

August 13, 2006

HONDURAS: BAD NEWS ñ ACTION NEEDED

MIRNA ISABEL SANTOS THOMAS (19-year old Garifuna woman) murdered. Rights Action asks for your support and timely response to the ongoing persecution of Garifuna community leaders. To get on-off this elist: info@rightsaction.org.

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August 11, 2006

HONDURAS: ANOTHER MURDER OF ANOTHER GARIFUNA YOUTH FROM SAN JUAN TELA

During the evening of Sunday August 6th, 19-year old MIRNA ISABEL SANTOS THOMAS was forced from her home in the Garifuna community of San Juan Tela by a group of heavily armed masked men. Her body was found the next morning alongside a road a few kilometers from San Juan, on the other side of the town of Tela, in the department of Atlántida, along the Caribbean coast of Honduras.

This past February, the cadavers of two San Juan youth were also found in the area of the community of La Ensenada, after their detention by soldiers and navy agents.

This past June, San Juan community president Jessica García was threatened and forced at gunpoint to sign a document ceding certain community lands to PROMOTUR, a real estate and tourism company owned by powerful politician, landowner, banker and businessman Jaime Rosenthal Oliva.

This occurred after months of repression and human rights violations, including frequent threats, armed incursions by company representatives and the destruction by arson of several San Juan community members' homes, including that of the well-known Lands Defense Committee activist Wilfredo Guerrero.

As is expressed in the following public communiqué from the community, few doubts exist concerning the links between the ongoing repression and violence in San Juan and the powerful interests of the tourism industry.

Aside from PROMOTUR's plans to build a tourism complex on the ancestral Garifuna lands of San Juan Tela, there are numerous resort tourism plans for the Tela Bay, including the opposed Los Micos Beach & Golf Resort.

The tourism industry's interests in the region are fueled by the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and other international organisms supporting the infrastructure and top-down tourism

development initiatives.

Simultaneous internationally financed programs, such as the World Bank's Honduran Lands Administration Program (PATH), threaten to fragment ancestral, communal Garifuna land titles, in violation of international agreements.

International funds are also destined to the management of the coastal protected areas that now form part of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, an element of the Plan Puebla Panama. Often managed by the same elite invested in tourism initiatives, many of these so-called protected areas were created in Garifuna and indigenous territory and now control the local communities' access to their own ancestral lands and resources.

PUBLIC COMMUNIQU...

Once again, we are in mourning in the Garifuna community of San Juan Tela (Durugubuty), this time for the murder of 19 year-old community member Mirna Isabel Santos Thomas. During the evening of Sunday, August 6th, a group of masked men armed with AK-47s kidnapped Santos Thomas from her home and later murdered her. Her body was found around kilometer 4 on the road towards Triunfo de la Cruz and La Ensenada.

The homicides that have been perpetrated against the youth of our community have caused concern and fear in Durugubuty. The authorities have not taken the necessary measures to protect community members and the murders of San Juan Tela youth Gino Eligio Lúpez and Epon AndrÈs Castillo earlier this year on February 26 remain in complete impunity.

Despite the existence of precautionary measures declared by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to protect the community of San Juan Tela, justice system operators continue to ignore the IAHRC resolution and have not taken adequate steps to protect our community.

The territorial conflict in the Garifuna communities of the Tela Bay is exacerbated by the tourism industry investors, who apparently intend to create a climate of insecurity in order to obtain their objectives, including the appropriation of our communities' ancestral lands.

The police presence that supposedly serves to protect the community is located within the terrain of the Shore Plantation Hotel (!!!) and thus serves to protect the investments of the tourism industry. Meanwhile, the community remains unprotected and is at the mercy not only of criminal outsiders but also of the security forces that are involved in repression against us.

The State's lack of political will to investigate the motives of the crime that led to the extrajudicial execution of two sons of the community by military forces has only served to fuel the exodus of youth, fearing that the violent crimes of February and the 1937 massacre may be repeated.

We request an immediate and exhaustive investigation into the murder of young Mirna Isabel Santos Thomas, along with an impartial trial against the military forces agents implicated in the February 26 murders, thus enforcing the rule of law that is so often trampled upon in Honduras.

San Juan Tela, August 9, 2006.

Patronato, Community of San Juan
San Juan Lands Defense Committee, CODETS

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TO DO:

Please write the Honduran ambassador in your country, and demand a clarification of these crimes ñ if they do not respond, write them again and again and Ò . Send copies of your letters to your own government officials, asking why the Canadian and USA governments have full political and economic relations with Honduras, when such crimes against the poor and Indigenous populations occur with such regularity and impunity?

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- be a human rights accompanier with Indigenous-African descendant Garifuna communities;
- come on educational-solidarity delegations to Honduras;
- establish long-term partnerships with OFRANEH and Garifuna communities;
- donate funds [via Rights Action] for the community development, environment and defense work of OFRANEH and Garifuna organizations.

Carry it on Ò info@rightsaction.org

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