP

Ulrike Lunacek, Vice-president of the European Parliament

Jordi Sebastiá, MEP

Bodil Valero, MEP

Brussels, the 4th of March 2016