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Honduras: No justice for indigenous leaders Amnesty International adopts new prisoners of conscience

The judicial system in Honduras is being used to press politically motivated charges against indigenous leaders and prevent them from claiming land titles, said Amnesty International today as it launched an international campaign for the release of indigenous leaders Feliciano Pineda, Marcelino Miranda and Leonardo Miranda, from Montaña Verde, Gracias, Lempira department.

Feliciano Pineda was arrested on 6 June 2005 on charges of theft, damages, house breaking and the killing, in 2001 of Juan Reyes Gomez in an alleged land dispute. The arrest took place as Feliciano was in a hospital in Tegucigalpa, after three men with machetes seriously injured him.

Despite the injuries – which prevented him from eating and walking without assistance -- Feliciano was taken to prison. In December 2005, Feliciano Pineda was acquitted of the charge of homicide. However, he remains in prison on the other charges, despite the fact that the legal period for bringing him to trial on these charges has elapsed. In September 2005, a prison guard threatened Feliciano with a rifle to sign a confession accepting all the charges against him which he refused to do.

On 16 December 2003, Marcelino and Leonardo Miranda, both Montaña Verde community leaders, were the first to be convicted for the murder of Juan Reyes Gomez. The brothers were sentenced to 25 years each, despite evidence that the charges against them were fabricated in reprisal for their role in trying to secure a communal land title for their community.

There were irregularities in their trial. Among others, forensic evidence used was not collected by experts qualified to do so and during the trial only testimonies from the prosecution's witnesses were accepted.

Feliciano Pineda and the Miranda brothers have been adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience – imprisoned for politically motivated reasons.

“The criminal charges against Feliciano Pineda and the Miranda brothers are part of a campaign against indigenous leaders and human rights defenders in Honduras that aims to deter them from their work to secure land titles and to protect the environment,” said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International called for the immediate release of Feliciano Pineda and the Miranda

brothers and for investigations to be initiated into the murder of Juan Reyes Gomez.

“Indigenous activists and human rights defenders in Honduras have become second class citizens, and as such they receive second class justice.”

Note to Editors: Further information and photos of Feliciano Pineda, Marcelino Miranda and Leonardo Miranda are available on news.amnesty.org

Public Document

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