



PUBLIC LETTER TO THE HONDURAN GOVERNMENT

NO MORE KILLINGS, ATTACKS OR THREATS AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Amnesty International is extremely concerned about the wave of threats and attacks against journalists and human rights defenders and is making an urgent public appeal to the President and his government to address this wave of attacks promptly and effectively.

Since the beginning of this year, Amnesty International has documented a serious deterioration in the security situation of journalists and human rights defenders.

On 15 May, the lifeless body of **Alfredo Villatoro**, the news manager at HRN radio, was found in southern Tegucigalpa. He had been kidnapped a week earlier. His death occurred a few days after the murder of **Erick Martínez**, an activist from the LGBTI community as well as a journalist, who was killed on 7 May.

In January journalists **Itsmania Pineda Platero and Gilda Silvestrucci** and her family received death threats via anonymous phone calls and text messages. They are both members of "Journalists for Life and Freedom of Expression" "*Periodistas por la Vida y la Libertad de Expresión*". The group was set up in December 2011 following the murder of journalist Luz Marina Paz Villalobos on 6 December 2011, to demand justice and call attention to the large number of journalists who had been assaulted and murdered in recent months.

In February two other human rights defenders from the Bajo Aguán region were the targets of a threat. **Wilfredo Paz** (the spokesperson for the *Observatorio Permanente de Derechos Humanos del Aguán*, Permanent Human Rights Observatory of Aguán, and a member of the *Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular*, National Front of Popular Resistance) received a threat directed at **Juan Chinchilla** (an activist from the *Movimiento Unificado Campesino del Aguán (MUCA)*, Unified Peasant Movement of Aguán), sent in a text message. Both the Observatory and MUCA had been involved in organizing an International Human Rights Meeting in Solidarity with Honduras which had been held in Aguán two days earlier.

Also in February of this year, **Mavis Ethel Cruz**, a journalist in the city of San Pedro Sula, received a death threat in a telephone call, shortly after finishing her programme "*Noticias a la Hora*" on Radio Libertad. Her programme that day had included news and discussion of labour rights problems, corruption and police reform. The person who made the call threatened to kill her son.

In February and April, journalist and human rights defender **Dina Meza**, a member of the *Comité de Familiares de los Detenidos y Desaparecidos (COFADEH)*, Committee of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared, and Director of the website *Defensores en Línea*, Defenders On

Line, received a series of threats and suffered several acts of intimidation. The threats against Dina Meza sent by text and telephone included threats of sexual violence.

In March **Bertha Oliva**, the founder and coordinator of COFADEH, also received threats by telephone and that same month another COFADEH member was verbally threatened by a man as she arrived at her office. The following month, in April, **Nohemí Pérez**, another COFADEH member, was also verbally threatened by a stranger as she reached the entrance to the COFADEH offices.

Threats have also been directed at those providing international accompaniment to human rights defenders. At the end of April, **members of PROAH (*Proyecto de Acompañamiento en Honduras, Honduras Accompaniment Project*)** received two death threats by text message, related to their accompaniment work.

Amnesty International has closely followed the human rights situation in Honduras for many years. The organization recognizes the importance of the fact that, during the 2010 Universal Periodic Review of the country by the United Nations, the Honduran Government extended an open invitation to experts from the United Nations and the Inter-American Human Rights system. It also recognizes the importance of the public commitments the government made to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2011 to adopt the measures necessary to ensure the protection of journalists and human rights defenders, including implementing the precautionary measures granted by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in favour of defenders, activists and journalists at risk.

However, this recent wave of attacks on journalists and human rights defenders is a cause of serious concern. Immediate steps must be taken as a matter of urgency to strengthen protection measures for journalists and human rights defenders so that they can have prompt and effective access to them when their lives or personal safety are at risk.

Specific measures should also be taken to improve investigations. It is essential that the impunity that surrounds such attacks and threats is reduced so that this situation is brought to an end. Leaving such assaults unpunished will only serve to increase the already scandalous rates of impunity in the country and raise serious doubts about the government's genuine commitment to human rights.

It is important to stress that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders) reaffirms rights established in international human rights treaties which Honduras has ratified and which are enshrined in the Honduran Constitution, such as the right to life and personal integrity and freedom of expression, association and movement. The work, leadership, legitimacy and fundamental contribution of those who defend human rights have been widely recognized at a global level.

The general climate of insecurity, impunity and feeling of vulnerability being experienced by journalists and human rights defenders requires the Honduran Government to take specific, swift and effective measures, such as:

- Making a public statement recognizing the important and legitimate work done by journalists and human rights defenders;
- Developing a comprehensive government policy that includes prevention and protection measures for those working to defend human rights. Such a policy must be developed in consultation with civil society, including journalists and human rights defenders, and be assigned the necessary resources so that it can be effectively implemented.

- Promoting and adopting a law that guarantees the protection of journalists and human rights defenders, as well as giving institutional stability to the protection mechanism and ensuring that the necessary economic and human resources are available to enable its effective operation;
- Taking immediate steps to re-evaluate and strengthen the protection measures that are already in place for some of the people mentioned in this letter and extending protection to the other people who do not yet have it;
- Conducting prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into the threats received by the people mentioned in this letter so that those responsible for these acts are effectively brought to justice, and so that the victims receive appropriate reparation.

These attacks on journalists and human rights defenders are alarming and the Government of the Republic of Honduras must take action. The opportunity to reverse this serious situation and demonstrate its genuine commitment to respecting the human rights of everyone in the country is in the Government's hands.