

HONDURAS: Murder of Another Garifuna Man

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OFRANEH (Fraternal Organization of Black Hondurans) writes:

ANOTHER MURDER IN THE NAME OF "PROTECTING" THE WILDLIFE REFUGE,

September 25, 2008 [translated for Rights Action by Rosalind Gill (RGill@glendon.yorku.ca)]

At 10 PM last night, in the Garifuna community of Triunfo de la Cruz, eight men fishing near the Vida Silvestre Cuero y Salado Refuge were detained by Armed Forces personnel who were patrolling the area. According to testimonies from the fishers, the soldiers detained them and then started shooting at them, before they even got a chance to say a word to defend themselves.

Guillermo Norales Herrera, of Triunfo de la Cruz was killed. The bullets that killed him appear to have come from an M16, the fire arm issued to the Honduran Armed Forces.

As they were being shot at, the fishers shouted at the Armed Forces personnel that one of them had been killed. Then the soldiers simply went away, leaving the fishermen to deal with the situation. Another fisherman, (Carlos Colon), who was struck by lightning while getting out of his boat, had to be hospitalized.

The murder of Guillermo Norales is yet another in a series of violations of human rights perpetrated by the Armed Forces patrolling the protected areas. The Garifuna community of Cayos Cochinos has had a bitter experience of repression ever since management plans for the region have been put in place.

The local community has presented a petition to the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights (IAHCR) concerning the fact that there have been incidents of shootings at Garifuna fishers.

The north coast of Honduras has been systematically robbed of its fish stocks by the commercial trawling fleet of the Islas de la Bahia. This affects traditional fishers' (most of whom are Garifuna) right to subsistence. These fishers have seen their catch plummet. As well, they must travel further and further from their communities to feed their families.

These protected areas, created without any form of consultation with local communities, have generated tension over resource management. No respect has been shown for traditional Garifuna knowledge, despite the fact that it is this knowledge that has made it possible to conserve most of the lands we live on.

In fact, 28 of the 46 Garifuna communities in the country are located in protected areas or park buffer zones.

Cuero and Salado were two Garifuna communities whose populations were evicted in the early nineties. These people's right to subsistence was restricted when the area was officially designated as the Vida Silvestre Refuge. 38 of the 40 families who lived in the wetland were silently evicted.

We should point out that the Fundación Cuero y Salado was the first private authority to take over managing a protected area. Many of the Fundación employees were hired because of their connections with Standard Fruit Company, which operates a palm oil extraction factory (CAISESA) at one of the headwaters in the Refuge.

Waste from this factory has polluted wetlands in the area.

There are many contradictions in the way protected areas are managed in Honduras. The management protects the interests of a small minority while those of the indigenous peoples and local communities are repressed. In Cayos Cochinas, there was an attempt to repeat the type of eviction that had been carried out in the communities of Cuero and Salado. Local fishers were brought before the law for fishing, while the trawling fleet was allowed to go ahead and catch as many shellfish as they wanted. But there is no consistency in the way these so-called "environmentalists" manage the protected area.

For example, Garifuna fishers are not even allowed to go near Cayo Paloma but the management allows TV reality shows to film some of their programmes there.

MICOS BEACH & GOLF RESORT

In the last few years, Tela Bay, which is next to the Cuero y Salado Refuge, has seen racial conflict, instigated by developers and politicians who have been trying to create a mega tourist development in the area. At this time, a tourist enclave financed by the InterAmerican Development Bank is being constructed. The project includes construction of a golf course, which will require filling in 80 hectares of a wetland protected by the RAMSAR.

This is another example of a situation in which the Garífuna population must endure repression from the foundation (known as PROLANSATE) which is in charge of managing the park. They say they are conserving the wetlands but it is common knowledge that the elite intended to commit ecocide in the Micos and Quemada Lagoons.

Another example of repression is the so called "accidental" killing of two Garífuna youths, Epsón Andrés Castillo y Yino Eligio López, two years ago, by Armed Forces personnel. Two military personnel were tried and sentenced for the killings, but of course the name of the person who gave the order to carry out the executions was never mentioned. It would also appear that the forensic report failed to identify the type of fire arm that had been used.

This is not the first time we have seen Honduran authorities protect their officials and Armed Forces personnel. Crimes committed by members of the Armed Forces in the eighties have been treated with impunity. Clearly, this does not augur well for the future.

The incident reported last night in Cuero y Salado is yet another example of the existence of a clear policy to violate the rights of the Garífuna people. Our territory is being sprayed on a daily basis to further a so-called development that serves the interests of investors and developers, rather than those of our people. As well, there are people in the justice system who are partisan and take the side of those who wish to see us abandon the coast where we live.

We are appealing to government authorities to carry out an exhaustive investigation of the incidents we describe above and to bring the full force of the law to bear on these military assassinations. We also demand that the Garífuna people be allowed to engage in subsistence fishing and that measures be taken to stop the destruction caused by the commercial trawling fleet. Over-fishing by this fleet is the real cause of the ecocide that is affecting the north coast of Honduras. We demand that the ancestral land rights of our communities be respected, including the right to a functional habitat and finally, the Garífuna people's right to subsistence.

La Ceiba Atlántida, September 25, 2008

Miriam Miranda, Coordinadora General of OFRANEH

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View a Photo-Essay, by James Rodriguez, about Garífuna Resistance against Mega-Tourism in Tela Bay, Honduras: <http://mimundo-jamesrodriguez.blogspot.com/>

Read recent urgent action about "tourism" incursions:

http://www.rightsaction.org/urgent_com/Honduras%20_tourism_projedct_072908.html

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

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