

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Honduras: Amnesty International condemns the recent killings of people defending justice, equality and human rights

It was with indignation and great concern that Amnesty International received the news of the killing of Judge Mireya Efigenia Mendoza Peña. This is the third killing of a leader committed to human rights that Amnesty International has been informed of in Honduras in only two weeks.

Mireya Efigenia Mendoza Peña, 42 years of age, was killed at midday on Wednesday 24 July in El Progreso, Yoro department. Armed men on a motorbike fired around 20 shots at her, some of them to her head, as she was at the wheel of her car. Mireya Efigenia Mendoza Peña, a judge in the El Progreso Trial Court, was also a member of the *Asociación de Jueces por la Democracia* (Association of Judges for Democracy - AJD) and a member of its governing body for 2012 – 2014. AJD is a non-governmental organization working to strengthen the justice system in Honduras.

Only three days previously, on Sunday 21 July, the body of Herwin Alexis Ramirez Chamorro, 24 years of age, also known as "Africa Noxema Howell", was found on the banks of the River López Bonito in La Ceiba, Atlántida department. The body of this Afro-Honduran transsexual presented multiple bullet and knife wounds. Herwin Alexis was a young leader active in his community of La Ceiba, where he volunteered for organizations such as: the *Organización Prounión Ceibeña* (Ceiba Pro-Union Organization - OPROUCE), which works for HIV prevention and LGBTI (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) rights; and the *Organización de Desarrollo Étnico Comunitario* (Ethnic Community Development Organization - ODECO), which works for the development of Afro-Honduran communities.

That same week, at midday on 15 July, Tomás García, 49 years of age, an indigenous leader, prominent member of the *Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras* (Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations in Honduras - COPINH) and deputy mayor of his community, was shot three times by the army during a peaceful protest in Río Blanco, Intibucá department. His 17-year-old son was also injured but is now out of danger. A soldier was arrested in relation to these incidents.

Since April, the Lenca indigenous communities of Río Blanco have been protesting at a hydroelectric project on lands they have been inhabiting for centuries. They state that there has been no adequate prior consultation. All these communities belong to COPINH, an organization working for indigenous rights and to protect the territory and its natural resources.

Amnesty International condemns these killings and calls on the Honduran authorities to conduct a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into each one of them, analysing the possible motives behind them and bringing the physical and intellectual perpetrators of these crimes to justice.

There is an urgent need to protect those working for equality, justice and against impunity in Honduras and it is therefore essential that the Honduran justice system is strengthened in a context of transparency and respect for the rule of law and human rights.