

Rights Action – July 27, 2012

HONDURAS – Petition in Defense of the Rights, Culture and Territory of the Garifuna People

PLEASE SIGN THIS PETITION: <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/defend-the-sovereignty-of-honduras-and-the-culture-and.html>

DEFEND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF HONDURAS AND THE RIGHTS, CULTURE AND TERRITORY OF THE GARIFUNA PEOPLE

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The Garifuna People have lived in Honduras for 215 years, after being expelled from the island of San Vicente, where our culture's ethnogenesis took place in the mid-17th century. The loss of our communities' traditional territory has been an ongoing process for over a hundred years. The Honduran State handed over huge tracts of land to banana companies in exchange for laying down railway infrastructure. Military officials, politicians and businesspeople joined forces to seize beachfront lands, with the pretext of "tourism development." Our territories are being converted into protected areas, without any consultation with affected communities.

But it was the coup in 2009 that marked the beginning of a definitive offensive by the State. The appropriation of the Bay of Trujillo by Canadian citizen Randy Jorgenson – known in his country as the "Porn King" – for the creation of a tourist emporium led to the destruction of the Garifuna community of Rio Negro.

In 2010, the government that emerged out of the June 2009 coup began to promote concessions of national territory for the creation of a quasi-independent state, with its own judicial, administrative and security systems. US economist Paul Romer promoted the concept of Charter Cities ("Ciudades modelos" in Spanish), intervening in the National Congress for the quick approval of a Special Development Regions (RED) law.

Demonstrating the interest of Canadian investors in taking over the Caribbean coast of Honduras, Canadian Senator Gerry St. Germain participated in a special congressional session on RED regulations. In 2011, without debate, the congress legislated regulations for the charter cities.

Government authorities have indicated that the first RED will be located between the Bay of Trujillo and the Sico river – an area with 24 Garifuna communities that are considered to be a cultural sanctuary. This same corridor is becoming an area controlled by people associated with organized crime, engaging in the illegal purchase of lands with the collusion of government institutions.

On October 18, 2011, a group of lawyers filed a motion of unconstitutionality regarding the REDs to the Supreme Court of Justice. This past February 25, the Attorney General's Office (Ministerio Público) declared that there were grounds for the motion to proceed. Immediately, the National Congress began a campaign to pressure and influence the court, including a threat to make cuts to its budget.

The independence of the judiciary – an element without which democracy itself is in question – is at stake in Honduras.

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