



International Statement

Honduras – Bajo Aguán: International Networks Denounce Ongoing Killings and Severe Human Rights Violations

We, the undersigned organizations, declare ourselves against the reigning violence and impunity in the Bajo Aguán Valley (Honduras), where killings of rural farmers and other severe human rights violations continue to occur.

Following the International Investigation Mission that was sent to the Bajo Aguán region from February 25 to March 4, 2011 to examine human rights violations¹, it is clear that death threats, kidnappings, disappearances and killings continue to occur with absolute impunity. At this time there is still no fair and lasting solution to this agrarian conflict on the horizon.

Summary of the events recorded from March 18 to June 15, 2011:

¹ The mission included the following international networks and organizations: APRODEV (Association of Development Agencies linked to the World Council of Churches); CIFCA (Copenhagen Initiative for Central America and Mexico); FIAN International (International Organization for the Right to Food); FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights); Rel-UITA (Latin America Regional branch of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Tobacco and Allied Workers); and Via Campesina International.

Killings²: According to information verified by national human rights organizations, **nine organized farmers have been killed³** since April, 2011:

- April 20, 2011: Tarín Daniel García Enamorado and Carlos Alberto Acosta Canales, associated with the *Productores de Colón* company
- May 5, 2011: Henry Roney Díaz, member of the *El Despertar* Cooperative
- May 10, 2011: José Paulino Lemus Cruz, member of the *Brisas del Edén* Cooperative
- May 29, 2011: Olvin Gallegos and Secunino Gómez, both members of the *El Despertar* Cooperative
- June 5, 2011: Guillermo Recinos Aguilar, Joel Santamaría and Genaro Acosta, rural farmers who were members of the *San Esteban* Cooperative

Injuries: From May to June, 2011, at least six farmers were reported as severely injured during eviction actions against the rural farmers' movements:

- May 5, 2011: Antonio Rivas, injured during an eviction attempt at the *La Trinidad* Cooperative
- May 7, 2011: Juan Licona and Manuel Vásquez of the *El Despertar* Cooperative were injured during an eviction attempt at the *El Despertar* lands.
- May 13, 2011: Neptalí Esquivel, severely injured during repression against a demonstration in Planes, Municipality of Sonaguera. Mr. Esquivel is now disabled, after being shot by a soldier in his left leg.
- June 5, 2011: Doris Pérez Vásquez and Oliver Gonzalez, farmers taking refuge in the facilities of the National Agrarian Institute (INA) in Sinaloa, were injured by gunfire from private security agents as they stormed the INA.

Kidnappings and Disappearances:

- April 14, 2011: Disappearance of Tarín Daniel García Enamorado and Carlos Alberto Acosta Canales, associated with the *Productores de Colón* company. Found tortured and killed on April 20.
- May 5, 2011: Disappearance of José Paulino Lemus Cruz of the *Brisas del Edén* Cooperative, found dead on May 10.
- May 10, 2011: Alejandro Gómez of the *La Trinidad* Cooperative, kidnapped and tortured.
- May 15, 2011: Francisco Pascual López of the *Rigores* Cooperative, disappeared and still missing.

² The Mission had documented 25 killings linked to the agrarian conflict in Bajo Aguán from January, 2010 to March, 2011: 23 farmers affiliated with rural farmers' organizations in Aguán, plus the killing of the journalist Nahum Palacios and his partner. The latter killings are believed to have been linked to the reporting work Mr. Palacios had done regarding the agrarian conflict prior to his murder. The preliminary report can be found at, <http://www.cifca.org/Informe%20mision%20final.pdf>, pages 12-16.

³ All of these victims were affiliated with one of the three rural farmers' organizations in the Bajo Aguán: *Movimiento Campesino del Aguán*, MCA (Rural Farmers' Movement of Aguán), *Movimiento Unificado Campesino del Aguán*, MUCA (Unified Rural Farmers' Movement of Aguán), and *Movimiento Auténtico Revindicativo Campesino del Aguán*, MARCA (Authentic Movement of Rural Farmers' Struggle in Aguán).

- May 29, 2011: Kidnapping of Olvin Gallegos and Secunino Gómez, both from the *El Despertar* Cooperative, both found dead the same day.

Death threats: Since June 2, 2011, Mr. Antonio Trejo Cabrera, lawyer and legal representative of the *Movimiento Auténtico Reivindicativo Campesino del Aguán* (MARCA), and in particular of the *San Isidro, Despertar, La Trinidad* and *San Esteban* Cooperatives, has received death threats on his cell phone against him and his family. On June 10, 2011, Mr. Trejo was followed by several vehicles, while simultaneously receiving further death threats against himself and his family. In his complaint filed with the General Department of Criminal Investigation, the threatened lawyer holds two businessmen from the area responsible for any eventual attempt on his life or his family members' lives, or any attack on his property. The private security forces of these two businessmen have been identified as some of the main aggressors against the rural communities.

We denounce the wave of violence that continues with no end in sight, in a region where the organized rural population lives in constant danger and total vulnerability as crimes are committed with absolute impunity.

Implementation of the existing legal tools and political agreements to resolve the agrarian conflict has not progressed significantly⁴. On April 23, 2011, the authorities recognized that they had not complied with the April 13, 2010 agreement between Porfirio Lobo and representatives of the *Movimiento Unificado Campesino del Aguán* (MUCA), and they renewed their commitment to implement it. With respect to the land reclaimed by the *Movimiento Auténtico Reivindicativo Campesino del Aguán*, MARCA, the INA awarded a total of 471 hectares to the farmers affiliated with this group.

On June 7, 2011, the Minister and Director of the INA reported to the Council of Ministers that the non-implementation of the Agreement was due to the lack of progress in land legalization; the INA described a "lack of political willingness on the part of the landowners, and specifically Mr. Miguel Facussé Barjum, who had not accepted the price for land purchase that was established by law." The Minister proposed "for the resolution of this problem in Bajo Aguán, expropriating these lands for the public domain via a Legislative Decree."⁵

Given this situation, we the undersigned organizations reiterate the following recommendations to national authorities and the international community, determined by the International Investigation Mission⁶. We urge the national authorities to:

- a) Fulfill their duty to investigate and punish in an expedited manner all crimes and human rights violations committed in Bajo Aguán, and pursue penal action against both the material and intellectual authors of these acts.
- b) Immediately cease the repression and violence against the rural farmers' movements, stopping in particular the forced evictions, and adopt effective measures to provide protection for persons at risk.

⁴ See the legal tools and political agreements regarding the agrarian conflict, and their level of implementation, in the Mission's preliminary report, pages 33-41.

⁵ Report from the INA Public Relations Office, June 7, 2011

⁶ See the Mission's preliminary report, pages 45-48.

- c) Duly regulate the actions of private security companies, ensuring that they fully respect the human rights of the population; action by these companies to the contrary should warrant suspension of their operating permits in the country.
- d) Comply with legal tools and political agreements vis-à-vis the agrarian conflicts to reach a just and sustainable solution to the issue of land ownership.

We believe that the **international community plays a fundamental role** in protecting and promoting human rights in Honduras. It is regrettable that the OAS has reinstated Honduras without consideration to the absence of guarantees for investigation and sanction against the severe human rights violations committed during and after the coup d'état.

The international community must urgently refocus its attention and actions toward the human rights situation in Honduras, especially in Bajo Aguán. To this end, the international community must:

- a) Make concrete and conclusive steps toward greater protection of persons at risk, especially those in Bajo Aguán.
- b) Carry out permanent and ongoing monitoring of the situation in Bajo Aguán, and particularly of the resolution of the agrarian conflict, as well as of the investigation and sentencing of those responsible for the killings; recommendations should be made to national authorities.
- c) Ensure effective implementation of the local strategy for the European Union guidelines for the protection of human rights defenders.
- d) Establish a permanent office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras.

June 17, 2011

Signing organizations:

ALOP (Latin American Association of Development Organizations)
 APRODEV (Association of Development Agencies linked to the World Council of Churches)
 CIFCA (Copenhagen Initiative for Central America and Mexico)
 FIAN International (International Organization for the Right to Food)
 FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)
 Grupo Sur
 La Vía Campesina International
 PIDHDD (Inter-American Platform for Human Rights, Democracy and Development)
 Rel-UITA (Latin America Regional branch of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel,
 Restaurant, Tobacco and Allied Workers)