

URGENT ACTION

MEXICAN DEFENDER FEARS FOR SAFETY IN HONDURAS

Honduran authorities have ordered Mexican human rights defender Gustavo Castro Soto, sole witness to the murder of Indigenous leader Berta Cáceres and victim of the attack, to remain another 30 days in the country. He has already provided testimony and fears for his safety in Honduras.

On 7 March the Honduran Attorney General's office ordered **Gustavo Castro Soto** to remain in the country for 30 more days in order to provide testimony in the case of the murder of Berta Cáceres. Berta Cáceres, leader and co-founder of the Council of Indigenous Peoples of Honduras (COPINH), was shot dead in her home on 3 March in La Esperanza, Intibucá department, west Honduras. Gustavo Castro was at her home and injured by a gunshot. He told Amnesty International that he appealed the Honduran Attorney General's office's decision, which was rejected on 9 March. In addition, Judge Victorina Flores in Intibucá department suspended Gustavo Castro's lawyer for 15 days because of her insistence on accessing copies of his testimony, Castro told Amnesty International. Gustavo Castro has not been provided with a copy of this latest decision, according to his organization, the Mexican NGO Otros Mundos AC/Chiapas – Amigos de la Tierra México.

Gustavo Castro, who is currently residing in the Mexican embassy in the capital Tegucigalpa, has repeatedly provided his version of the murder to local authorities. Authorities had originally told him he was free to leave the country but then intercepted him as he was boarding a flight to Mexico on 6 March. Gustavo Castro told Amnesty International that he fears greatly for his safety, as well as that of his brother, Oscar Castro, who is accompanying them in the country.

Berta Cáceres had received threats for years in connection to her work defending the rights of Indigenous communities and the environment. Most recently, Berta Cáceres and COPINH had denounced threats and harassment in connection to their protests against the construction of the Agua Zarca dam in the community of Río Blanco.

Please write immediately in English, Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on authorities to allow Gustavo Castro Soto to return to Mexico as soon as possible;
- Urging them to guarantee Gustavo Castro Soto's safety and allow him to remain in the Mexican embassy for as long as he is in Honduras.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 APRIL 2016:

President

Juan Orlando Hernández
 Presidente de la República
 Casa Presidencial
 Bulevar Juan Pablo II
 Tegucigalpa, Honduras
 Email: info@presidencia.gob.hn
 Twitter: @JuanOrlandoH

Salutation: Dear President/ Estimado Señor Presidente

Attorney General

Óscar Fernando Chinchilla
 Fiscal General de la República
 Ministerio Público
 Lomas del Guijarro
 Tegucigalpa, Honduras
 Email: fiscalgeneral@hushmail.com
 Twitter: @MP_Honduras

Salutation: Dear Attorney General/ Estimado Señor Fiscal

And copies to:

CONADEH
 Colonia Florencia Norte
 Boulevard Suyapa
 Tegucigalpa, Honduras
 Email: central@conadeh.hn

Mexican Embassy in Honduras

Eucaliptos No 1001
 Residencial Lomas del Guijarro, Apdo.
 Post. 769, Tegucigalpa, Honduras
 Email: embhonduras@sre.gob.mx

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 50/16. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr37/3588/2016/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Gustavo Castro Soto, in addition to his work with Otros Mundos, is a member of a number of organizations working on environmental issues and against mining and hydroelectric megaprojects in Mexico and Latin America.

Amid a general climate of crime and violence, Honduran human rights defenders, in particular Indigenous, peasant and Afro-descendant leaders involved in environmental issues, land disputes and protesting hydroelectric projects have long been targeted with violence and intimidation in retaliation for their work. A weak criminal justice system and corruption has contributed to a climate of extensive impunity for these abuses.

COPINH has been fighting for over 20 years for better standards of living for its community in Río Blanco, north-western Honduras. Since 2011, COPINH members have been campaigning for their right to free, prior and informed consent in relation to a proposed hydroelectric plant that might force them out of their ancestral lands. Its members have been targeted with threats and harassment for years in connection to their work.

In May 2013, Berta Cáceres was accused of carrying an unlicensed gun in her car which she claimed was planted by military officers at a checkpoint. Two months after she was charged, the Honduran army killed one of her colleagues, Indigenous leader Tomás García, and seriously injured his teenage son when they were protesting against the hydroelectric project. The following month, another criminal proceeding was filed against Bertha Cáceres and two other COPINH leaders, Tomás Gómez and Aureliano Molina. They were accused of inciting others to commit the crimes of usurpation, coercion and continued damages against the company behind the hydroelectric project in Río Blanco. According to information received by Amnesty International at the time, all they had done was express their opposition to the project at a meeting.

Name: Gustavo Castro Soto

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 50/16 Index: AMR 37/3614/2016 Issue Date: 10 March 2016