

Honduras: Gregorio Chavez Kidnapped & Disappeared In The Aguan

By Annie Bird, July 5, 2012

CALL NOW: Demanding Authorities Help Neighbors Locate Gregorio Chavez Arranda, [Demanding](#) that Police and Military Withdraw from the Panama Village

On July 2, 2012, neighbors from the town of Panama found evidence that campesino Gregorio Chavez Arranda was kidnapped from his fields and taken by Dinant palm oil company private security forces onto the Panama Farm. As in three similar kidnappings last year, authorities have refused to assist family members and neighbors in locating the victim and appear to be collaborating with the security forces, making this kidnapping a forced disappearance.

Call now and demand that the police accompany family and neighbors onto the Panama Farm to look for the missing man and that security forces immediately leave the town of Panama.

Tell the US Embassy that as the Embassy has maintained a close relationship with Miguel Facusse ([principal owner of the Dinant palm oil company](#)) and trained military forces in the region, and they must act now to save Gregorio's life.

Nathan Macklin: MacklinNL@state.gov; (504) 2236-9320, 2238-5114

If you speak Spanish, call Honduran officials:

Ana Pineda, Minister of Human Rights (504) 9982-6801

Commissioner Mejilla – Departmental Chief of Police for Colon: (504) 9761-3669

Police Station in Trujillo: (504) 2434-3211



Gregorio Chavez Arranda Kidnapped

On Monday, July 2, Gregorio Chavez Arranda, a campesino resident of the town of Panama, disappeared while working his yucca field that borders the Panama Farm, controlled by palm oil businessman Miguel Facusse through his corporation Dinant, and heavily controlled by large armed private security force.

Every day at 5pm Chavez Arranda tended his garden plot and then returned home. When he had not returned home at 6:30pm, his family and neighbors worried and went to the plot, where they found a shotgun bullet casing, his machete thrown to the side and remnants of material which could have been used to bind him. Plants were crushed in a path enter the Panama Farm in what appeared to have been where he was dragged away into the Panama farm. Given this evidence and the history of abuses by Dinant security forces, his neighbors are certain he was kidnapped by Dinant security guards.

AUTHORITIES DO NOT ACT, BUT OCCUPY THE PANAMA TOWN

Neighbors immediately called on the police in the nearby town of Tocoa demanding that based on the evidence police immediately search the Panama farm. The police refused to come to the community's assistance claiming it pertained to another jurisdiction, the town of Trujillo over an hour away. It was not until the following afternoon at approximately 2pm that investigators from the town of Trujillo came to Panama and took the bullet casing but did not enter the Panama farm to search for the missing man.

Also on July 3, neighbors blocked the entrance to the Panama farm and searched the Panama farm for Chavez. Police and military encamped 40 minutes from the area threatened to evict the campesinos, and when police arrived they told campesinos they could no longer search for Chavez in the farm.

Human rights observers who visited the town on July 4 found the town to be occupied by the military and police, with a military checkpoint on the only road entering the town, while the entrance to the farm was without police presence. Observers witnessed police cars and other cars carrying police together with security guards patrolling the town. There are a minimum of 25 police in the town under the command of Jose Ordenez and Eric Ramirez of the Trujillo police station, and at least 15 soldiers from the 15th Battalion and other military units. This militarization is installing an atmosphere of fear in the town.

SECURITY GUARDS, POLICE AND US ARMY TRAINED MILITARY ARE REPORTED TO COLLABORATE IN KILLINGS

The security guards present in the Panama Farm are both directly employed by Dinant and Dinant also contracts the Orion Security Company. The company is [reported to be](#) run by ex Colonel Jose Antonio Melgar, who until recently was the commander of the 15th Battalion military base near the Finca Panama.

Campesinos and human rights activists report that the 15th Battalion has actively participated in the killing of campesinos, together with police and private security guards, in what appears to be death squad activities. It has also been reported that Colombians dressed in Honduran military uniforms train military and private security guards on the base. Campesinos also report that the US Army Rangers train the 15th Battalion and patrol the region. In August 2011 it was confirmed that Rangers were training the 15th Battalion.

THREE OTHER CAMPESINOS REMAIN DISAPPEARED SINCE MAY 2011

Chavez is the second campesino neighboring the Finca Panama to have been kidnapped in this way. On May 15, 2011, Francisco Pascual Lopez, a campesino from the Movimiento Campesino Rigores which also borders Panama, was tending his cattle on a plot neighboring the Panama Farm in the company of a neighbor boy when Dinant security guards shot him over the fence. The boy ran to get help, but by the time neighbors arrived at the scene, Francisco was missing

and a trail of blood led into the Panama farm. Police who visited the scene refused to search the Panama Farm. Francisco Pascual Lopez remains disappeared.

Two other campesinos, Olvin Gallegos and Segundo Gomez from the Movimiento Campesino Autentico Revindicador del Aguan (MARCA), were forcibly disappeared in a similar way by palm plantation security guards based on the El Mochito farm on May 21, 2011 while they were traveling by bicycle on a road in San Esteban. Neighbors witnessed the abduction and went to El Mochito to try to recover the men, only to find a police and military presence apparently protecting the farm. Guards would not allow neighbors to search for Olvin and Segundo, and security forces did not assist. The two remain disappeared and their families who continue to search for them are under constant threat. After three abduction attempts by security forces, Olvin's siblings, who he raised with the oldest sister, are in hiding.

PALM PLANTERS ILLEGALLY OBTAINED FARMS FROM COOPERATIVES

The conflict that led to Olvin and Segundo's disappearance and at least seven extrajudicial executions was unexpectedly resolved on June 29 2012 when after a court sentence nullifying the sale of the San Esteban farm and three other farms to palm planters Miguel Facusse, Rene Morales and Reynaldo Canales was issued. The palm planters were evicted and the farms turned over to campesinos. MARCA is composed of the rightful owners of the four farms, and after the eviction of the palm planters MARCA president Julian Hernandez was followed and threatened.

The Finca Panama was acquired by the Facusse under similarly irregular circumstances, around the same time as the San Esteban farm. 'Purchases' at this time were characterized by intimidation, violence, and fraud. The members of the old Paso de Aguan cooperative still live in the town of Panama. Almost all of the cooperatives who lost their farms at this time attempted to undertake court cases to regain them but as a result of the extremely high legal costs and extremely protracted proceeding, most were unable to continue the law suits. Approximately 60 campesinos and their supporters have been killed since 2010 when campesinos began taking possession of the farms palm oil planters had illegally obtained in the mid 1990s.

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CANADA: 552 - 351 Queen St. E, Toronto ON, M5A-1T8

CREDIT-CARD DONATIONS can be made (Canada and USA):

<http://rightsaction.org/tax-deductible-donations>

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MORE INFORMATION / QUESTIONS

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