

Rights Action
March 24, 2004

**African Palm & Murder in Honduras: In memory of CESAR
VIRGILIO PINOT**

By Sandra Cuffe, Rights Action

REVISITING MACONDO: Transnational Fruit Corporation's "security" forces assassinate community activist in Honduras.

Fifty years after the great strike of 1954 that began with banana dock workers and snowballed into a nationwide action, much has changed and nothing has changed here in Honduras the "Banana Republic".

Control exercised by transnational fruit companies remains firm. Assassinations by company paramilitary forces continue. Impunity is the order of the day.

On Saturday, March 13, 2004, at approximately 3:30pm, CESAR VIRGILIO PINOT, member of the activist cooperative "Martires de Guaymas", and various community members were attacked by "security" forces of Agro Oriental, subsidiary of Tela Railroad Company for the production of palm oil, in the African palm plantations of Toloa Empalme.

Virgilio died as a result of the bullet wounds. JOSÉ NEPTALY LÓPEZ, also a member of the Martires de Guaymas, was wounded ... and subsequently captured!

The root of this brutal act of repression is the organization of various communities -- Kilómetro 32, La Unión, Villafranca and La Tomasa, all belonging to the municipality of Tela, department of Atlántida -- into an

Association of Independent Palm Producers. The Tela Railroad Company, subsidiary of the US-based transnational Chiquita Brands International Inc. (itself the direct descendant of the infamous United Fruit Company), has lost the profits it obtained from the same producers, who previously sold their product to the multinational.

In response, the company's "security" guards, armed with AK47s, have been persecuting community leaders. Numerous community leaders active in the Association have been accused of 'illegal association,' under the reformed Article 332, known as the 'anti-gang law,' currently being challenged for its violation of various articles and guarantees of the Constitution. They have been accused of belonging to a group of car thieves.

Along with Neptaly, various community members also belonging to the Martires de Guaymas are currently in jail in Tela: OSMAN ALEXANDER BLANCO DUARTE, WILTON RENE BLANCO DUARTE, ANTONIO BAQUEDANO RAMOS and JOSE MEDARDO REYES MENDOZA. Police, acting in collaboration with the company paramilitary forces, have entered five houses by force, holding children and elders at gunpoint.

The transnational fruit company's paramilitary forces act with complete impunity. In court, the company's "security" forces have not even been

required to testify. Instead, agents of the DGIC - the General Direction of Criminal Investigation - reported that they had spoken with the guards, who were not even identified except for by nicknames, and relayed their responses.

In the case of the assassination of Cesar Virgilio Pinot, authorities accepted the guards' explanation that they murdered Virgilio in self-defense, in response to the latter's attack against them. No one called on the numerous community members who witnessed the attack. Neither has there been any file opened for the case. Nor has the location of Virgilio's body been revealed.

These grave violations are only the latest in a long history of repression and political persecution, accompanied by the complicity of State authorities.

DEMONSTRATE YOUR SOLIDARITY ...

Please send urgent appeals to authorities in the United States, Canada and Honduras, demanding:

- a complete investigation into assassination of Cesar Virgilio Pinot
- that the guards responsible for the murder be tried for their crimes
- that the five prisoners be freed and that an investigation be carried out to determine the source of the false accusations against them

- that repression cease against communities of
Kilómetro 32, Villafranca, La
Unión and La Tomasa, as well as against members of
Martires de Guaymas
- that public authorities in the municipality of Tela
break their ties with
the company paramilitary forces and act independently

SEND COPIES TO:

- Martires de Guaymas/Copinh,
marcelinomartinezespinal@yahoo.es AND
copinhonduras@yahoo.es. fax: (504) 783-0817

Honduras Ambassador to USA, Mario Canahuati, 3007
Tilden Street, NW
Suite 4M, Washington, DC 20008, T: 202-966-7702, F:
202-966-9751, E:
embassy@hondurasembassy.org

Chiquita Brands International, Inc., 250 East Fifth
Street, Cincinnati, OH
45202, T: 513-784-8000

Honduras Embassy in Canada, T: 613-233-8900, F: 613-
232-0193, E:
embhonca@magma.ca

Honduran mission to United Nations: 866 UN Plaza Suite
417 New York, NY
10017, T: 212-752-3370, e: m.suazo@worldnet.att.net

Canadian Ambassador for Honduras, Denis Thibault, F:
011 [504] 232-8767, e:
sjose-gr@dfait-maeci.gc.ca

USA Ambassador to Honduras, Larry Palmer, 011 [504]
236-9320, F: 011 [504]
238-4446

Vilma Cecilia Morales, Honduran Supreme Court
President, f: 011 [504]
233-6784 (or 7921)

Ricardo Maduro, President of Honduras, f: 011 [504]
221-4552

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FUNDS for "MARTIRES DE GUAYMAS:

Make tax-deductible check payable to "Rights Action"
and mail to UNITED
STATES: 1830 Connecticut Av, NW, Washington DC, 20009;
CANADA: 509 St.
Clair Ave W, box73527, Toronto ON, M6C-1C0. [In the
USA, you can donate on
line: www.rightsaction.org]

Come to Honduras on educational delegations or come
and work as a long-term
volunteer human rights accompanier:
info@rightsaction.org

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