

July 29, 2008

URGENT ACTION

Tourism, Repression and Violations of Garifuna Indigenous Rights in Honduras

**THE IDB (INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK)
IS FUNDING A MEGA-TOURISM PROJECT
RESULTING IN THE WHOLESALE VIOLATION OF GARIFUNA INDIGENOUS RIGHTS IN HONDURAS**

Down to their last 42.8 manzanas of land, the "Barra Vieja" Garifuna indigenous community is close to being forcibly disappeared by the "Micos Beach and Golf Resort" tourism enclave. The first stage of the huge, enclave Micos tourism project includes:

- 18-hole golf course,
- two 5-star hotels,
- an equestrian center
- 400 private vilas,
- shopping centers, bars and restaurants, pools, etc.

Barra Vieja is one of 5 Garifuna communities that, dating back to 1798, settled in the Tela Bay along Honduras' north shore. A second community – Miami – has effectively been forced out. The other three – San Juan, Tornabe and Triunfo de la Cruz – are being pressured and threatened by economic and political sectors associated with the Micos Beach and Golf Resort project and the IDB.

This Urgent Action is for Barra Vieja.

For general background about the Garifuna people and recent repression related to tourism, read: "The Last Rebels of the Caribbean: Garifuna Fighting for their Lives in Honduras", by Ramor Ryan, 27 March 2008 (<http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/1195/1/>).

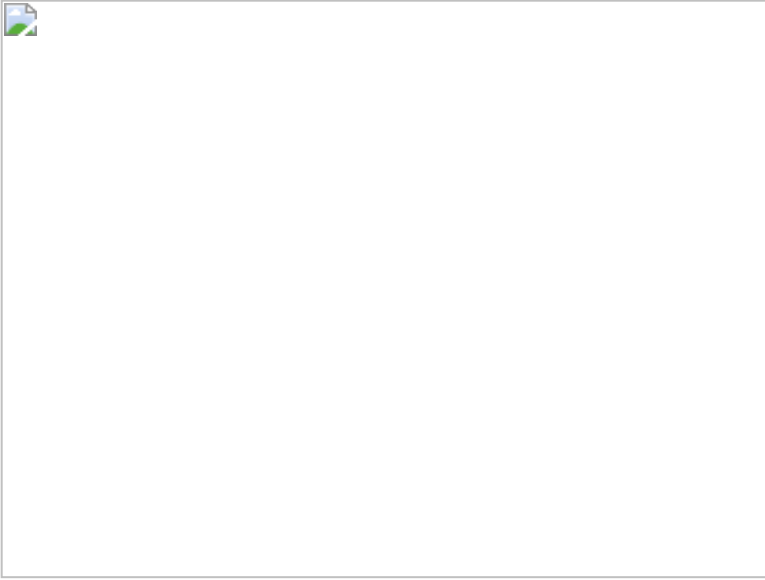
MICOS GOLF & BEACH RESORT

The Micos project is a "development" project funded in large part by the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) and is being managed by a public-private enterprise Desarrollo Turistico Bahia de Tela (Tela Bay Tourism Development). \$190,000,000 is being invested in the first phase of the project.

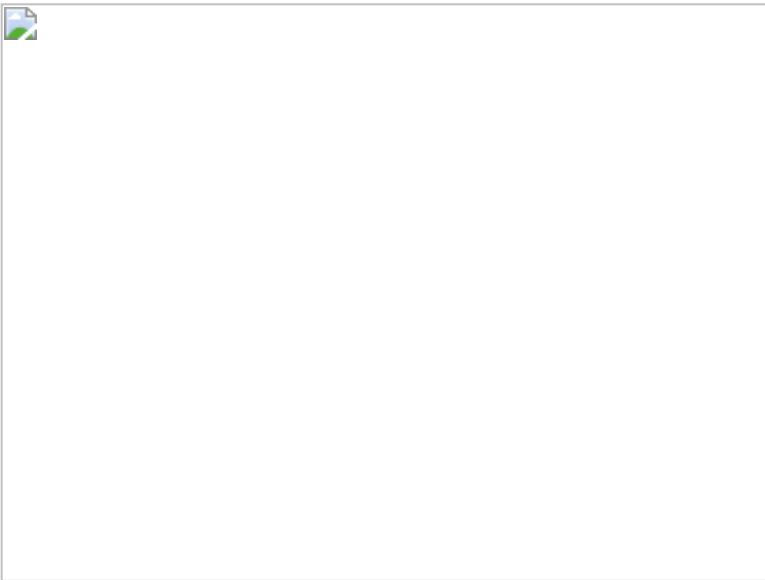
Rights Action in BARRA VIEJA

On July 8-10, a Rights Action delegation visited the Garifuna communities of Triunfo de la Cruz and Barra Vieja, in the Tela Bay region. Over the past years, many Garifuna community leaders and members have been killed or suffered repression. (For background info: info@rightsaction.org).

Immediately, the community most under siege is Barra Vieja.



Officially recognized in 1950, the settling of Barra Vieja – and most of the north shore of Honduras by Garifuna people – dates back to 1798.

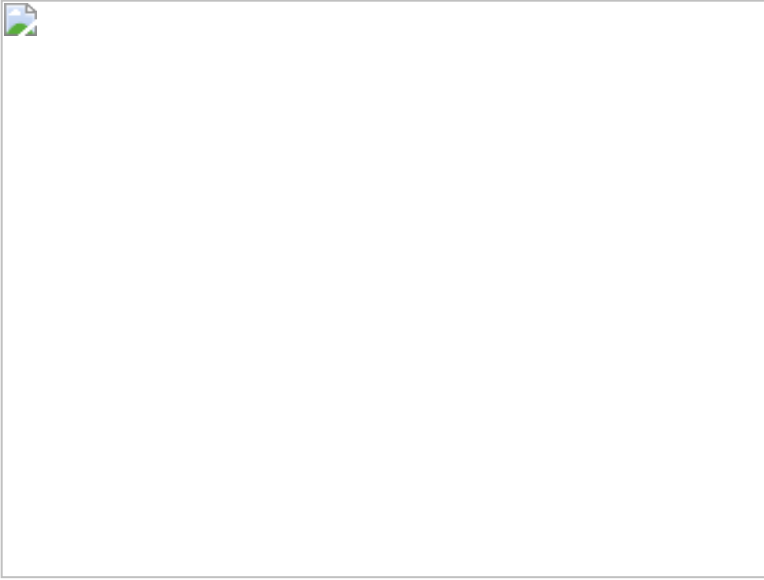


Reduced now to one-tenth its size, due to pressures and alleged illegal land purchases by people associated with the tourist project, Barra Vieja is a tiny community with a few dozen mainly Garifuna families left.

THE SQUEEZE

The tourist project is literally squeezing the community of Barra Vieja out of existence.

From the east, close to 90% of Barra Vieja's land and territory has been taken from them, with no real compensation according to community members. To the north, the Atlantic Ocean.



To the west, the Micos project has wrested all the land away from the former Garifuna community of Miami, and has already begun enclave tourism construction. In the photo above, Rights Action delegation members stand at the edge of Barra Vieja, looking into the former Miami, where Micos project construction has begun.

To the south, one finds the Micos Laguna, part of the Jeanette Kawas National Forest. For generations, Garifuna people along the north coast have fished in and preserved the fragile Micos Laguna – now threatened by the Micos enclave tourism project.

But, the Micos tourism project cannot even leave Barra Vieja with their remaining piece of land. To physically get the tourists to the tourism center in the former Garifuna community of Miami, the project is building a four-lane road that comes progressively closer to the beach, with the Micos Laguna squeezing in from the south. This road must go through what remains of Barra Vieja, which is squeezed between the ocean and the Micos Laguna. This road cannot go around the Micos Laguna.

WHO WAS JEANETTE KAWAS?

Sadly and eerily, this National Ecological Reserve – where this “development” is being imposed - was named in honour of Jeanette Kawas, an Honduran environmentalist who fought against large land owners (interested in the production for export of African Palm trees) and to have areas around Tela Bay given protected status. Formerly known as Punta Sal, this area was designated a National Park in 1994. Jeanette Kawas was murdered in 1995 – a political murder that has typically never been solved.

THE STANDOFF

Over five times, Barra Vieja community members – supported by OFRANEH and Garifuna people from elsewhere - have walked to the edge of their remaining piece of land and physically stood in front of bulldozers, road graders and large dump trucks. So far, project workers have backed down.

How long will it be before the Micos Golf and Beach Resort – with friends in high places in the Honduran government – calls in the Honduran Army and National Police to force the enclave tourism road through the remainder of Barra Vieja – disappearing the community, forcibly displacing its inhabitants and condemning them, most likely, to lives of poverty?

LETTERS NEED TO BE WRITTEN

1- To the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank), that is funding this exclusive “enclave” form of tourism that is comprehensively violating the territorial and human rights of the Garifuna people and their communities, and harming the local environment given that the Micos project is being built not only on Garifuna territories but also in the “Jeanette Kawas National Ecological Reserve.”

2- To Honduran government officials.

They must suspend work on this project until all pending land, territorial and environmental issues are resolved transparently and peacefully with the Garifuna communities along Honduras' north coast, including providing

compensation and reparations to Garifuna people and communities for repression already suffered, and loss and damage of property and territory;

WHAT IS NEEDED

1- funds are needed to enable OFRANEH (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras), that works in 46 Garifuna communities along the north coast, and the Patronatos (local government) of the affected communities (like Barra Vieja) to continue with their efforts to resist the destruction of more Garifuna communities. To make tax-deductible donations via Rights Action, see below;

2- international attention is needed – from media coverage to solidarity organizations – so as to help build the critical energy necessary to pressure the IDB and Honduran government to immediately suspend this project until all pending land, territory, environmental and human rights issues are negotiated and worked out directly with OFRANEH and the affected communities;

3- visits are needed from solidarity delegations and media, to learn more about and then denounce this extremely harmful and abusive “development” project;

4- human rights accompaniment is needed to bring international observers to live for short or longer periods of time with OFRANEH and the affected communities, given the very serious levels of repression and threat being experienced by Garifuna leaders;

ADDRESSES

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WHAT TO DO

RIGHTS ACTION

Based in Guatemala, Rights Action (with tax-deductible legal status in Canada and USA) funds and works with community-based Indigenous, development, environment and human rights organizations in Guatemala and Honduras, and also in El Salvador, Oaxaca and Chiapas; and educates about and is involved in activism related to global development, environmental and Indigenous and human rights struggles.

TO MAKE TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS for indigenous and community-based organizations that are implementing their own development, human rights and environment projects --- including OFRANEH ---, make check payable to "Rights Action" and mail to:

* UNITED STATES: Box 50887, Washington DC, 20091-0887;

* CANADA: 422 Parliament St, Box 82552, Toronto ON, M5A 4N8.

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS: http://www.rightsaction.org/Templates/donations_index.html

HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATIONS TO MINING-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES: Consider forming your own group and coming on an educational seminar trip to learn more about community and Indigenous resistance to mining and other large-scale "development" projects.

2nd HEMISPHERIC GATHERING AGAINST MILITARIZATION – HONDURAS, OCTOBER 3-5: Form your own group and come to Honduras for this continental Gathering. ¡Para callar las armas, hablemos los pueblos! (To quiet weapons, the people must speak!). www.antimilitarizacion.blogspot.com; info@rightsaction.org. PLACE: La Esperanza, Intibucá, Honduras.

3rd SOCIAL FORUM OF THE AMERICAS – GUATEMALA, OCTOBER 7-12: Form your own group and come to Guatemala. Thousands of people from across the Americas are expected at this gathering to debate and discuss (and enjoy awesome music, art and theater) how Another World Is Possible ... And Necessary. For more info: info@rightsaction.org.

JOIN: Rights Action's our email list: <http://www.rightsaction.org/lists/?p=subscribe&id=3>

RECEIVE OUR QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER: info@rightsaction.org

CREATE YOUR OWN E-MAIL LIST: and re-distribute this and other information.

LISTEN: to www.democracynow.org news program every day.

READ: Eduardo Galeano's "Open Veins of Latin America"; Naomi Klein's "The Shock Doctrine"; Howard Zinn's "A People's History of the United States";

SMILE: And live to make another world is possible, everyday.