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Honduras: International Forum condemns killings of human rights defenders in Honduras and demands a diligent investigation

The International Forum for Human Rights in Honduras, made up of more than 20 national and international organizations, strongly condemns the violence, harassment and killings perpetrated against human rights defenders in Honduras.

According to the state [National Human Rights Commissioner](#), in 2021 at least 170 defenders were victims of attacks, harassment and threats in Honduras; [by the first quarter of 2022](#), 6 killings against human rights defenders were registered. Unfortunately, this trend has continued into 2023.

We hereby condemn the recent killings of water and human rights defenders [Aly Magdaleno Domínguez Ramos and Jairo Bonilla Ayala](#), which occurred on 7 January 2023. This took place in the community of Guapinol, a town in the municipality of Tocoa, located in the province of Colón. The human rights defenders had been peacefully challenging the development of mining projects in the Carlos Escaleras National Park and were facing strong attacks and threats. Aly Domínguez was the subject of [criminal proceedings](#) along with his brother Reynaldo Domínguez and 31 other defenders.

The dangerous situation faced by the Municipal Committee of Common and Public Goods of Tocoa (CMDBCPT), as well as the communities of the Guapinol and San Pedro area, [has been recognized and documented](#) by multiple actors monitoring the human rights situation in Honduras. In particular, the National Network of Women Human Rights Defenders in Honduras has given multiple warnings about the risk and threats to community leaders. Despite public denunciations, the Honduran State has not responded in a forceful and effective manner to the critical situation, failing to address the danger faced by the defenders of Guapinol and their families. It has [neglected its international responsibility](#) to provide protection to defenders, to conduct a prompt and impartial investigation of the facts, and to guarantee the non-repetition of these abuses.

We also condemn the [assassination of Omar Cruz Tomé](#) on January 18, 2023, who was a peasant leader, defender of land, president of the peasant cooperative Los Laureles and member of the Agrarian Platform of the Aguán Valley. This criminal act has been linked to [previous denunciations](#) made by members and leaders of organisations including the [Agrarian Platform](#) of El Aguán, the Coordinator of Popular Organizations of El Aguán (COPA), the Broad Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ) and the Law Firm Studies for Dignity. In these denunciations, they exposed the attacks and widespread violence in El Aguán perpetrated by corporations in the agribusiness sector in Honduras. To date, no action has been taken by the state in response to these accusations.

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Within this context of generalized violence, we are alarmed by the increased risk faced by women leaders and territorial defenders in these communities, who fight alongside men for their land and water rights. We are aware that, in addition to facing persecution, threats and the criminalization of their peers, these women experience differentiated aggressions against their bodies and life experiences. Often their work and leadership go unrecognised, in addition to the traditional roles family and community-oriented roles that they continue to fulfil.

The International Forum for Human Rights in Honduras strongly condemns the killings referred to above. The situation described shows the reprisals and systematic violence perpetrated against those who seek to defend human rights in Honduras. They find themselves at risk, without due attention, recognition and protection by the State. Furthermore, we are outraged by the continued application of an [extractivist policy](#) endorsed by the State. The organisations that are part of this international articulation have documented, referred and denounced how extractive activities are developed with impunity and to the total detriment of peoples, communities and human rights defenders. In addition to the fact that to date, the measures implemented by the State haven't signified a structural change that would put an end to socio-environmental conflicts in the country.

Therefore, we urge the competent authorities and the National Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders to implement urgent measures to guarantee the livelihood, security and dignified exercise of human rights of all human rights defenders in the Honduran territory.

It is imperative that the State of Honduras urgently develops a diligent criminal investigation process that observes the principles of independence and impartiality in each of the stages of the process, integrates a gender and intersectional perspective and allows for the identification of those responsible for the due punishment of these acts. Similarly, it is imperative to create mechanisms that allow communities and human rights organisations to follow-up on the progress of the investigation.

We demand that the State comply with the measures that it is responsible for implementing to ensure that these unfortunate deaths do not remain, once again, in impunity, and that it immediately move forward with all necessary measures to ensure that human rights defenders can safely carry out their work. One such measure is that introduced [by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights \(IACHR Court\)](#) in 2018 which calls on states to approve and implement a due diligence protocol for the investigation of crimes committed against human rights defenders.

It is imperative that the State of Honduras makes regulatory changes that ensure responsible business activity, in full compliance with the highest international standards in this area. Until now, the country has only guaranteed the enrichment of the economic sectors that have historically benefited from extractive activities outside the international obligations of States and at the cost of the hundreds of murders and criminal acts against human rights defenders, from which that Honduras and the region have suffered so much. In this vein, we also recall the [jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court](#) when it indicates that States must "prevent human rights violations produced by private companies". Moreover, the Inter-American Court points out that companies are obliged to prevent their activities from "provoking or contributing to human rights violations", and to adopt measures aimed at remedying such violations, should they occur.

We at the International Forum for Human Rights in Honduras stand in solidarity with those who continue to exercise their legitimate right to defend human rights in Honduras, as well as with the victims of reprisals and their families. We support their constant struggle in the search for truth, justice and reparations. We have the right to defend rights.

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