

AI Index: PRE 01/090/2013
21 February 2013

Honduras must investigate killing of murdered activist's brother

Honduran authorities must urgently investigate the recent killing of Jose Trejo just five months after his brother, a prominent human rights lawyer, was also murdered, Amnesty International said today.

José Trejo was shot dead by unknown men on Saturday, as he travelled on his motorbike in the outskirts of the city of Tocoa, in the north of the country. His brother Antonio, a prominent human rights activist, was shot dead by unknown gunmen in September 2012. No one has been brought to justice for Antonio's killing.

The day before he was shot dead, José Trejo had been in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa, to meet with officials in an effort to ensure justice for his brother's murder and visit media outlets to keep the spotlight on the case.

"A thorough, independent and impartial investigation must urgently be carried out, with those responsible brought to justice," said Esther Major, Researcher for Central America at Amnesty International. "The authorities must not stay silent in the face of this crime and commit to a policy of zero tolerance for attacks on human rights defenders."

"Failure by the Honduran authorities to take action only sends the dangerous message that attacking those who defend human rights is allowed."

Background

Before being shot dead last September, the human rights lawyer Antonio Trejo had reported receiving death threats linked to his work representing the victims of human rights abuses amid an ongoing land conflict in the Bajo Aguán region in the north of the country.

Trejo had been representing three peasant cooperatives that are embroiled in a complex land-rights dispute in Bajo Aguán, a fertile valley in the north of the country.

In recent years, thousands of landless rural workers occupied land which they claim had been expropriated by wealthy landowners and corporations. Legal battles have been waged for over a decade, with decisions being set down, appealed and multiple forced evictions being carried out.

Repeated violent confrontations in the valley have resulted in scores of deaths over the past three years – mainly of rural farmers but also of the landowners' employees.

The violence continues despite a deal the Honduran government struck with the valley's landowners to return some 4,000 acres of agricultural land to some rural farmers' cooperatives.