



PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN HONDURAS: YOU MUST INCLUDE MEASURES RELATING TO THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN YOUR PLANS FOR GOVERNMENT!

Dear Presidential Candidate,

Greetings from the undersigned organisations. We are writing to you today to bring to your attention the situation of human rights defenders in Honduras. Over the last few years, our organisations have closely followed this issue and, notably, have conducted research and submitted recommendations to the government of Honduras regarding the serious violence and stigmatisation suffered by these individuals.

Honduras continues to be one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America for human rights defenders, especially for those who stand for rights relating to land, territory and the environment. According to a report published in January 2017 by the NGO Global Witness, Honduras has the world's highest per-capita homicide rate of human rights defenders who work on issues pertaining to land, territory and the environment¹. Research carried out by the undersigned organisations has confirmed that the vast majority of those responsible for threatening and attacking this group of

¹ Global Witness, Honduras: the deadliest country in the world for environmental activism, January 2017. Available at <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/honduras-deadliest-country-world-environmental-activism/>



human rights defenders are not brought to justice, meaning that impunity is helping to perpetuate this violence. Furthermore, the defenders are confronted with a backdrop of stigma and discredit that facilitates and normalises the attacks against them. Human rights defenders supporting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community are also especially vulnerable to threatening behaviour and assault.

Bearing in mind that the candidate who is voted in as President of the Republic in the forthcoming election will have to face significant challenges relating to human rights and adopt measures to address priority issues in this area, in the spirit of maintaining an open and continued dialogue with government authorities in order to improve human rights conditions for everyone in Honduras, we would like to reiterate the recommendations that we have made on past occasions.

- Publicly recognise, by means of a national public campaign, the legitimate work of human rights defenders, particularly those defending rights relating to land, territory and the environment, as well as sexual and reproductive rights.
- Initiate prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into attacks, threats and assaults against human rights defenders and bring the perpetrators, whether material or intellectual authors, to justice.
- Authorities must refrain from misusing the justice system to intimidate, harass and discredit human rights defenders and must initiate administrative, disciplinary or criminal processes, where applicable, following allegations of misuse of the justice system to attack and harass defenders.
- Strengthen the technical and financial mechanisms established for the protection of human rights defenders, journalists, social media contributors and administrators of justice so that protection plans may be developed and implemented in consultation with the beneficiaries. Authorities must ensure that the measures adopted are comprehensive, have a preventative focus and respond to the individual and collective needs of the beneficiaries, taking into account their gender, age, ethnic identity and socio-economic background.
- Guarantee the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. In the context of protests, offer safeguards against the unnecessary and excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies and ensure prompt, impartial and effective investigations into complaints regarding the illegal use of force, including command responsibility. Likewise, guarantee that victims will receive adequate reparation.
- Adopt all necessary measures to ensure that law enforcement officials are provided with the necessary training and resources to carry out their work in accordance with international rules and standards. Public officials who have committed human rights violations must not remain in office and must be dismissed with the guarantee of due process and non-discrimination. Ensure the proper control and supervision of private security companies in Honduras.



- Guarantee in a comprehensive manner the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities, in particular the right to consultation and to free, prior and informed consent by the government bodies responsible for evaluating and approving licences for the exploration and exploitation of natural resources. Authorities should ensure effective participation by the affected peoples and communities in the planning and implementing of projects to explore and exploit natural resources in their territories.
- Guarantee all the economic, social and cultural rights (including the right to a healthy environment) of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities without discrimination, and, in particular, ensure their right to territory.
- Strengthen the land registry in such a way as to respect and protect the rights associated with land ownership, such as the rights to food, health, adequate housing and life, as well as the right of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant communities to territory. Avoid legal uncertainty that allows the overlapping of land titles at the expense of these rights and of Indigenous or Afro-descendant collective ownership.
- End the militarisation of Bajo Aguán and devise strategies aimed at solving land disputes that would guarantee the rights of farming families in this region, including the rights to food, health and adequate housing. Honduras must guarantee that the communities of Bajo Aguán will not be forcibly evicted, and that any eviction will be carried out in accordance with international human rights laws and standards. Authorities must allocate resources to ensure that reports of murders of community members, including human rights defenders, are investigated promptly, thoroughly and impartially by the Valle del Aguán Violent Deaths Unit (UMVBA) of the Public Prosecutor's Office.
- Include in the Constitution the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Adopt and implement measures to prevent all types of gender-based violence against LGBTI individuals, both privately and in public institutions. Carry out prompt, thorough and independent investigations into human rights violations committed against LGBTI individuals and defenders of sexual and reproductive rights in order to identify, try and punish those responsible. Among the various possible lines of enquiry, those designed to determine whether the crimes were committed based on the victims' sexual orientation and/or gender identity or their work in human rights defence should be considered.

We look forward to hearing your party platform and action plans in relation to human rights issues. We also look forward to receiving your comments on the issues mentioned in this letter at the following address: hrdamericas@amnesty.org

Kind regards,

Amnesty International



Coalition Against Impunity

Diakonía

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Global Witness

HIVOS

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Oxfam

International Platform Against Impunity

Trocaire